Core Action Plan

The University of San Diego is in the first stage of a revision of its Core Curriculum. We look to develop a core that gives our students a greater sense of direction and intention in their educational experiences, and that facilitates interdisciplinary, experiential, and ethically-engaged learning. The Core Action Plan lays out a process by which we can determine our vision for the Core, and then fulfill those goals. Revising the Core is an opportunity to improve upon what is one of the most important reflections of the mission, purpose, and uniqueness of a degree from USD.

Core revision is a key part of the President's Strategic Directions, approved by the Board of Trustees. It is also a response to WASC recommendations from their 2010 review. Members of the interim Core Reform Task Force attended the AACU Institute on General Education and Assessment in June of 2011, and worked over the summer to complete this Core Action Plan (CAP) as a guiding document. The authors of the CAP are Mary Boyd, Andy Allen, Carole Huston, Sue Lowery, Alberto Pulido, and Abraham Stoll.

We will initiate the process of Core revision this fall. Although many at USD have been considering the matter for a while now, we do not want to begin with any preconceptions about the best core model. Rather, we offer a process by which open inquiry, from faculty as well as the wider campus, will intelligently and efficiently choose our directions.

Part One of this action plan puts forward a three-year timetable, which is punctuated by two milestones: the Core Proposal (a rough draft of the new core) and the Core Charter (the final draft). It then sketches out the governance, describing the committees which will be involved, the role of administration, and the necessary steps for approval and implementation. Part Two begins to articulate the larger and more idealized goals of Core revision by offering a first attempt at a Vision Statement, and by drawing up Measures of Success. Part Three lays a foundation for the important discussions of Year One. It assembles a survey of several kinds of core models, and a glossary of common terms and definitions, so that we can get talking.

Part One

Timetable

Year One: Imagining the Core
The main work of this stage is open discussion, through forums, committees, the Academic Assembly, and as many other channels of communication as can be devised. We will begin with general ideas and possible core models. And then we will try to advance an increasingly precise understanding of what the faculty and university would like to do. By the end of the academic year, we will have drafted and approved a Core Proposal – not a plan worked out in detail, but an agreement on the general ideas.

Major goals:
- Multiple core surveys: Begin with perspectives on current core among faculty, students, staff, alumni. Then expand to consideration of other models and the ongoing discussion.
- Discussion: through Open Forums, the Core blog, and elsewhere. Faculty will lead the discussion, and we will seek input from USD's many stakeholders, including students, alumni, University Ministry, etc.
- From discussion to proposal: The Core Planning Committee will use the surveys, and the Open Forums, and all other forms of feedback, to create proposal drafts in an iterative fashion.
- The Core Proposal: a working document that describes our intended direction, and the basics of the Core model we will adopt. Must be endorsed by the Assembly, SBA and Engineering. Must be reviewed by the Senate, Provost, President, and the Board Of Trustees' Academic Affairs Committee.

Year Two: Building the Core
With the Core Proposal from Year One as a guide, this stage tackles the numerous practical elements that support and shape a core curriculum. While these considerations need to be part of the debate from the beginning, we want to let our pedagogic instincts lead in Year One. Then here in Year Two we will allow practical matters to become more influential. As we articulate the Core Proposal to form a detailed model, practicalities will inevitably shape the ideal plan, likely resulting in substantive changes. By the end of the academic year, we will have written the Core Charter, and it will have gone through a full approval process. The Core Charter is the refined and fully articulated version of the Core Proposal.

Major goals:
- Seek input from those stakeholders with practical concerns, e.g. Faculty Status Committee, ARRT, Student Affairs, Associated Students, International Center, Admissions, Registrar, Information Technology Services

- Integrate into the Charter the mechanisms that support the classroom, including: financial resources; assessment; processes by which we staff the core; long-term viability.
- Develop a detailed plan for implementation in Year Three and beyond.
- The Core Charter: the final blueprint for the Core. Must be endorsed by the Assembly, SBA and Engineering. Must be approved by the Senate, Provost, President, and Board of Trustees.

Year Three: Implementation
In this year we begin the actual transition to a new Core, in anticipation of bringing it to the classroom in year four. A fundamental question is whether this will be a single transition, enacted all at once, or whether the Core should be built through an unfolding series of pilot programs, with room to reevaluate and redesign in subsequent years. This section is not fully developed, as we cannot now anticipate all of the issues. Other questions include:
- How to do faculty development?
- What will encourage ongoing faculty involvement?
- How will we assess the new Core?
- How do we transition from the old to the new Core? – e.g what happens with existing students?
- What are the steps of implementation?

Governance

This is a plan for organizing the various committees and stakeholders, and a description of the approval process.

