Report on Proposals for Core Curriculum Improvement

Submitted by: The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (CCAC)
CONTENTS

Pages

I. Introduction................................................................. 1
II. Core A Content............................................................ 1
III. Core A Staffing........................................................... 2
IV. Transfer and Equivalency Problems................................. 3
V. Limitations................................................................. 3
VI. Conclusions............................................................... 4
Appendix A  Committee’s E-mail Seeking Comments.............. 5
Appendix B  Faculty Comments............................................ 7
Appendix C  Honor Students Comments............................... 30
Report on Proposals for Core Curriculum Improvement

I. Introduction

On March 16, 2011, The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (CCAC) solicited from all sectors of the university proposals for improving the Core Curriculum. The intent of the invitation, as stated in the email, was “to reconcile differences about the Core that have divided the University.” The email is included as Appendix A.

Ten faculty members responded. One faculty member wrote three proposals; two did not suggest improvements, but rather, respectively, expressed concern over the solicitation, and recommended that no changes be made pending assessment. In addition, 19 students in an honors CORE 202 class wrote final exam essays that responded to the CCAC invitation by suggesting improvements to the Core.

This report summarizes and synthesizes the 10 faculty and 19 student proposals for improving the Core. The responses do not constitute a representative sample of opinions across the University, but they allowed individuals who so chose to identify aspects of the core that they perceived as needing improvement. The most common faculty objections to the core focused on the Core A sequence; the students, as per their assignment, also focused on Core A. With respect to this focal point, there is a coherence and consistency of perspective across documents despite the smallness of the sample. Respondents’ objections to the Core A sequence generally fell into one of three categories: dissatisfaction with the content of the Core A courses; problems with staffing; and objections concerning course substitutions or equivalencies. Appendix B contains responses from Faculty. Appendix C contains responses from students.

II. Core A Content

A. The interdisciplinary format.

The Core A courses are intended to cultivate in students the abilities to reason critically, use technology wisely, and communicate effectively in both writing and speech. In the current approach, each course addresses all of the outcomes. However, some of the faculty and student respondents thought that the Core A learning objectives could be better accomplished through courses dedicated to a single skill and taught by instructors with disciplinary expertise in that field.

One faculty proposal objected that the treatment of cyber literacy in Core A courses was insufficient to provide RU graduates with “skills needed for effective cyber citizenship” and the skills are not being taught by IT faculty. The faculty member wrote, “Just because all faculty use IT does not mean that all faculty can teach IT.”

On this same theme, another faculty respondent quoted instructor comments in the Formative Assessment of CORE 101 and 103: “Not enough time to cover all components of the course...the oral communication segment suffered... because most of the faculty teaching were English faculty.”
A third faculty member referred to CORE 201 and 202 subject matter as “a hodgepodge of ideas that even the faculty teaching these classes openly admit to not covering in their classes. Thus many departments are quite unhappy with what students are (not) [sic] learning in these classes.”

Likewise, one of the honors student respondents expressed disappointment with the Core A courses, observing, “I could have taken a literature course, a creative writing course, a public speaking course, and a technology course [and] completed the University Core A goals and learned much more.” On the same theme, another honors student wrote, “My suggestion for these [Core A] goals is that they be divided up into individual classes themselves instead of incorporating all the goals into each class...shouldn’t the students have to take three or four classes that focus on one goal instead of having to take three or four that only touch on each goal a small portion of the time?”

B. Level of difficulty.

Some Core A critics thought the courses were too easy. One faculty referred to the Core A Handbook as “a rigidly defined textbook that is at best the equivalent to high school material.” The most common complaints among honors students were the repetition of high school content and repetition of assignments across the four Core A courses. According to one student, “University Core A as a whole in my opinion needs to be more difficult. I found that the goals in University Core A I had mostly met before college in high school.” Another student wrote, “all of the Core information is repetitive and can be summed up in one or two semesters. The overall aspect of Core is just an enhanced version of high school English.”

C. Lack of liberal arts content.

Finally, criticism also cited a lack of traditional liberal arts content. Some faculty suggested CORE 201 and 202 could be improved by grounding the content in liberal arts themes rather than having instructors choose their own topics. One stated the two courses “have the least tangible content of any of the core curriculum and the material covered has no common value.” Another stated “University Core A classes should have a content which reflects the themes of a liberal education,” and “there really is no Core experience beyond learning certain assessable skills. That’s not liberal education and it is not general education.” Another suggested Core 201 and 202 classes might be improved by incorporating the QEP “Citizen Scholar” theme, which might “help us move towards making the courses more relevant, more like ‘sophomore seminars’ rather than skills taught through pop culture topics.”

III. Core A Staffing.

A. Instructor qualifications.

One faculty objected that volunteers cannot be adequately trained in brief workshops to teach in disciplines outside their own, citing instructor statements from the Formative Assessment of CORE 101 and 103. One said, “I’m feeling somewhat horrified [at the expectation of interdisciplinary teaching].” Another commented, “It’s not that more training would have helped...it was just the matter that I did not feel like I had the right to be teaching this sort of thing.”
B. Drain on resources.

One proposal indicated that Core 201 and 202 drain department resources: “Departments are told to reduce their own adjunct costs in order that there will be sufficient monies available to hire adjuncts for CORE 201 and CORE 202.” Another faculty names expenses peculiar to Core A that could be avoided through the use of existing department courses: “Core Coordinators’ compensation, training workshops, course development grants, and salaries of adjuncts hired to teach department courses abandoned by Core A faculty. These are on-going costs.” A third faculty proposal noted that CORE 201 and 202 “have the most problems with staffing issues including cost and other personnel issues such as evaluation and assessment.”

