



College of Liberal Arts and Education

Date: December 18, 2014

To: Pam Zarkowski, Academic Vice President and Provost

From: The Department of Philosophy

Re: The Reduction of Exposure to Philosophy in the New Core Curriculum

Summary

In the present core curriculum at UDM, nine credit hours are devoted to the study of philosophy and religion (Objective 4). Students are required to take one philosophy class, one religious studies class, and then can choose between a second philosophy class or a second religious studies class (Objective 4c).

In the new core curriculum philosophy and religious studies are grouped under section C. At present it requires one course in C1 (philosophy) and one course in C2 (religious studies). A nine-hour objective has been reduced to a six-hour objective, resulting in a net loss of 3 credit hours for philosophy and religious studies in the new core.

The Department of Philosophy objects to this on the following three grounds:

1. The loss of exposure in the core will do demonstrable harm to the Department.
2. This change will undermine the tradition, values, and educational philosophy of the university.
3. The Department has so far been denied due process in this matter.

1. This loss of exposure in the core will do demonstrable harm to the Department.

Our Department is comprised of five full-time tenured faculty. Three of our full time faculty have received the Faculty Achievement Award, and two have received the *Agere ex Missione* Award.

Our Department not only serves the core curriculum, but also provides staffing for courses that support the following programs: pre-law, political science, architecture, nursing, digital media studies, Catholic studies, women and gender studies, African American studies, masters in liberal studies, and Honors. The Department was recently approached by an associate dean of Engineering & Science to seek its input in designing an ethics course that would satisfy ABET requirements. One of our faculty is presently pursuing a graduate certificate in order to help the department of history staff its courses in Latin American and African history.

Our Department has provided and continues to provide substantial service to the college, university, and community, including the directorships of the Masters of Liberal Studies program, the Honors Program, and the Carney Latin American Solidarity Archive, serving in shared governance at both the college and university levels, faculty sponsorship of the Gay Straight Alliance, participation in core curriculum revision and Visit and SOAR Days, membership on hospital ethics boards, and service on other important committees. In addition, since 2000 the Department has sponsored and organized the annual UDM Ethics Bowl in which well over 100 students, faculty, administrators, and staff participate.

When the Department underwent McNichols Faculty Assembly (MFA) program review in the academic year 2011-2012, the Program Review Committee summarized the quality of our program in the following way:

The Philosophy faculty contributions to teaching, scholarship, and service are exemplary . . . All of the external reviewers commented on the productivity of the faculty . . . [the program has [a] strong commitment to the Core Curriculum . . . [a] strong minor . . . [a] mission-driven program . . . The program services the pre-professional programs . . . [it has] strong assessment . . . The program makes a net contribution to the operating budget (from "Program Review Report for Philosophy," January 26, 2012, p. 9. Report available upon request.).

Over the past fifteen years the Department has worked hard to increase its number of majors and minors. In Fall 2000 the Department had approximately five students (5 majors and 0 minors). As of Winter 2013 it had a total of 57 students (27 majors and 30 minors). At present TitanConnect indicates that the Department still has 53 students (17 majors and 36 minors) despite the fact that the university has experienced a significant dip in enrollment over the past two years. Given the vocationally and professionally oriented character of our university, we consider these to be robust numbers, and they are the product of years of hard work.

At the same time we freely admit that philosophy is not a "destination" major. We recruit the vast majority of our majors and minors through the core, after students have arrived at UDM. The shared Objective 4c elective in the present core makes

every philosophy course in our catalog core-eligible. It has been this shared elective that has allowed the Department to avoid canceling any upper-division classes for the past several years, because the combination of its increased number of majors and minors and students seeking to fulfill this core elective effectively fills these classes. *If this elective is removed from the core, the Department will have significantly less access to potential majors and minors, and as a consequence it will be unable to fill its upper-division classes. In the worst case scenario it will over time be reduced to a mere service department with no majors of its own, in which case UDM will become the only Jesuit-sponsored university without a philosophy major.*

This is precisely why this change will have such a devastating effect on the Department.

2. This change will undermine the tradition, values, and educational philosophy of the university.

Catholic colleges and universities, especially those in the Jesuit tradition, have traditionally deemed certain disciplines worthy of deeper study: the disciplines of the liberal arts and sciences in general, and the study of philosophy and religion in particular. These facts are amply documented by the history of Catholic and Jesuit education. Therefore, in the Department's view, this change will most definitely undermine the tradition, values, and educational philosophy of the university.

3. The Department has so far been denied due process in this matter.

It should be noted that at least one member of the Department has been deeply involved in the core revision process since it began in November 2005. The following narrative is drawn from that experience.

a. It might be asked at the outset why the Department has waited so long to raise this issue. The main reason is that in almost nine years of deliberations a reduction of philosophy's place in the new core was never openly discussed.

