

CORE CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT REPORT

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

December 15, 2014

# summary

The School of Professional Studies collects a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data that provide both direct and indirect measures of students’ learning throughout its academic programs. At the course and program levels, measurement of student achievement is ongoing through course-embedded assessment and regularly-scheduled program reviews. Additionally, SPS has been collecting data for the assessment of the Core Curriculum. The data will be used to determine to what extent the courses are meeting the General Education learning outcomes. Each department and faculty will review the data on their courses and use the insights gained to inform teaching practices and curriculum reform.

# The general education program

The Core Curriculum in the School of Professional Studies (SPS) supports Trinity’s commitment to lifelong learning, by providing adult students with a course of study that grounds professional preparation in liberal arts knowledge and values. Further, the Core expresses the mission of Trinity by providing adult students with a strong foundation in the liberal arts while promoting their professional development through a focus on applied learning. The Core emphasizes building the essential skills and values that promote life-long learning, critical thinking, and social responsibility. The Core does not state explicit student learning goals. Its goals are framed in terms of what the curriculum will deliver rather than in terms of what students will learn. Nevertheless, student learning expectations are implicit in these goals. The Core aims to:

• Promote breadth of study, exposure to a broad range of liberal arts disciplines, and understanding of interdisciplinary relationships;

• Provide a foundation for specialized study in a major;

• Ensure a common body of knowledge to which students and faculty can relate subsequent studies;

• Develop essential skills for advanced study and lifelong learning.

The Core pursues these goals through a curricular design intended to meet the educational needs of adult working students. The design is both straightforward and flexible. It requires coursework in three major areas: Area I: Skills for Work and Life, Area II: Understand the Self and Society, and Area III: Ethics and Moral Reasoning. Each of the areas is further divided into academic disciplines. The Core’s three areas incorporate one or more of academic disciplines that reflect the curriculum’s student learning goals:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **AREA I: Skills for Life and Work** | **AREA II: Understanding the Self and Society** | **Area III: Ethics and Moral Reasoning** |
| **Writing (3 credits)**  ENGL 107 College Composition  **Communication (6 credits)**  COM 225 Intercultural Communication  COM 290 Public Speaking  SPAN 103 Spanish for the Workplace  **Numeracy (3 credits)**  MATH 108 Finite Mathematics  **Information Literacy (3 credits)**  INT 109 Information Literacy | **Arts and Humanities (6 credits)**  ENGL 215 Major United States Writers II  ENGL 267 Multicultural United States Literature  FNAR 101 Survey: History of Art I  FNAR 102 Survey: History of Art II  HIS 130 Introduction to American Civilizations  HIS 132 Twentieth Century United States  HIS 155 The 20th Century World  PHIL 103 Reasoning and Argumentation  RST 290  **Social Sciences (6 credits)**  COM 201 Interpersonal Communication  ECON 101 Introduction to Microeconomics  ECON 102 Introduction to Macroeconomics  POLS 103 The American Political Process  PSYC 101 Introductory Psychology  SOCY 100 Introduction to Sociology  **Scientific Understanding (4 credits)**  BIOL 101 Introduction to Biology  ENVS 101 Discovering Planet Earth | **Ethics (3 credits)**  PHIL 245 Ethics I  PHIL 251 Bioethics  PHIL 253 Business and Professional Ethics |

Students are required to choose from a menu of course options in each area. This menu approach both provides choice and ensures exposure to a wide range of disciplines and methods of inquiry. All courses are at the introductory level, since the Core focuses on foundational skills and knowledge, and is intended to be completed within students’ first two years.

The straightforward design of the core curriculum facilitates the evaluation and application of transfer credits. Many SPS students bring prior college credits with them, and the Core curriculum, with its extensive menu of approved courses, is structured to accept a wide range of transfer coursework. The Core curriculum is also structured to allow students to take advantage of experiential learning through the Trinity Experiential Lifelong Learning (TELL) program, which awards credit based on documented prior experience.

All undergraduates must satisfy the 34 hour credit-requirement for general education coursework. Specifically, it requires 34-50credit hours, depending upon initial placement in math and writing courses. The Core curriculum serves to develop students’ proficiencies in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, technological capabilities appropriate to the discipline, and information literacy. All of these competencies are embedded in the Core curriculum’s discipline-based areas. For instance, scientific and quantitative reasoning skills are developed through Core Area 2 (Understanding the Self and Society).

# assessment of general education

In 2010, the School of Professional Studies began to aggregate and analyze direct measures of student learning for its pre-foundational and core math and English courses. The Math and English specialists developed annual reports, which measured the outcomes of the aforementioned courses. The results of the assessment reports were incorporated into the existing curriculum. Due to a change in staffing, the last Math and English reports were produced in 2014.

In Fall 2012, the School of Professional Studies implemented an undergraduate curriculum assessment project to complement Trinity’s overall outcomes assessment efforts. The Core does not state explicit student learning goals; therefore, SPS conducts assessment in areas that overlap with the academic unit’s three major areas of general education coursework: Area I: Skills for Work and Life, Area II: Understand the Self and Society, and Area III: Ethics and Moral Reasoning. SPS assesses its core curriculum in the following areas: Critical Thinking, Ethical Reasoning, Information Literacy, Intercultural Knowledge, Oral Communication, Problem Solving, and Quantitative Literacy. SPS has adopted several rubrics designed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities to assess the general core in the six categories listed above.

More on the AAC&U Rubrics

Through its ground-breaking national initiative, [VALUE](http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm) (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education), AAC&U has worked with faculty and assessment expert teams across the country to develop a set of 15 rubrics through which institutions can evaluate cross-cutting capacities students develop across courses and programs. More than 2000 institutions are currently using VALUE rubrics as part of their assessment plans. See the attachment for more information about the successful implementation results for the use of VALUE rubrics at campuses across the nation. (AAC&U, 2012)

The purpose of the current assessment project is to assess the degree to which the SPS general education core program teaches and effectively measures specific outcomes that are key to the mission of the university and the academic unit. Each semester, faculty that are teaching courses that have been identified for assessment are expected to assess at least one assignment with each rubric assigned to his or her class. Specific competencies related to the rubric category are ranked from 1 “Benchmark” to 4 “Capstone”. Faculty members select the ranking on the rubric that corresponds to the quality of work that the student has demonstrated. The results of these assessments will be incorporated into the curriculum.

# results OF CORE CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT

Research indicates that SPS students enrolled in writing and ethics courses within the Core show improvements in competency levels in the areas of Critical Thinking and Ethical Reasoning. The results are reflective of changes to curriculum and classroom pedagogy in English and efforts led by the SPS Writing Specialist. However, while the improvements are noteworthy, further strengthening of students’ writing skills remain a goal for the School of Professional Studies.

These results suggest that Trinity’s writing courses are increasingly providing effective skill building opportunities for many SPS students, allowing them to complete their general education requirements and move forward successfully into the next phase of their academic programs.

Alternatively, SPS students enrolled in numeracy and science courses within the Core demonstrate below average competency levels in the areas of Problem Solving and Quantitative Literacy.

More analysis is needed to determine whether Trinity’s current numeracy and science courses effectively meet the needs of the SPS student population. There is currently no Mathematics Specialist available to study the effectiveness of the Math core in the areas of Problem Solving and Quantitative Literacy.

The SPS Core Curriculum assessment plan is a work in progress, with some components fully operational, some in their pilot stages, and others in the planning phase for future implementation. During the 2014-15 academic year, the data will be analyzed and further recommendations will be made for improved student success.