IV. Transfer and equivalency problems

One student worried that employers or graduate admissions would wonder at the absence of the traditional courses, which may make it more difficult to transfer or be admitted to a graduate program. This student wrote, “I know quite a few people who have been frustrated wondering whether or not their CORE classes would count for anything at [other] schools.”

Both faculty and students felt there were inequities in policies concerning exemptions from and substitutions for Core A courses. One student was surprised to learn that a dual enrollment class she had taken in high school did not exempt her from CORE 103. Another student also complained of “the inability to opt out of the Core program if students have equivalent AP or dual enrollment classes.” Despite her AP and dual enrollment high school classes, the student had to take CORE 103, 201, and 202: “This infuriates me.” (NOTE: It turns out that CORE 103 was required for admission to the Honors Program; however, this may not have been well communicated).

A faculty member objected to the different expectations of “native” and transfer students. Transfer students coming in with VCCS credit for ENGL 101 and 102 are exempted from CORE 101 and 102. However, resident RU students are not permitted to opt out of CORE 101 and 102 by taking ENGL 101 and 102 during the summer at a community college. “This is quite unfair,” he wrote. Another faculty objected to the same situation, proposing that “All transfer courses are treated the same (does not matter if the student has attended RU or not before)” and “Students in consultation with College Advisors may take PHIL XXX and COMM XXX in place of CORE 201 and 202.” (NOTE: At this point, adjustments have been made which treat all transfer courses in the same way.)

V. Limitations

The Committee engaged in spirited debate over the study’s limitations. The Committee recognizes the design and methodology of this study limit the application or interpretation of the results. Some Committee members argued specifically that the limitations include significant constraints on generalizability and utility of findings which typically establish internal and external validity. Because of these constraints on generalizability and utility of findings, no significant relationships can be determined from the data, and no conclusions may be generalized or transferred. In the end, the reader must decide for himself or herself.
VI. Conclusion

The purpose of CCAC’s solicitation for comments on the core was to provide a reconciliatory framework for the discussion over differences that have divided the campus. The evidence presented is qualitative rather than quantitative, and is not a statistical analysis of the data collected. The responses serve to highlight individuals’ perceptions and may suggest support is lacking among some in the RU community. Objections appear concentrated in specific areas and suggest specific steps for improvement:

- First, find ways to better align the content of CORE 201 and CORE 202 with what is perceived to be a liberal education.
- Address issues regarding the quality of training and instruction within the core curriculum and create a plan to address a perception that the quality of instruction for our students in CORE 201 and CORE 202 is lacking. This plan could include, but need not be limited to, providing better training for instructors, establishing incentives to departments for their involvement, and giving CORE 201/202 courses to departments to design and teach. Assessment data will allow us to judge the success of such improvements.
- Devote measurable resources to core curriculum staffing to allow departments the freedom to allocate tenured and tenure-track faculty to core instruction.
- Communicate how changes in transfer and equivalency rules have addressed the objective of treating students equally.

The RU community should address current obstacles to the core’s success rather than focusing on the past. The committee is not attempting to defend or critique the core, but to make clear that several persistent issues and perceptions continue to impede success. We cannot succeed without substantial support and participation from all interested parties – specifically, the faculty that must teach it and the administration that must support it. CCAC and the Core Curriculum Director are moving forward with various options, but a measurable improvement in our cooperation and a commitment to secure the core’s future is vital.
Appendix A
Campus-wide Email

TO: Faculty, Students, Staff, and Administration
FROM: Core Curriculum Advisory Committee
DATE: 3/16/2011

The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (formerly GECAC) has the responsibility (along with others) of oversight of the Core Curriculum at Radford University. The success of the Core is crucial to the success of RU. It carries the responsibility of making sure that our students graduate with skills and competencies required by both SACS and SCHEV. Even more importantly, it must embody what we as an academic community believe is the essence of a liberal education. If we fail at either of these tasks, we have failed ourselves.

Our committee has recently passed two documents establishing a formal assessment process for the Core. The Core Director, Coordinators, and the Office of Student Assessment have worked very hard to fashion these documents with the intention of fulfilling our obligations to SACS and SCHEV. The Faculty Senate is working on motions to place the Core within the existing internal governance structure. The spirit that informs all of these activities is the recognition that the Core Curriculum is a common enterprise that needs to remain under faculty direction.

What the CCAC would like to do now is to try and bring the faculty, students, staff and administration together in a transparent process designed to overcome, as much as possible, the obstacles that have prevented the Core from receiving the full support needed to make it a success. We don’t pretend that this will be an easy task, and readily admit that compromises will be required. We know that the history of the Core has placed colleges in opposition to each other and that a variety of lines have been drawn that make the task of improving the Core and addressing existing dissatisfaction more difficult than it otherwise should be.

The document that follows is a motion passed by the CCAC to establish a process to solicit suggestions for changes to the Core. The end result of this process will be a report from CCAC to the Faculty Senate reporting the results of these discussions and perhaps suggesting some changes to the Core. This report will not supersede the approved internal governance process for department-initiated creation, revision, or elimination of courses. Changes will be suggested only if they meet the following three criteria.

1) A good case can be made that these changes will improve the Core Curriculum.

2) These changes must be consistent with meeting the student learning objectives that underlie the Core and form the basis of the required assessment of the Core. (These objectives are listed in your syllabus.)

3) The changes need to help heal existing wounds while avoiding inflicting new ones.

It is the responsibility of CCAC to make suggestions that accomplish these objectives in a way consistent with a Core Curriculum that is academically coherent. If we can’t do that, we will not make any suggestions at all. Proposals may address any or all parts of the existing Core Curriculum including: Learning Outcomes; Core Characteristics; University Core A: Core Foundations; University Core B: Core Skills and Knowledge; College Core A: National and International Perspectives; College Core B: Supporting Skills and Knowledge. For full descriptions of all these components, see http://core.asp.radford.edu/.
We realize (because the issue was raised during our discussion of the motion) that a case can be made that the Core Curriculum should be left alone, at least for a period of time that would allow it to be assessed formally. Normally, this would be a compelling argument. The Committee decided, however, that this formal assessment of the Core would not address the issues dividing the university that we are hoping to address in this process.

