

Core Competencies Model – Presentation to the Core Planning Committee

November 19, 2013

12:15-2:00 p.m., Serra 204

The final presentation to the full CPC was given by the Core Competencies subcommittees. Before the presentation began, CPC Chair Kristin Moran reviewed the upcoming timeline, as she has done at each subcommittee's presentation. Any faculty members who have questions about the schedule should contact Dr. Moran for more information. All meetings are open and faculty members are encouraged to attend and lend their voices to the process.

Three subcommittees comprise the competencies: Communication, Critical Thinking and Information Literacy, and Mathematical Reasoning/Quantitative Reasoning. The Communication subcommittee is further divided into three areas: Written communication, oral communication, and second language. There are seven competencies in total. Competencies were not viewed as additional courses to be added to the curriculum; instead, competencies would exist within learning outcomes in a developmental model spanning freshman through senior years, culminating with the capstone experience. Each competency would necessitate support and resources for students (to achieve competency) and for faculty (training to embed competencies in their courses). The presentation laid out each competency's definition, suggested learning outcomes, and recommendations for curricular structure. Definitions and outcomes were derived from readings and group discussion. Readings included the AAC&U competency value rubrics, key documents from national academic associations and councils, and articles by top researchers in fields related to a specific competency.

Written Communication

Written communication was defined as: the development and expression of ideas in writing; experimentation with many writing genres and styles; involving different writing technologies, texts, data, and images; and is developed through iterative experiences across the curriculum. Outcomes included: context of and purpose for writing; content development; genre and disciplinary conventions; sources and evidence; and control of syntax and mechanics. The suggested curricular structure would include a writing placement exam for all students entering USD, a foundational writing course in the fall and spring of the freshman year, a flagged course at the intermediate 200 or 300 course level, and a senior year capstone experience with embedded outcomes in written communication. Students would receive mentoring and tutoring through an expanded Writing Center. Students who test at a low skill level would be placed into targeted writing courses catering to those students' needs. Faculty would need sufficient support for training to embed the writing competency into their courses.

Oral Communication

USD has never had an oral communication requirement of its students. Oral communication has traditionally been associated with a classic liberal arts education and its pedagogy is closely related to the writing competency's pedagogy. Many universities have had longstanding commitments to oral communication in their core curricula. Oral communication was defined as: prepared, purposeful presentation to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, and to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors for individual public speaking. Its outcomes included: cohesive organization of content; language choice; delivery techniques; use of evidence; and central message development. Also mentioned was the importance of learning how to speak extemporaneously and to also overcome "communication apprehension"—the fear of public speaking. The suggested curricular structure would have oral communication as a 1-unit integrative component within the LLC and linked courses freshman year, a flagged course at the intermediate 200 or 300 course level, and a senior capstone experience with embedded outcomes in oral communication. The Writing Center could have an expanded role in offering mentoring and tutoring in oral communication. Faculty would need sufficient support to embed the oral communication competency into their courses, which may involve training in how to teach an oral communication component or bringing an oral communication coach into the classroom.

Second Language

Second language proficiency is critical in developing students into global citizens who will also have an understanding of their future colleagues whose first language is not English, as well as for the international engagement efforts on campus. Second language competency is the ability to achieve basic proficiency in a second language across the dimensions of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. USD includes a cultural competency component for diversity, inclusion, and social justice and for intercultural competence. Outcomes state that students should achieve an intermediate mid-level proficiency in speaking and reading and an intermediate low-level for listening and writing. USD students do not meet these levels currently. The recent program review team's report suggests that Languages & Literatures increase their contact hours, which are lower than many other universities' and do not meet the ACTFL guidelines. Curricular structure suggestions are to increase language course units from 3 to 4 and that language courses are taken consecutively. All first-year and transfer student would complete a placement exam. Global competency is to be developed in association with the inclusion and social justice requirement. Students would receive mentoring and tutoring at the new Rigsby Language and Culture Commons in Founders Hall 123. Before 2005, USD had 5-unit intensive language courses which included labs. Though successful, the model was labor-intensive.