The Core Planning Committee (CPC)
- To be formed this fall, by appointment by the Provost. Dean Boyd will serve as Chair. It will consist of the five members of the existing Task Force (Carole Huston, Alberto Pulido, Sue Lowery, Abraham Stoll, Andy Allen), a representative from Community Service Learning, a student from Associated Students, a representative from SBA, and four positions open to faculty expressing interest in the fall. One member will also represent the Senate.
- Several representatives, as primary stakeholders, will participate as ex officio, non-voting members, including from University Ministries, Student Affairs, Living Learning Communities, Honors Program, Preceptorials, and Alumni.
- Meetings will be open, and reports will be posted on the web.
- CPC will report regularly to the Academic Assembly, SBA faculty, and Senate.

- Charged with overseeing the total process and keeping us on the timetable.
- Will delegate key tasks to several committees and working groups, including Academic Affairs and Planning Committee, the proposed Senate Core Committee, the Core Curriculum Committee, the Diversity Curriculum Committee, CAS Assessment Team.
- Will assemble the Core Proposal at the end of Year 1, and present it for the endorsement process by Assembly, SBA, Engineering, and for the review process by the Senate, Provost, President, and Board of Trustees.
- Will assemble the Core Charter at the end of Year Two, and see it through endorsement by Assembly, SBA, and Engineering, and approval by Senate and the Board of Trustees.

Other faculty committees in the process – their work to be coordinated by the CPC
- Academic Affairs and Planning Committee: Host and organize the Open Forums, summarize ideas and provide feedback to the CPC
- Core Curriculum Committee: Evaluate survey data, summarize ideas and provide feedback to the CPC; clarify relationship between existing Core and possible models
- Diversity Curriculum Committee: Will coordinate with the Center on Inclusion and Diversity; host open forums around proposed role of diversity in the Core
- CAS Assessment Team: Primarily in Year Two will align learning outcomes with core models, and devise assessment structures.
- Undergraduate Curriculum Committee: Consider how Core models will mesh with the majors and minors.
- Library Faculty Committee: Investigate how library science and information literacy can inform the Core.

Primary stakeholders
- Students
    - A representative undergraduate (the Vice President for Academics) appointed by Associated Students will serve on the CPC and report to the Student Senate.
    - There will be special Open Forum discussions and surveys for students
- University Senate
    - In its constitution the Senate has jurisdiction over the Core Curriculum, and will be called upon to endorse the major steps of the process. It will review the Core Proposal in Year One and approve the Core Charter in Year Two.
    - There is a pending proposal for a Senate Core Committee. When approved, it will receive regular reports from CPC and provide guidance.

- The Senate Core Committee will specifically take on the task of coordinating between the academic units that offer undergraduate degree programs.
- Academic Assembly, including Copley Librarians
  - Will receive regular reports from CPC
  - Will be asked to endorse the Core Proposal in Year One and the Core Charter in Year Two
- School of Business Administration, including Engineering
  - Will have a representative on the CPC
  - Will be asked to endorse the Core Proposal in Year One and the Core Charter in Year Two
- The Administration
  - President: Core revision is an initiative of the President's new Strategic Directions. Will coordinate with the Board of Trustees.
  - Provost: will provide overall leadership and support, including financial matters; will coordinate with Board Of Trustees' Academic Affairs Committee.
  - Dean of CAS: Chair of CPC; will provide direct leadership on many facets of the process.
  - Dean of SBA: Will receive reports from the CPC representative and provide input.
  - Vice President for Student Affairs: Will receive reports from the CPC and provide input.
  - Vice President for Mission and Ministry: Will receive reports from the CPC and provide input.

Approval process for the Core Proposal
- Endorsement by Academic Assembly, SBA, and Engineering
- Review from Senate, Provost, President, and BOT Academic Affairs Committee in order to get feedback for the crafting of the Charter

Approval process for the Core Charter
- Endorsement by Academic Assembly, SBA, and Engineering
- The proposed Senate Core Committee will present to the full Senate for approval
- Provost and President will bring the Charter to the Board of Trustees for approval

Part Two

Vision Statement

The University of San Diego is committed to the proposition that an excellent college education not only offers a body of practical knowledge, but also exercises and develops the intellectual habits that can elevate our humanity. It prepares students for a life of productive work through useful skills and advanced knowledge. And it prepares students to be ethical and thoughtful citizens of the world.

This is an expression of the two great traditions that animate USD: liberal arts education and Catholic higher education. By carrying on the great humanist project of free inquiry, the liberal arts teach students to think critically. Students learn to examine the world, to question assumptions, and to cultivate self-reflection, all of which are essential habits for adults in our rapidly changing, diverse world. These ideals are also essential to the spiritual and ethical values of USD's Catholic mission, values that are strengthened by the unfettered discourse of a university with no boundaries. The distinctive idea of a Catholic university puts particular emphasis on academic excellence in the liberal arts, and on critical reflection as a key ingredient in our spiritual welfare, and in our calling to uphold the dignity and aspirations of all people.