Please take a look at the appended motion approved by this committee, engage with others in a discussion of concerns you have about the Core, and make suggestions for improvement.

Thank you for your patience and input. Deadline for submission of proposals is August 1, 2011. We request, but do not require, that those who submit proposals identify the college, division, or constituency with which they are affiliated so that we may attempt to reconcile differences about the Core that have divided the University. Please send proposals to CCAC at: ccac@radford.edu.

The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (formerly GECAC)

**Motion Approved by Core Curriculum Advisory Committee**

**Whereas**, the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (formerly GECAC) is receiving proposals from more than one source for the revision of the Core Curriculum;

**Whereas**, many faculty appear uncommitted to the Core Curriculum as a result of either the process by which it was developed or parts of the new Core which they do not like;

**Whereas**, the success of the Core Curriculum is very important to the long term success of Radford University;

**Whereas**, the Core Curriculum will not be a success unless it is able to be embraced by the faculty and students of Radford University;

**Whereas**, any process for reform of the new Core Curriculum should recognize the amount of effort that has been put into the Core by those involved with developing, directing and teaching Core courses;

**Whereas**, any process for reform of the new Core Curriculum should be carried out in such a way as to unite as many faculty behind the reformed Core Curriculum as possible;

**Resolved**: The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee (formerly GECAC) should begin a process of soliciting opinions and suggestions regarding changes to some or all parts of the Core Curriculum. This process will result in a report that may include recommendations of changes to the Core Curriculum and will be presented to the Faculty Senate before the end of Fall Semester 2011.
Appendix B
Responses from Faculty

Core 201/202 Revision Suggestion

What are the issues?

There appear to be five issues with Core 201 and Core 202 that need to be addressed in order to improve acceptance of these classes by the entire faculty. They are: (1) the costs associated with implementing the program; (2) the program’s impact on departments and colleges; (3) the provision of genuine academic content; and (4) the credentials of those who teach Core 201 and Core 202; and (5) implementing the university’s commitment to faculty control of general education.

Costs:

No Core program works well when done “on the cheap.” We need to put our money where our mouth is. Either Core classes are important or they are not. The campus community needs to decide that. If these classes are important, then the costs need to be transparent and adequate provision needs to be made to meet their resource needs. There has been a decided lack of transparency concerning how much hiring adjuncts to teach Core 201 and 202 costs versus what it would cost to hire tenure-track faculty in disciplines to provide Core classes as well as classes for majors.

Impact on Departments and Colleges

In an era of resource scarcity, creating Core 201 and Core 202 as separate entities makes very little economic sense. It drains even more resources from existing departments, even those with large numbers of majors. Increasingly, departments are finding themselves unable to move students through to their ultimate degree in a timely and efficient fashion. Departments are told to reduce their own adjunct costs in order that there will be sufficient monies available to hire adjuncts for Core 201 and Core 202. Currently, many departments throughout the university find themselves patching together programs using emeritus faculty because they cannot teach the program with the number of full-time faculty they have. Adjuncts can be used in some of the introductory course, but it is very difficult to find non-emeritus adjuncts competent to teach upper-level material.

Assuring Academic Content

The skills and competencies that are the focus of University Core A are important. Equally important, however, is the provision of genuine content. Under the old general education program, courses proposed for inclusion in the general education program had to be approved by departmental curriculum committees and then by college curriculum committees and GECAC. Courses proposed for University Core B and College Core A and B still do. However, right now it is unclear how much content screening goes on in the process of approving Core 201 and 202 topics. It also is unclear how closely
coordinated the topics are with the goals of the university’s mission, strategic plan, or goals of the Core Curriculum. At present Core 201/202 seem to cloud rather than elucidate the university’s goals for the Core and its mission. This issue will be exacerbated if the Core becomes its own department.

University Core A classes should have a content which reflects the themes of a liberal education—What does it mean to be human? How do we pull together the needs of the body, mind, and soul (to paraphrase Aretha Franklin, soul is deep feeling, understanding, and insight)? How should human beings interact with one another? How can human beings better deal with other peoples and cultures? This does not mean that only faculty in the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should teach these classes. As many faculty members have said in the past few years: “The Core belongs to everyone.” The Core does and should belong to everyone. However, if there is to be a coherent approach to the Core, everyone who teaches Core 201 and 202 needs to ground their course in one or more of the themes above (or in similar themes). Otherwise, there really is no Core experience beyond learning certain assessable skills. That’s not liberal education, and it is not general education. The idea is to bind together a college experience and encourage a more mature and responsible citizen who lives not just in a world of the own immediate needs and desires, but also who is linked to a universal humanity that manifests itself in a variety of historical, cultural, social, economic, spiritual, and aesthetic forms.

Further, removing Core 201/202 from anchors in departments and colleges from anchors in colleges and departments encourages the idea that Core work is remedial “make work” that is not really relevant to one’s future life or career.

**Credentials**

One of the major issues right now is that we have to hire so many adjuncts to teach in the Core. This is not putting our best teachers in our most important courses. We need to ensure that all faculty teaching Core 201 and 202 are firmly grounded in a discipline and have appropriate degrees. In addition, we need an evaluation process that will ensure that well-qualified individuals are staffing all Core 201/202 classes. These should be tenured or tenure-track faculty. If a Core adjunct is “assigned” to a department, then the department needs to play a role in hiring and evaluating the individual.