We believe it was never openly discussed because of a conceptual confusion regarding the relationship that learning outcomes and credit hours would have to any possible core curriculum. At a certain point during the deliberations of the Core Curriculum Task Force (CCTF) it was decided that the new core would be regarded exclusively as a collection of learning outcomes. Despite the fact that the size of the core as measured by credit hours was from the very start of this process a manifest concern of a number of professional schools with restrictive accreditation requirements, the CCTF and then later the Core Curriculum Implementation Committee (CCIC) adopted the practice of talking about the new core exclusively in terms of learning outcomes, and not credit hours.

The problem with this approach is that learning outcomes represent the *goals* to be achieved by a curriculum, but do not by themselves dictate *how* those goals are

to be achieved. In other words, learning outcomes are the “what” of a curriculum, not the “how.” The “how” of a curriculum is determined by decisions indicating precisely *how* the learning outcomes will be met. Learning outcomes are typically met by the teaching of a course or courses, each of which bears a number of credit hours. The number of credit hours or courses in it measures the size of a curriculum. Therefore, learning outcomes do not by themselves determine the size of a curriculum.

Nevertheless, the insistence of the CCTF and the CCIC in speaking of the new core only in terms of learning outcomes at the very least clouded the issue in a significant way. It also made a collective conversation about credit hours impossible. We conservatively estimate that for over a period of at least five years any attempt to discuss credit hours within these two committees was summarily shut down by the majority. *Clearly the Department would have raised this issue much earlier had it been clear at the time that it might possibly be suffering a loss of exposure in the new core. Even then, since these committees in effect prohibited discussion of core credit hours it would have been impossible to raise because it is precisely credit hours that are the issue in connection with the matter at hand.*

In the end, however, it must be stressed that the final report of the CCTF makes no mention of reducing the exposure to philosophy in the new core, nor is there any mention of doing so in that committee’s minutes.

- b. It was only in July 2014, in his capacity as a member of the CCIC, that a Department member discovered that a reduction in the exposure to philosophy and other key disciplines was an unspoken assumption of many members of that committee. In response, the member had this issue put on a meeting agenda so the issue could be openly discussed.

After debate and discussion the following motion was put forward, seconded, further debated, and eventually passed by majority vote:

That the current level of exposure to philosophy, religious studies, the natural sciences, and the social sciences be retained in the new core.

- c. The unwillingness to discuss the size of the core in terms of credit hours persisted into the Fall 2014 term. At an MFA meeting devoted to discussion of the new core on September 4th, 2014, a member of our Department pointed out that if a one-to-one relationship was assumed between each set of learning outcomes and a single course, this would result in a core with 54 credit hours. The member was told that the new core was not a collection of credit hours but was comprised rather of sets of learning outcomes.
- d. At an MFA meeting on September 18th, 2014 devoted to collecting “reconciliation” reports that gave each program a chance to report on “how the new outcomes would work (or not work) in their respective programs” a representative from the Department registered our objection to the reduction in exposure to both philosophy and religious studies in the new core.

- e. On October 16th, 2014 the MFA approved the final report of the CCIC, which included the recommendation “that the current level of exposure to philosophy, religious studies, the natural sciences, and the social sciences be retained in the new core.”
- f. During the Fall 2014 term the MFA Executive Committee (MFAEC) appointed a five-member Core Curriculum Reconciliation Committee (CCRC) charged with “evaluat[ing] and resolv[ing] reconciliation issues toward the goal of implementing the Outcomes-based Core proposed by the CCIC.”
- g. In the later half of the Fall 2014 term the CCRC, under the direction of the MFAEC, capped the new core at 48 credit hours. This marked the first time in at least five years that there was any acknowledgment on the part of the MFA or its constituent committees that the number of credit hours in the new core were of any importance.
- h. On December 4th, 2014, the CCRC, under the direction of the MFAEC, announced that it would conform to the 48 credit hour limit by combining the F5 and F6 outcomes into an either/or configuration, and that the F1 outcomes would be covered by courses in program majors. At the same time, the MFAEC/CCRC announced that it would make no further adjustments to the new core.
- i. In doing so, the MFAEC/CCRC ignored the MFA-approved recommendation of the CCIC to retain the current level of exposure to philosophy, religious studies, the natural sciences, and the social sciences in the new core (item 3e) and the Department’s objection to the reduction in exposure to both philosophy and religious studies (item 3d).
- j. In doing so, the MFAEC/CCRC failed to meet its charge to “resolve reconciliation issues toward the goal of implementing the Outcomes-based Core proposed by the CCIC” (item 3f).
- k. In doing so, the MFAEC/CCRC apparently did not consider the mission implications of its decision, or the harm it would do to the affected programs.
- l. In doing so, the Department contends that the MFAEC/CCRC departed from MFA practice in the following ways:
 - i. The MFA’s overall charge is to safeguard curricular integrity. It does so primarily through a well-defined and rigorous program review process, where departments are allowed a collaborative voice in matters relating to the future of their programs. This process even allows a department the possibility of appealing an adverse decision.
 - ii. The actions of the MFAEC/CCRC, by way of contrast, were imposed unilaterally and outside of its own established review process, and without consultation with the Department despite its duly registered objections. These actions therefore fall outside of the legitimate parameters whereby the MFA or its constituent committees can make decisions that might affect curricula

and programming without a Department's participation, or the opportunity for appeal.