Critical Thinking

The deliberation on critical thinking incurred much disagreement among subcommittee members. The group decided it was best to define critical thinking as the basis for every method of inquiry, requiring the analysis of an issue or problem and an exploration of the support and assumptions that underlie a thesis and derived conclusions. The Breadth Subcommittee's four dimensions (artistic; literary and historical; social and behavioral; scientific) would embed critical thinking as a learning outcome. Critical thinking outcomes are: explanation of an issue or problem; support; influence of assumptions; student thesis; and conclusion.

Information Literacy

IL is often confused with information technology. IL can include the use of technology to access information, but the two are not the same. The ACRL defines IL as the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, and use information. Outcomes for IL are: recognizing the extent or scope of information needed; accessing the information; evaluating the information and its sources; effectively using information for a specific purpose; and the ethical and legal accessing and use of information. IL works best when embedded in a discipline; it fails when taught as a stand-alone course. The subcommittee recognized that IL and critical thinking pair well as part of the research process and as developmental methods of inquiry, such as the LLCs' methods of inquiry. Some students genuinely have no concept of what plagiarism is or are aware when they are plagiarizing. Curricular structure recommendations for critical thinking and information literacy (CTIL) are: embedding CTIL in the LLC and linked courses in a foundational first-year curriculum; flagging courses for CTIL above the 100-level; and embedding CTIL in the senior capstone experience. Transfer students would be assessed for CTIL and advised to take flagged CTIL courses specific to transfer students. Students would receive tutoring and mentoring in CTIL and faculty would receive sufficient support to develop and implement CTIL into their courses, such as training for designing assignments incorporating CTIL.

Mathematical Reasoning and Problem Solving (MRPS)

Group readings and discussion led to defining mathematical reasoning within two distinct areas: numeracy (quantitative reasoning) and abstract reasoning (MRPS). The subcommittee determined that mathematical reasoning is an activity that is not limited to conceptual methods—it is also a language. MRPS involves: creating, following, and assessing chains of mathematical arguments; explaining, interpreting, and correctly applying definitions, theorems, and results; and having familiarity with the idea of mathematical proof (ability to understand and explain simple proofs; understand and derive mathematical formulas; recognize difference between proofs and informal arguments). Outcomes include: problem solving and modeling; mathematical reasoning, argumentation, and proof; and communication. Curricular structure recommendations suggest that all students take a math placement exam upon entering the university or by completing an MRPS core course and that the MRPS course would be taken in the freshman or sophomore year.

Quantitative Reasoning

Quantitative reasoning (QR) tackles the issue of how to best use “big data.” Data is used as evidence to ask or answer a problem or issue in any discipline. Students use and evaluate quantitative evidence to solve complex problems and issues. Outcomes include: interpreting and representing quantitative reasoning by converting relevant information into mathematical forms (equations, graphs, diagrams, etc.) and deriving meaning from the data presented graphically or in tabular form; evaluating validity of data, recognizing assumptions, and applying data in context; and communicating or expressing quantitative evidence in support of an argument or decision. Curricular structure recommendations are to screen all students for a basic skills course in QR; enrolling students at a low-skill level in a basic skills course during the first year; all students take a QR-flagged course; and that QR-flagged courses may occur in the core, the major, or as an elective. Carleton College has successfully embedded QR across disciplines using its QuIRK initiative (quantitative inquiry, reasoning, and knowledge) that includes curricular materials, assessment, and program design for QR. Examples of QR courses are “Liberty and Equality in American Politics,” “The Black Death and the World It Made,” and “Measured Thinking: Reasoning with Numbers about World Events, Health, Science, and Social Issues.” Since data arguably exists in all areas of study, then QR could be embedded in all disciplines.

Common Features across Competencies

Each competency is developmental in nature, from foundational first-year courses through intermediate level (courses >100-level) courses in the second and third years through the senior capstone experience. All competencies are flagged at the 200 and 300 levels and are embedded in the senior capstone experience. Each competency will use placement testing at entry level; placement exams that currently exist will be retained and enhanced. Testing for writing placement will be re-examined from a proposal put forth by the English department several years ago and international students will take placement exams for fluency. The capstone experience will synthesize competencies in projects inside or outside of the curriculum. Some capstones are stand-alone courses within a major and some majors do not have a capstone experience. For students whose majors do not require capstone, a general capstone experience could be created, students could be required to complete senior projects or theses, or create a capstone experience incorporating CSL, for example. Further work is needed to define capstone implementation. Successful implementation of the competencies will be a process over time requiring significant faculty support and development in learning new pedagogical emphases and assessment for effectiveness. An incentive process should be considered for faculty to attend seminars and workshops for course redesign and assessment for effectiveness. Administrative support is necessary to ensure the success of this foundational change in re-envisioning a stronger, more cohesive and interdisciplinary core curriculum at USD.