**E. Faculty Control of the Curriculum**

Last spring the Faculty Senate passed a resolution upholding the principle that the faculty is primarily responsible for the general education curriculum. Right now the organization, future development, and implementation of Core 201 and 202, although staffed by hard working and dedicated individuals, is very much outside the control of the faculty. In the end, the appearance is that the purpose of the new Core Curriculum is to gradually remove control of the university’s general education program from the faculty at large.
Proposed Solutions

Classes in Core 201 and 202 should move as much as possible back to departments in one of the colleges. This will allow for better planning and staffing of these courses as they will be built into department curriculums and departments and faculty within departments will receive adequate credit for teaching these classes. Departments with fewer majors can teach more Core courses in a given semester, helping them to balance their faculty workloads and helping to stabilize department personnel needs. This also will make it more likely that more Core A classes will be taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty. If these really are the most important classes in a student’s college experience (as is suggested by our rhetoric on the subject), then they ought to be taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty. Right now because departments have no control over the content of these classes, it would be detrimental to the process of achieving tenure for tenure-track faculty to teach them. The department would not know how to include these classes in yearly evaluations and tenure decisions. Returning these classes to departments and colleges also will stop draining resources away from academic disciplines and allow the academic disciplines to carry the burden of these classes. That is both more efficient, more cost-effective, and more pedagogically sound.

Placing Core 201 and 202 in departments also would better foster the continuation of key elements of University Core A throughout the rest of the Core curriculum (University B and College A and B) and the remainder of the student’s academic career at Radford University. It is difficult to practice skills in a vacuum. If these truly are to be developmental classes, we need to be intentional in ensuring that critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills are developed within the context of specific content areas or disciplines. These content areas or disciplines do not need to be those of the individual’s major.
Cyber Literacy

One of the more effective ways to define Cyber Literacy is by analogy. Like computing, driving can be extraordinarily beneficial and extremely dangerous. We spend years modeling both driving and vehicular maintenance behavior for children before sending them off to driver education, followed by an apprenticeship with a learner’s permit before allowing them to join us on the highways as licensed drivers who respect the rules, responsibilities and etiquette of sharing the road. Unfortunately, the same is not true for our introduction to cyber infrastructure and cyber behavior. This lack of education and preparation costs productivity both in terms of a lack of understanding of the power and application of information technology especially to a specific discipline as well as the misuse of cyber infrastructure. There are certain basic IT skills and a core understanding of IT that every graduate should have regardless of discipline. These include but are not limited to the basics of how computers work, how data is represented and transferred, the internet, word processing, spreadsheets, database, security and the cyber threats we all face every day. However, in addition to these core topics, there are specific topics that would apply in each discipline on campus. For example, accounting students require a much deeper understanding of spreadsheets while design students must be exposed to applications such as AutoCad.

Despite the best efforts of computer security professionals, all it takes is one user clicking on the wrong link or downloading the wrong file and the entire cyber infrastructure of an organization can be at risk. Even simple little things like forwarding an e-mail Christmas card can bring the computing power of an organization to a halt if the file is too large or contains a virus. It is ironic that every faculty and staff member at Radford University is required to take online cyber security training every year, but our students are not exposed to the same topics. Radford University graduates should enter the world beyond equipped to be good Cyber Citizens by being able to recognize and avoid risky cyber behaviors, by understanding and practicing safe, ethical and productive cyber behaviors, and by being aware enough of how cyber infrastructure works to understand their role in it and to adapt to and adopt technologies that emerge in their lifetimes.

Current Status at RU:

The current Radford University Core Curriculum does not provide sufficient awareness of cyber infrastructure or cyber security. Outcomes of University Core A include an ability to explain how digital information is organized and communicated and to identify ethical and other considerations for using digital information. These information literacy outcomes provide a minimal foundation for using technology, but they do not provide graduates the information technology knowledge and skills needed for effective cyber citizenship. An IT class was included in Core A throughout its entire conception until the 11th hour. At the last minute, the Core A committee voted (with IT being outvoted) to remove information technology from Core A and allow it to be moved to Core B. Unfortunately the Core B group had already made their plans and did not include IT in Core B. The result is that we have a core curriculum that does not require our students to take any IT coursework at a time when IT is infiltrating every component of our lives from work, to education, to medicine, to transportation and entertainment. Further, what minimal information literacy topics are being taught in the core are not being taught by IT faculty. Just because all faculty use IT does not mean that all faculty can teach IT.
Proposal:

We propose a hub and spoke model. The hub consists of a core set of information technology topics required of every student. A task force would be put together made up of IT faculty, other interested faculty, ITR staff, and corporate partners to identify this core set of topics. This task force would also seek input in the cyber security and cyber citizenry guidelines published by the Department of Justice, Department of Education, Association for Computing Machinery and others. This hub might make up 2/3 of a traditional 3-credit course.

The spokes are program based and would make up the other 1/3 of the course. Each academic program would identify and possibly help deliver a set of information technology topics specific to their discipline. For example, beyond the core set of topics, the cyber background required for an Elementary Education major might differ significantly from that required for an Accounting major.
Core Curriculum ideas

**Overall action:**
Replace CORE 101 and CORE 102 with ENGL 101 and ENGL 102, and allow individual departments to determine if CORE 201 and CORE 202 are appropriate for their majors, or to determine the appropriate substitutions for these two classes.

**Individual Action:**
Eliminate CORE 101 and CORE 102 and replace them with ENGL 101 and ENGL 102.

**Justification:**
Students transferring from the Virginia Community College system may substitute their ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 for our CORE 101 and CORE 102, respectively. Thus Radford University has already determined that ENGL 101/102 are equivalent to CORE 101/102. Required resident RU students to take CORE 101/102 actually creates two “classes” of students—those transferring into RU from the VCCS and so-called “native” students. In the past the (former) Acting Core Director has not allowed “native” RU students to take ENGL 101/102 in the summers at their local Virginia community college, instead requiring them to only take CORE 101/102. This is quite unfair.