- iii. Furthermore, the MFAEC/CCRC's neglect of the Department's concerns will do demonstrable harm to a program it deemed "exemplary" only two years ago (item 1). This is clearly contradictory, and radically at odds with the MFA's overall charge of safeguarding curricular integrity.
- m. In informal discussions with individual members of the MFAEC/CCRC, there have been assurances made that the Department could make an appeal to a future MFA Core Curriculum Committee (CCC). But after a careful reading of the CCC's charges, we see nothing in them that allows for such an appeal. To all appearances the CCC will be a maintenance and assessment committee and nothing more.

Conclusion

Over the entire course of the core revision process, different colleges and departments have advocated for their programs by claiming that if the core was altered in one way or another the programs in question would be irredeemably harmed. In this document the Department is doing precisely the same thing, but with two important differences.

First, unlike many programs that might have been *potentially* harmed through this process, the harm to the Department is actually *imminent*. And secondly, under item 1 of this document the Department has actually *demonstrated precisely how and in what ways* it will be harmed if its present circumstances do not change.

In recent conversations with Professor Matthew Mio of the MFAEC, whom we consider to be a friend of the Department, he has characterized the MFAEC/CCRC's present attitude toward our circumstances in so many words as: The process has spoken and the process must end.

Surely you can see how we find this hard to accept in light of the foregoing narrative. If there had been a single official document generated out of this process that explicitly and unambiguously stated "there will be a reduction of exposure to philosophy in the new core" and which gave the reasons why, then at least we would have had a timely opportunity to mount an argument against this reduction. But instead it seems that in the present instance the Department is doomed to be crushed between a flawed dimension of the process (the long refusal to talk about credit hours) and the understandable desire to bring this exceedingly difficult process to an end. Though we understand this desire, we cannot consider our present circumstances to be the product of a fully deliberative process.

The Department wants to stress that it seeks not to assign individual blame or make accusations of malevolent intent. We only want one thing: not to be harmed by this process. And there may be a possible solution to this issue lurking in the document that created the CCRC. Precept 2 in that document reads:

The interpretation of the Outcomes-based Core integrating themes (F1-F6) must result in a credit total no more than 48, as held by the current Core. This could allow for more than three credit requirements in areas B and C.

The first sentence seems to be saying that if there are any adjustments to be made to the CCIC structure to make the 48-hour limit, they must be made within outcomes F1-F6. This squares with the adjustments that the MFAEC/CCRC made to outcomes F1 and F5-F6.

The second sentence clearly refers to the CCIC's recommendation in its final report, a report that was approved by the MFA, to retain the current level of exposure to philosophy, religious studies, the natural sciences, and the social sciences in the new core (item 3e). Since this is the case, then there are two possible solutions to the current situation that would be consistent with the CCRC's governing precepts and charges:

- A. Fold the critical thinking outcomes (F2) into major courses as was done with the reading and writing across the curriculum outcomes (F1).
- B. Combine the F3 and F4 outcomes into an either/or configuration as was done with the F5 and F6 outcomes.

Either of these alternatives would do less (or no) harm to existing programs since none of these outcomes (F2-4) are discipline-specific, and would restore the shared elective that philosophy presently shares with religious studies in a section C3 that would be added to the new core without exceeding the 48-hour limit.

We offer these two possibilities as a good faith effort to find a solution to the present issue, and we hope you will consider them worthy of discussion.

The Department also hopes you understand why we are appealing to you directly, given our frustrations with the process that has led to our present predicament. We hope that you can broker a conversation with the other stakeholders in this process so we can all put this behind us.

However, should the MFAEC/CCRC continue to ignore the concerns of the Department, we hope that you will intervene on our behalf in your capacity as the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.

There is precedent for such an intervention. In the recent past you intervened on behalf of a Masters program in engineering that the MFA had recommended for termination after a detailed and rigorous program review.

In the present circumstance you have a program termed "exemplary" by the MFA review process that is in very real danger of being arbitrarily crippled by a failure of process and a rush to completion at any cost.

We implore you to not let this happen.