The Core Curriculum is at the center of USD's liberal arts, Catholic education. It is here that students may develop breadth of knowledge, becoming informed about history, the arts, science, religion, and the many disciplines that give entrance into the important intellectual discourses of today. And in the Core, students may synthesize ideas from these disciplines. They compare disparate intellectual approaches, and practice the ability to think critically and creatively about related, often competing, ideas. They reflect on the great problems of society and spirit, and consider how their academics fit into their real worlds. Breadth and synthesis are truly the core of a liberal arts, Catholic education, opening up the dual possibilities of an effective professional life and a life as an engaged, inclusive citizen.

As we begin to revise the Core Curriculum, there are clearly many core models we can choose, and many directions we can take. These decisions should be guided by the goals of liberal arts, Catholic education. At present we have articulated the following four principles which we hope our Core can uphold. We welcome further additions and adjustments.

> The Core should bring students to courses they might not choose on their own. But it simultaneously should integrate academics with the social and political issues – examined through a critical lens – that students know to be central to our regions, our cultures, and this historical moment.

> The Core should develop in each student an elevated conception of citizenship. This includes the development of democratic citizenship, involving the ability to take part in intellectual discourse, to think through social problems, and to

recognize the complex ways that each individual is woven into the larger social fabric. And it includes the development of a more spiritual citizenship, involving a nuanced understanding of ethics, of religious traditions, of Catholic social justice, and of our multi-ethnic world.

The Core should give students a chance to learn beyond the walls of the classroom. This can be achieved through interdisciplinary courses and the integration of disparate studies. And it can be achieved through numerous kinds of co-curricular learning, such as internships, study abroad, and community service.

The Core should serve as a signal representation of the unique education offered by USD.

Measures of Success

How will we know if the revised core is an improvement over the existing core? How can we be sure that we follow through on our original goals and principles? Our measures of success should be specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, and timely. The measures of success suggested below are first steps in that direction.

- Achievements in student learning are visible.
- The Core is perceived by both faculty and students as developmentally coherent and integrated.
- Student engagement increases (satisfaction, enrollment in USD's core).
- Faculty satisfaction with the core improves.
- Satisfaction with advising improves (instead of perceiving Core as an obstacle to be overcome).
- The connection between the USD mission and the core is clarified.
- The distinctiveness of being a USD student is defined.
- Greater numbers of tenure-track faculty are teaching in the core.

As we proceed with the core revision process, our measures of success will need to be further refined and clarified.

Part Three

Core Models

Here are five models, meant to summarize the most basic types of Core Curricula that we have seen. These are offered as a starting point for discussion and imagination. In the descriptions below we use a few specifics (e.g. the number of courses in the cluster) in order to articulate the ideas. But these are not essential, and there is a great deal of room within each model to refine and innovate, to combine, or to make bigger or smaller.

Distribution

What USD currently has. The student is instructed to take 1 natural science, 1 English, etc. This traditional model is based upon the existing vocabulary and organization of nearly all universities – the departments and disciplines currently organize us at USD, and largely formed the basis of our graduate training.

Examples:
Yale University   http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/distributional-requirements
U of Chicago   https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/academics/core.shtml
Carleton College   http://apps.carleton.edu/academics/requirements/current/
USF   http://www.usfca.edu/catalog/core/

The Cluster

A group of independent courses, gathered together under a theme, such as Pollution or Social Justice or Great Books. There are many ways to organize clusters. One example: students will choose a theme, and then choose 4 courses from among 12, taking two per semester in their freshman year. In terms of syllabus and grades, these courses are independent, each taught by a professor in his or her own way. But the students will be able to integrate the courses through the common theme, and through being part of a cohort taking overlapping classes. The cluster could also bring in outside speakers, show movies, include instruction from the library, and design co-curricular activities for the entire cluster. There could also be 2-course clusters in the sophomore year, repeating the structure on a smaller scale. Some schools use the cluster as an advanced level of the core, requiring students to do either a cluster or a minor.

Examples:
UCLA   http://www.college.ucla.edu/ge/clusters/index.html
Portland State   http://www.pdx.edu/unst/sophomore-inquiry-upper-division-clusters
Hofstra   http://www.hofstra.edu/Academics/Colleges/HCLAS/FYC/index.html
U of Southern Maine   http://usm.maine.edu/core/thematic-clusters
University of Dayton   http://www.udayton.edu/gened/domains_of_knowledge.php

The Core Course
A course or several courses designed jointly by several departments. These have relatively standardized readings lists, and every student takes them. E.g. Columbia has Literature Humanities, which is mostly philosophy and literature from the Greeks forward. And Columbia has a few other Core courses, including Frontiers of Science. This model could involve team teaching, or stand-alone seminars. It could also involve some kind of lecture, e.g. where students attend a seminar once a week and a lecture once a week, for 3 units. The lectures could be delivered by 3 or 4 professors (or 5 or 6) in turn, who would simultaneously teach the attached seminar. A core course could also take the form of a freshman seminar. It could be a year long, or worth 6 units in a single semester. Core courses could have interdisciplinary themes, as in the cluster. Or there could be a Science Core, a Humanities Core, etc. Compared to the cluster model, this has more direct team teaching, and is more centralized.