In addition, CORE 101/102 “water down” the much-needed writing requirements that are the entire focus of ENGL 101/102. Mixing in extraneous subjects

**Individual Action:**
Let individual departments determine whether CORE 201 and CORE 202 are appropriate for their majors and if not, what the appropriate substitutions should be.

**Justification:**
CORE 201/202 are currently taught from a rigidly-defined textbook that is at best the equivalent to high school material. The topics are a hodgepodge of ideas that even the faculty teaching these classes openly admit to not covering in their classes. In addition, the varying backgrounds of the instructors ensure that these classes will never be uniformly taught. Thus many departments are quite unhappy with what students are (not) learning in these classes.

But the main academic reason these classes are inappropriate for certain majors is that the topics that are supposed to be covered in these classes are too broad to fit the overall Core Curriculum needs of certain majors. Thus individual departments should determine what would best substitute for these classes. For example all Physics majors could be required to take PHIL 111 and COMM 114 since these two classes have material that classes in Physics do not cover. In addition these two example classes concentrate their entire curriculum on these single subjects and do not include extraneous subjects. They would be far more appropriate for Physics majors than CORE 201/202 as they are currently taught.

**Overview Rationale:**
The overall problem with University CORE A may actually be found in the textbook for the CORE A. The preface of the 2010-2011 University Core A Handbook states:
“What is University Core A? - University Core A is a series of four interdisciplinary courses that you will take during your freshman and sophomore years. The central focus of the University Core A Curriculum is how to think critically, to write and speak clearly, and to conduct research carefully. These courses will enhance your ability to be self-reflective and allow you to ponder modern issues that affect you, such as the use of technology. You will also have the opportunity to explore ethical issues that are important in your life.”

There are 4 overall learning subject areas listed for University CORE A: critical thinking, writing clearly, speaking clearly, and conducting research. To mix these 4 areas up and distribute them among 4 separate classes is simply folly. Instructors all acquire their degrees in one academic subject area. However to be an instructor in CORE A requires instructors to by definition teach material outside of their subject area. No one ever gets an advanced degree in “CORE.” There is no such advanced degree. Thus instructors are by definition unqualified to teach the 4 hodgepodge classes known as CORE 101, 102, 201 and 202.

If students are expected to know these 4 subject areas then they should be required to take classes that cover these 4 distinct subject areas. Thus students need classes that teach clear writing (ENGL 101), conducting research (ENGL 102), speaking clearly (COMM 114) and critical thinking (PHIL 111).
III. Core Characteristics (http://core.asp.radford.edu/Core_Characteristics.pdf)

Increasingly, curricula are dictated by state, University, and professional regulations. The mandated assessment of pre-formulated learning outcomes already determines which courses may be offered in the Core program. For the sake of creativity, flexibility, and versatility in the system, unnecessary constraints should be removed. Some of the Core Characteristics—a recently devised set of general education rules—seem gratuitous. I recommend the deletion of the following:

1. “Students are advised to take CORE 101 during their first semester of enrollment or receive transfer course equivalency credit. In addition, students are advised to take University Core A courses in sequence each semester, excluding summers, until the sequence is successfully completed.”

   **Justification:** For the sake of brevity, in a set of rules, stipulations that are merely advisory should be removed.

2. “So that a student’s RU education might have as much disciplinary breadth as possible, students must fulfill core curriculum requirements with courses with prefixes different from that of their major. An exception may be made for one course. Furthermore, students are restricted from taking more than one course with the same prefix to fulfill requirements in University Core B; and students are restricted from taking more than one course with the same prefix to fulfill requirements in College Core A.”

   **Justification:** By requiring math, science, fine arts, and humanities courses, University and College Core B provide for “disciplinary breadth.” To go beyond this and limit course choices by department prefixes assumes (incorrectly, in my view) a zero sum relationship between majors and general education whereby the latter (with one grudging exception) cannot not also serve the former, or, for that matter, a sustained interest in one particular field. Thus the Core program unduly excludes thematic learning across courses.

   What terrible ill does the Characteristic prevent? The greatest potential for prefix overload lies in HIST and RELN courses, as they are options in, respectively, six and five Core categories. Even so, the most a student could take in either discipline is four courses. Thus we might have a history major complete both the World History and American History introductory sequences, and a PHRE major study different aspects of religion as a quest for meaning in two courses, and as a social factor and a global expression of human similarities and diversity in two others. Such extremes are impossible in other disciplines within the Core and in these two fields seem unlikely student choices. Even so, there is a thematic coherence in these course configurations that is the ideal in some general education systems. The hypothetical students would have explored different intellectual methods and agendas through application to a common ground (history or religions). We could do worse; for example, a selection of courses dictated merely by the requirement of different prefixes.

3. “To ensure that students are able to fulfill degree requirements and plan schedules accordingly, courses will be offered multiple times each academic year and multiple faculty members must be capable of teaching each course.”

   **Justification:** Some Core courses require specialized instructor knowledge that departments cannot afford to duplicate, e.g., CHNS 101: 102 Elementary Chinese; LATN 201 Intermediate Latin; RELN 203 Sacred Texts and Contexts (requires ancient language proficiency). Further, enrollments for some
courses may not sustain multiple offerings each year, e.g., CVPA 266 Travel Study in Visual and Performing Arts, or RUSS 300 Readings in Russian. Departments already follow a course rotation plan. As long as Core courses are scheduled on a consistent timetable available in advance, students should be able to plan their courses effectively. In the GE system, departments were trusted to manage their own general education staffing and course rotation, and, in my view, should still exercise that authority.

