

Subject Catastrophe
From David R Koukal <koukaldr@udmercy.edu>
Date Friday, December 5, 2014 5:54 am
To Todd Hibbard <hibbardja@udmercy.edu>, "Carol Weisfeld" <weisfecc@udmercy.edu>, Noah S Resnick <resnicns@udmercy.edu>, Julia L Eisenstein <eisensjl@udmercy.edu>, "Britt-Smith, Laurie" <lbrittsm@udmercy.edu>, "Mio, Matt" <miomj@udmercy.edu>
Cc koukaldr@udmercy.edu

Dear Colleagues,

Yesterday's decision to reduce the level of exposure to philosophy (among other disciplines) in the new core will devastate our program.

Given that philosophy is not a "destination" major, we are heavily dependent on our exposure in the core to recruit our majors and minors. Over the past fifteen years we have gone from roughly five majors to 35, with even more minors. Because of these numbers, we haven't had to cancel an upper-division class in years due to under-enrollment. Given the kind of university we are we consider these to be robust numbers, and they are the product of years of hard work.

Yesterday's decision will undo that work. Reducing philosophy's exposure in the core will severely degrade our ability to attract students and fill our upper-division courses. Over time we will be reduced to a mere service department; not that we mind serving the university in the ways that we do--in the core, staffing required courses for other programs, Honors courses, etc.--but we want to sustain our major too. If we lose our shared elective with religious studies this will undermine our ability to do this, and if this were to come to pass, we would be the only Jesuit university without a major in philosophy.

It has been intimated that there will be a chance to reverse this decision at some point in the future, in the MFA core committee, etc. Please pardon me if I express my skepticism.

In the first place, I have received mixed signals about which committee (the CCRC or the MFACC) would be doing what. On more than one occasion I was told by different members of the MFA exec that it would be the MFACC that would be making the decisions that the CCRC is making right now.

Secondly, once something is removed from the core, it will be almost impossible to restore it, given the different agendas that will be in play on an even larger MFACC.

Thirdly, the very fact that I am writing this email right now further undermines my confidence in the process. Nine years ago I entered this process knowing that we had one of the weaker philosophy requirements among Jesuit universities. Never in my wildest dreams could I have foreseen that this already-weak requirement would be in danger of being weakened even further.

Fourth, the study of philosophy and religion is demonstrably central to Catholic education, and has been for centuries. But at UDM it's being displaced by a required course in--statistics?--

which NONE of our comparable institutions require? Was this decision informed at all by a discussion of our educational mission and tradition, or at least the norms of Catholic education?

Fifth, that this decision was made without any consultation about how it would effect the relevant departments is especially galling to me. The MFA is charged with safeguarding curriculum integrity. We have a process of formal program review where each program gets to make its case. Philosophy, you might recall, passed its review with flying colors. But now the MFA, in making this arbitrary decision, is doing severe damage to a program to which it once granted its approval. How can this body simultaneously require curricular integrity while making decisions that destroy curricula, and apparently with no appeal? NO program that has ever gone through review has been treated with such callous disregard.

Finally, over the entire course of this revision process, program after program has loudly proclaimed, "if x, y, and z happen in the core, our program will be irredeemably harmed." In every instance these warnings have been heeded--except in the present case. Why is it legitimate for some programs to argue for the vitality of their programs, but when philosophy and religious studies do the same, our concerns fall on deaf ears?

In closing, ask yourselves whether what you are doing to philosophy and religious studies is worth a course in statistics. Please save us now.

Sincerely,
David Koukal

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Ite inflaminate omnia
- St. Ignatius of Loyola