Examples:
Columbia University   http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/
Colgate University   http://www.colgate.edu/academics/liberalarts/corerequirements.html
Saint Mary's   http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/undergraduate-requirements/collegiate-seminar/index.html

The Developmental Core
Sometimes called vertical or scaffolded, this creates a progression from year to year. The first year generally focuses on basic competencies and skills, such as writing and quantitative reasoning. The second year expands to explore a more interdisciplinary and more socially-derived set of concerns. For example, year two could be organized around Social Justice, which would bring together diversity, Catholicity, ethics, etc. Developmental models offer the opportunity to organize a progressive course of study, so students get things in a certain order. They can extend through all four years, culminating in a capstone.

Examples:
Santa Clara   http://www.scu.edu/core/
Portland State   http://www.pdx.edu/unst/university-studies-program-overview
Farleigh Dickinson   http://view.fdu.edu/default.aspx?id=12
Miami University   http://www.miami.muohio.edu/documents_and_policies/bulletin04/requirements/miami_plan.cfm

Living Learning Communities
Can be applied to, and compliment, every other core model. Students take part in a similar course of study and live near each other in the dorms. LLCs are generally connected to a cluster of courses that are organized around a broad common theme, such as sustainability, or around a learning approach, such as service learning. LLCs extend the pedagogy from the classroom to include many cocurricular activities, both formal and

informal. They are typically collaborative partnerships between the College of Arts and Sciences, a core curriculum committee, and Student Affairs. USD uses the LLC model in the Honors Program, and is piloting three LLCs this year with 300 incoming freshmen.

Examples:
Santa Clara   http://www.scu.edu/rlc/
Villanova   http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/learningcommunities
Seattle University   http://www.seattleu.edu/housing/Inner.aspx?id=70435
Holy Cross   http://academics.holycross.edu/montserrat
Loyola Chicago   http://www.luc.edu/learningcommunity/Communities.shtml
Portland State   http://www.pdx.edu/housing/fye

Glossary

Capstone
- A 4th year Core requirement, as a culmination of the major, e.g. Honors Thesis
- Could require more general work, such as combining a thesis or project with classes outside of the major – e.g. an English major could take a history course related to his or her project

Co-curricular learning
- internships, community service, undergraduate research, study abroad

Core Action Plan (CAP)
- Written in summer 2011 by the Core Task Force.
- Sets up a timetable and articulates the several steps and the governance for the Core revision process.

Core Charter
- The detailed and firm plan, to be drafted and approved by the end of Year Two.
- The Core Charter represents the final draft of the Proposal. Over the course of Year Two the many stakeholders will work out how to put the general ideas of the Proposal into practice.

Core Proposal
- A working document to be drafted by the end of Year One, proposing the general design for the new Core.

Discipline oriented requirements
- Organizes Core requirements by department or by Humanities/ Social Sciences/ Natural Sciences/ Fine Arts
- The primary means of organizing our current core
- Cf. Outcome oriented requirements

E-portfolio
- An online collection of work, can include papers, video, reflections, co-curricular activities, artwork, and other kinds of projects
- Assembled in a class or over the course of 1 to 4 years
- A strong way to integrate material from otherwise separate classes

High Impact Practices
- The general term for curricular ideas that go beyond traditional classroom-centered pedagogy. E.g. team teaching, clusters, co-curriculars, learning communities, capstones, etc.

Horizontal Organization
- Connects courses into clusters which the student takes at one time, or without a prescribed order
- Cf. Vertical Organization

Living Learning Communities
- Students take a common course of study and also live in community, taking part in curriculum outside of the traditional classroom
- Currently being piloted at USD

Outcome oriented requirements
- Organizes Core requirements by learning outcome or rubric, rather than by class and department. E.g. a student would not be required to take a course in Communication Studies, but rather would be required to fulfill information literacy, which could be done in a number of courses from a number of departments, including Communication Studies
- In the current Core we do this with D course for diversity and W for writing
- Cf. Discipline organized requirements

Vertical Organization
- Creates core structures that pursue goals over the course of several semesters, often with markedly different themes and approaches in each year.
- Allows for sequences, e.g. skills such as writing and math in year 1, then more complex investigations in year 2. Allows for Core classes in years 3 and 4, including capstones.
- Cf. Horizontal Organization