Not only unnecessary, this Characteristic works against variety and originality in Core offerings. The demand for multiple instructors and multiple sections is best met by large generic “Introduction to X” courses—an unnecessarily bland general education diet. Surely there is room in the Core program for introductions to fields that both meet the appropriate learning outcomes and reflect the special expertise of an instructor or appeal to only a select group of students.
II. The structure of the Core program

Assuming the discontinuation of Core A courses, I propose changing the current format of the Core Program.

Justification

The present structure distributes Core hours across four divisions: University Core A, College Core A, University Core B, and College Core B.

The reason for some of these divisions is unclear or outdated. For example, by what logic are the Perspectives courses sequestered in their own category? Why do we need the College Core A designation? The distinction between University and College Core B was intended to enable colleges to select a configuration of courses tailored to disciplinary objectives. As of June 2011, however, no college has done so. According to the CHBS Advising Center, the only college difference in College Core B menus is that CHBS, unlike its counterparts, does not require a Health and Wellness course. However, since CHBS does allow majors to receive College Core B credit for a Health and Wellness course, the difference is minor and, in any case, has nothing to do with CHBS’ humanistic and social-scientific subject matter.

In the meantime, we are left with an obscure distinction in Core B between “Skills and Knowledge” and “Supporting Skills and Knowledge,” and an odd grouping of disciplines in College Core B that has students choosing between a Math and a Natural Sciences course, between a Humanities, Visual and Performing Arts, and a Foreign Languages course; and between a Behavioral Sciences and a Health and Wellness course. Worse, the 9 to 11 hours dedicated College Core B could, if differently allocated, enhance the Core’s academic strength.

For easier advising, structural clarity, and academic rigor, I propose a return to the “areas” format of the former GE program in which components represent specific disciplines or learning objectives. There are endless possibilities for framing areas and distributing hours across them. Assuming the elimination of the four UCA courses, I propose the following:

Area I. Communication: 9 hours: ENGL 101, 102, and COMS 114, 240, or 250.

Area II. Critical thinking: 3 hours: PHIL 111, 112, 113, or 114.

Area III. Information Technology Literacy: 0-3 hours: Passing score on Information Systems and Computer Applications CLEP test, or ITEC 100 or 110.

Area IV. Fine Arts: 3 hours.

Area V. Humanities: (regrettably only) 3 hours

Area VI. Global Perspectives: 3 hours (the menu from Core Global Perspectives and College Core B Foreign Languages courses)

Area VII: Social and Behavioral Sciences: 6 hours, with 3 hours selected from HIST 101, 102, 111, or 112.
Area VIII: Mathematical Sciences: 6 hours.

Area IX: Natural Sciences: 8 hours.

Total: **41-44 hours** (depending on whether or not an ITEC or a FORL course is used)

This model has the following advantages:

- Total hours are slightly less than the present 43-45 hours


- Students are required to take a history course.

- Disciplinary course menus from the former GE and present Core programs will transfer.

- The Learning Outcomes for Core A will have to be redistributed among department courses; otherwise the present Learning Outcomes will transfer.

- The management of faculty is under departmental jurisdiction.
Proposals to strengthen the Core Curriculum

I propose improvements in three areas of the Core Curriculum: Core A, the structure of the Core program, and the Core Characteristics.

I. Core A:
I propose that Core A courses be discontinued.

Core 101 will revert to ENGL 101 in name and content.
Core 102 will revert to ENGL 102 in name and content.

In lieu of CORE 201 and 202, students will select one course from each of the following menus.

1. Speech Communication: COMS 114 Public Speaking or COMS 240 Teamwork and Communication or COMS 250 Interpersonal Communication*

2. Critical Thinking: PHIL 111 Introduction: Knowledge, Reality, and the Human Condition; or PHIL 112 Introduction: Ethics and Society or PHIL 113 Introduction: Reasoning and Argument or PHIL 114 Origins of Western Philosophy*

To accommodate ENGL, PHRE, and COMS majors, the first two sentences of the second “Advising Issues” paragraph of the Core Characteristics must be struck (“So that a student’s RU education might have as much disciplinary breadth as possible, students must fulfill core curriculum requirements with courses with prefixes different from that of their major. An exception may be made for one course.”) On other grounds, in my third proposal I recommend deleting the entire paragraph.

Justification
Core A has been the most controversial and troublesome part of the Core. The following concerns have been raised.

(a.) Quality of instruction. The Core A program is founded on the (misguided, in my view) presumption that faculty can be adequately trained in a few days to teach in disciplines other than their own. Instruction based on such haphazard preparation is bound to be inferior to that provided in department courses taught by experts in the field.

Indeed, persons inside the Core A program have found Core A teacher preparation inadequate.

* Regarding staffing, in the past, both the School of Communication and the PHRE Department have accommodated a large volume of GE students. According to the COMS 114 official syllabus (6b), “Many departments require students to take this course to graduate. Thus, the department teaches this course as a service to the university and offers approximately 22 sections each semester taught by a number of different instructors.” Likewise, until 2009, slightly over half of RU students fulfilled GE requirements with a PHIL course. In addition to full-time philosophy faculty, we used several adjuncts teaching 1-3 classes each. Thus I believe the necessary PHIL sections could be covered. At the same time, RU could make use of standardized tests in the area of critical thinking, e.g., the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Finally, this matter should be debated in the Senate, in the presence of the Provost and appropriate department representatives.