Core Competencies Model

The core competencies model has 14-18 total courses for 44-59 total units:

- Breadth: 5-6 courses, CTIL embedded
- Oral communication: embedded integrative unit attached to LLC and linked course in freshman year
- CIT: 2 courses (six units) in THRS
- CIT: 1-2 courses (3-6 units) in PHIL (upper division Ethics could be met in the Major)
- CIT: 1-2 courses (3-6 units) in ISJ (inclusion and social justice)
- Writing: 1 course (3 units)
- MRPS: 1 course (3 units)
- Second Language: 3 courses (9-12 units at either 3 or 4 units per course)
- Capstone: 0-1 course (0-3 units)

Students could test out of any competency or receive AP credit for a competency. The capstone could be taken in or out of the major. The ISJ course(s) could satisfy the cultural outcome in second language courses. Students will need to take a QR-flagged course, but there will be no set required QR courses in the curriculum.

Q&A Session

A few faculty members debated the one course requirement for philosophy, noting that a previous core model presented by CIT listed a requirement of two courses in philosophy, one of which would be an ethics course. Another faculty member asked if a literature requirement had been dropped from the model. Some had the sense that the core model was a *“fait accompli,”* even though it had been stated previously several times that all models are negotiable and additional discussion will take place throughout the core revisioning process. The CPC will create another model based on the models put together by the subcommittees, collect feedback and revise at the Dec. 3 meeting, and send the model out for a full faculty review for more feedback, further revision, and another opportunity for review before it is presented to the Academic Assembly in February. The Competency subcommittee based some of its work on the models from the Breadth, CIT, and Academic Integration subcommittees.

The core revision process was brought up and described as overly complex, involving several committees, reports, and timelines over the past three years, lending less than a transparent view of the process, especially regarding the determination of which courses would be kept to fulfill a competency and which would be dropped. As an example, an ethics course had initially been considered as being a requirement taught from the PHIL department in one model, being taught in any discipline in another model, and being an optional course in yet another model, and that the Philosophy department did not have the opportunity to consider or weigh in on these deliberations, despite this being an open discussion point among the CPC for three years.

An additional issue to consider is that scientific literacy may only comprise one course whereas second language might remain largely unchanged, if not expanded. Some departments may not be happy to see fewer core requirements from their areas while other departments will have no change in the number of requirements from their areas, so further consideration is needed to address this issue. Another issue is that a lot of emphasis has been placed on the LLCs, when LLCs are currently only one course. Adding competency learning outcomes to some courses may work (i.e., critical thinking and general chemistry), but perhaps not for all courses. The Integration Subcommittee discussed having topic-driven LLC courses instead of LLC preceptorial entry-level major courses. What impact will a new core model have on the LLCs and the current preceptorials? Perhaps the entry-level preceptorial courses will not be associated with the LLC or perhaps they will remain one and the same. If additional outcomes are to be placed into the LLCs, some separation may be needed because one course cannot cover all competencies.

Second language had five contact hours in an intensive language model during the first and second semester language classes before 2005; students did not actually receive 5 units of credit, but they did have more contact hours. This model was abandoned in 2005 because it was not working, and two contact hours were dropped. A recent program review report suggested that L&L increase its contact hours to increase proficiency. The L&L was clear to point out that it is not trying to take advantage freed-up units. It was asked if it was possible to have increased contact hours without adding units. With an increase in contact hours, students would still need classroom space, whether or not units are increased. Taking second language courses consecutively would be strongly advised and encouraged, but not required, considering some students' course pathways are intensive and may not be flexible enough to allow consecutive semesters of a language.

Discussion returned to critical thinking and whether it should also be acknowledged as a basic competency with fundamental principles and concepts across disciplines, not just a mid-level discipline-specific competency. The report stated that faculty from a variety of areas are needed to continue to work on further developing each of the competencies and their outcomes, especially the critical thinking competency. This led to a discussion of faculty teaching the writing competency who are not experienced in the discipline of writing and how this violates the integrity of the disciplines and contact with students who expect to be taught by experts in the field that they teach. Contributing to further develop a student's writing in a discipline is not the same as teaching it as a basic competency, it was argued.