In “The Experience of 100-level University Core A, 2009-2010,” a faculty member noted that the training sessions and availability of Core area coordinators were “not enough preparation for bringing faculty
members educated and experienced in the teaching of writing up to the level of faculty members educated and experienced in the teaching of oral communication and logic” (1, p. 1)

Comments of Core 101/103 English faculty interviewed for “The Formative Assessment of Core 101 and 103 for the Fall Semester 2009” (4) suggest the same (e.g., pp. 20-22, 51-52, 56, 58). “I’m feeling somewhat horrified,” said one Core A faculty in reference to the expectation of interdisciplinary teaching (p. 21). “It’s not that . . . more training would have helped,” said another, “it was just the matter that I did not feel like I had the right to be teaching this sort of thing” (p. 21). “I’m not a philosophy teacher,” remarked a third instructor, “and I struggled with [logic]. I do not have the background, the depth of knowledge nor the skills of teaching in that area that a philosophy professor would have, nor should I be expected to” (p. 22). Another faculty described the training sessions and expectations relative to teaching the subject of logic as “a complete disaster. . . . Talk about feeling incompetent,” he or she continued, “I felt completely incompetent.”

In addition to insufficient training, time constraints impaired Core 101 instruction. Faculty comments in the Formative Assessment indicate the difficulty of addressing the full range of Core A skills in a single course. “Not enough time to cover all components of the course,” said one faculty (4, p. 26). According to another, “the oral communication segment suffered . . . because most of the faculty teaching were English faculty.” One teacher boldly confessed, “This professor coped out . . . did not try to incorporate the oral component” (p. 51). The assessors summarize, “Many faculty who were interviewed stated that they told administrators and Core A Coordinators that they could not do what was expected” (pp. 57-58). Nothing has changed since the Formative Assessment that would substantially alter this situation. The expectation that instructors can, in a matter of days, become proficient in several unfamiliar disciplines is simply unrealistic. RU students need and deserve the superior instruction in these critical skills that department courses provide.

Comparison of Core A and department course official syllabi further attests to the relative weakness of the former. Contrast as venues for learning critical thinking the treatments in PHIL 113 Introduction: Reasoning and Argument and Core 201 Topics in Critical Inquiry (5 a, b). In Core 201, critical thinking is but one element in an amalgam of speech-giving, the use of print and digital sources, etc. According to the “Detailed Descriptions” of course content, Core 201 covers only the material in the first bulleted item in the PHIL 113 list; further, the latter exposes students to critical thinking in the arguments of Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, and other classical philosophers.

Likewise, the focus on public speaking in Core 101 Essentials of Written and Oral Communication is diluted by units on self-expression, interviewing and profiling, and textual analysis (6a). An article in the March 30, 2011 RU CORE A Newsletter (see A, below) provides insight into the speech component. The Core A authors note that “Presentations take up a lot of class time, are difficult to grade objectively, and are often just as difficult to listen to,” and recommend that “when your class context doesn’t allow for full-fledged graded speeches,” instructors should have students give informal speeches in which they use props to tell the class something about themselves. By contrast, in COMS 114 Public Speaking, students are required to give “at least three well planned and thoroughly rehearsed speeches for grade,” including a persuasive and an informative speech. “Written work,” the syllabus continues, “consists of (1) outlines or scripts that indicate organization and planning for each speech, and (2) written evaluations of presentations by fellow students or by speakers outside of class” (6b, p. 1).

Without a doubt, there are many conscientious and excellent teachers in the Core A program. However, the interdisciplinary design of the courses handicaps the performance of even the best instructors.
(b.) Staffing. According to the program design, Core A is to be staffed by volunteers from across the University. However, a stable pool of volunteers sufficiently large to instruct every RU student has not been forthcoming. In her “The Experience of 100-level University Core A, 2009-2010,” (1, p. 1) Dr. Guruswamy notes that English faculty mentors were reluctant to serve the Core A courses (1, p. 1). A March 4, 2010 Senate motion presented a Core plan unanimously endorsed by CHBS and CSAT chairs in which Core A was eliminated. The motion and the Senate discussion of it (2a, b) reference staffing problems. Due to a shortage of volunteers, it seems, as of March 3, only 37% and 25% of fall non-honors sections of, respectively, Core 201 and 202 had been staffed. In this setting, Dr. Guruswamy again noted that “English professors do not want to teach Core 101 and Core 102” (2b, p. 2).

The reasons why are captured in instructor quotations in “The Formative Assessment of Core A 101 and 103 for the Fall Semester 2009” (4). The following words or phrases were used in reference to one aspect or another of Core 101/103 (textbooks, technology, management, expectations of faculty, assignments, training, etc.): “disaster” (pp. 22, 27, 32); “frustrating” (pp. 20, 27); “incoherent” (pp. 27, 51); “confusing” (pp. 51, 52); “nothing worked” (pp. 24, 26); “not feasible” (p. 23); “a mess” (p. 32); “unconscionable” (p. 32); “demeaning” (p. 20); “headache” (p. 27); “mind numbing” (p. 26); “missed the mark” (p. 28); “really bad” (p. 20); “forced” (p. 27); “alienated” (p. 27); “loathe” (p. 28); “worthless” (p. 28); and “incompetent” (p. 23). Regardless of recent improvements in Core A procedures, we still find that as late as March 17, 2011, Dr. Susan Van Patten was still recruiting Core 201/202 instructors for the following fall, with an incentive of up to $1000 in course development funds (see B, below).

Staffing instability is evident at the Coordinator level as well. “The Formative Assessment” notes the ill effects of a rapid turnover among Core A Coordinators, who are charged with training faculty in the array of disciplines. “Within eight months there had been four different Core A Committee members involved with the Oral Communication aspect of the Core. . . . [W]ithin three months, two different individuals were involved in teaching the training sessions for faculty in the area of Critical Thinking.” Likewise, between the design and implementation of Core A, the position of Technology liaison changed hands. In the assessors’ view, this instability compromised Core A effectiveness (pp. 29-30).