A standard bar of proficiency is needed. What measurements could be used to establish this standard bar of competency? For example, will more students need to take a remedial course in writing and how would this be determined? Would math competency be measured with a particular SAT score or a placement exam? There is a math competency exam administered twice a year. As an example, Communication Studies does not require a math course above 115 and if a student places out of this level, they do not have to take a math course if they major in Communication Studies. There was support for a critical thinking and writing entry-level competency exam and that if students could not grasp the basics of critical thinking, perhaps they would then need to take a logic class. The entry-level writing competency exam would help capture students needing more assistance, including international and transfer students. It is not known how many students need to take ENGL 100. Two sections are offered at the ENGL 100-level and 28 sections are offered at the ENGL 121 level.

It was asked if courses had yet been chosen for flagging and which courses would be flagged for which competency/ies. By the time the CPC reconvenes on December 3, it is hoped the model that is developed will have incorporated the ideas expressed at each of the presentations. It was then suggested if it would be possible to address controversial areas, as well as to show areas of consensus, within the report. The group then discussed how best to share the CPC's work once they have put together their draft based on the subcommittees' work. The CPC would vote first on the model before forwarding it to the faculty. CPC meetings have always been open, so subcommittee members are welcome to attend the Dec. 3 meeting.

Returning to second language, some cautioned that in the past, when the intensive language learning model was in place, some students signed up for Latin to avoid the additional contact time required by Spanish or French. A course unit corresponds with a certain amount of work outside of the class, so increasing units would mean an increase in work done outside of the class for the professor and the students. It was reiterated that the CPC does not have the authority to determine or approve unit increases or decreases. The Curriculum Committee would need to approve a department's request to increase or decrease the number of units of a course.

It was agreed that students should take their math requirement early in their college career, preferably within the first two years, than to wait until the senior year. Some universities do not allow students to register for courses until they have taken a particular required course. Might USD consider a similar step for the math requirement? Students who wait to take math during the senior year tend to do themselves a disservice if they do poorly in the class.

Regarding entry-level placement exams, in addition to the suggestion to revisit the English department's proposal from several years ago to establish a writing competency entry-level placement exam, it was suggested that a similar testing device be created for critical thinking principles and processes.

It was asked if a course was requested to be flagged for a particular competency, would the course need to meet all outcomes for that competency, or could a few be selected? It was suggested that professors study their courses to see where competencies and outcomes already exist to determine flagging. Critical thinking and information literacy are inherently built into a research-based or capstone course as well as when students are assigned research papers, for example. Many universities that have flagged courses have developed initiatives to help faculty come together to find the best ways to evaluate how courses could be flagged. Establishing a process for flagging courses would be an important first step after the new core model has been approved. A lot of faculty who are teaching research methods are already teaching principles of information literacy, for example, so those are examples of courses that could easily be flagged for IL. It is important to note that in such cases faculty may not even realize that they have been incorporating competencies and outcomes into their teaching and course work.

A student suggested having an even stronger push for more IL throughout the core and said that, as a senior, she has had more experience with IL in her senior year, but not as much in the first three years, which does not give a lot of time for for IL skills improvement.

It was asked what the “linked” course was. The “linked” course is a course in the spring that is linked to the LLC course in the fall. The LLC course in the fall and the linked course in the spring would each have a 1-unit oral communication component attached. Foundation writing courses would be loosely associated with the LLC theme, but they would not be linked or attached to the LLC or linked courses in terms of scheduling. This would allow for more flexible scheduling. More discussion is needed to iron out the details.

It was suggested to layout visually what the first two years might look like under this draft model, to assist in clarifying the proposal, flagging courses, number of units, and other elements.

The CPC Steering Committee next meets **Friday, November 22 from 11:15-12:15 in Camino 126** to compose a proposal based on updates and information gained from each of the subcommittees. By December 2 the CPC hopes to have a clarified document that includes a table, a sample of how the first two years of the revised core might look like, and recommendations for support, resources, and compensation (i.e., if a director of writing is considered), how assessment might happen, and what committees might form to help determine how courses will be flagged and counted, all of which is to be shared at the December 3 meeting for further discussion and revision.