From every indication, Core A administrators have done an admirable job finding instructors. However, Core A planners overestimated the willingness of faculty to teach skills outside their disciplines under close supervision. Again, the problem lies with the conceptualization of UCA, not the execution. As long as Core A depends on volunteer faculty, there can be no conclusive resolution to the staffing deficit and turnover.

(c.) Expenses. General education in any form is costly. However, Core A amounts to a new curriculum and there are expenses peculiar to it that could be avoided through the use of existing department courses. These include Core Coordinators’ compensation, the cost of training workshops, course development grants ($500 per faculty per course), and the “back-fill” salaries of adjuncts hired to teach department courses abandoned by Core A faculty. These are not one-time but on-going costs.

In my view, Core A is a daring experiment that has failed. The interdisciplinary approach compromises instructional quality; sufficient numbers of faculty are not volunteering as teachers; and there are special funding requirements. The time has come, I think, to cut our losses and return to department courses.
The menu of department courses proposed above reflects existing RU Core A equivalencies. On February 25, 2010, a motion was made in the Faculty Senate to co-designate Core 101 and 102 as, respectively, CORE/ENGL 101 and CORE/ENGL 102 (7) since Core 101 and 102 are “taught exclusively by faculty hired and trained by the English department” (7). Although tabled, the motion assumes, as do the equivalencies below, that Core 101 and 102 are interchangeable with ENGL 101 and 102.

More to the point, a motion approved by GECAC and later by the Faculty Senate (April 15, 2010) stipulates that for a minimum of three years, students may waive Core 101 and 102 with the equivalent of ENGL 101 and 102 (8a). A second motion passed on the same day allows students to substitute for Core 201 and 202 the transfer equivalencies of COMS 114 or 240, and PHIL 111, 112, or 113. Transfer students who began the Core in 2010-2011 may waive Core 201 and 202 with the transfer equivalency of introductory philosophy courses in ethics and critical thinking, and an introductory technology course (8b).

The Radford University Transfer Guide (undated) provides equivalencies for VCCS and Core A courses. ENG 111 (College Composition I) counts for Core 101. Credit for Core 102 is granted for ENG 112 (College Composition II) and SPD or CST 100 (Principles of Public Speaking). Core 201 and 202 may be waived with VCCS equivalencies for (RU’s) PHIL 112, 113 and ITEC 100 (9, p. 3).

Finally, the 2010-2012 Core Curriculum Equivalencies for University Core A (10, updated 6/1/2010) allows students who have earned credit for VCCS ENG 111 (College Composition I) to waive Core 101. Students who have completed VCCS ENG 112 (College Composition II) may waive Core 102. Core 201 and 202 may be waived with completion of three hours in Speech and Communication (the equivalent of our COMS 114 or 240) and three hours in Philosophy (the equivalent of our PHIL 111, 112, or 113).

RU advising agencies, GECAC, and the Faculty Senate have already approved substitutes for Core A courses. While one formula (the undated RU Transfer Guide) includes an Information Technology component, a more prevalent configuration—the one deployed in this proposal—equates UCA with a two-course introductory writing sequence in combination with an introductory philosophy and speech communication course. With respect to the Information Technology component, I note that RU students can receive credit for ITEC 100 Introduction to Information Technology by scoring 52 or higher on the Information Systems and Computer Applications CLEP test, an option that perhaps should be more widely pursued at RU.

1. The Experience of 100-Level University Core A, 2009-2010
   http://senate.asp.radford.edu/current/reports/miscellaneous/100218_Curriculum%20Committee%20Report%20on%20Early%20Experiences%20with%20the%20100%20Level%20Core%20Courses.pdf

2a. Substitute Motion to Replace the Core, (Unanimously supported by CHBS and CSAT chairs and directors) March 4, 2010. http://senate.asp.radford.edu/Archive/2009-2010/Motions/100225_Motion%20to%20Recommend%20the%20Core%20Curriculum%20Be%20Replaced.pdf

2b. Senate discussion of the Motion, March 4, 2010
   http://senate.asp.radford.edu/Archive/2009-2010/Minutes/Senate%20Minutes/2009-2010%20Faculty%20Senate%20Minutes.pdf

4. Formative Assessment of Core A 101 and 103 for the Fall Semester 2009

5a. Core 201 (Topics in Critical Inquiry) official syllabus
http://core.asp.radford.edu/Core%20Proposals/CORE%20201.pdf
5b. PHIL 113 (Introduction: Reasoning and Argument) official syllabus


7. Motion to co-designate Core 101 and Core 102
http://senate.asp.radford.edu/Archive/2009-2010/Motions/100225_Motion%20to%20Co-Designate%20CORE%20101%20and%20102.pdf

8a. Motion Regarding Transfer Equivalencies for CORE 101 and 102, Approved April 15, 2010:
http://senate.asp.radford.edu/Archive/2009-2010/Motions/100401_Motion%20to%20Recommend%20Transfer%20Equivalencies%20for%20CORE%20101%20and%20102.pdf
8b. Motion Regarding Transfer Equivalencies for CORE 201 and 202, Approved April 15, 2010:
http://senate.asp.radford.edu/Archive/2009-2010/Motions/100401_Motion%20to%20Recommend%20Transfer%20Equivalencies%20for%20CORE%20201%20and%20202.pdf

9. Radford University Transfer Guide, p. 3
http://admissions.asp.radford.edu/forms/transferguide.pdf


A. RU CORE A Newsletter (distributed to RU faculty in a March 30, 2011 e-mail):
“Teaching Tip: Helping Students Get Comfortable with Giving Presentations . . .

Most instructors would agree that the ability to give effective presentations will serve students well in their academic and post-academic careers. Unfortunately, the idea of giving a speech fills many students with dread, and the idea of grading an in-class speech does the same for many faculty. Presentations take up a lot of class time, are difficult to grade objectively, and are often just as difficult to listen to.

However, there are ways to help students improve their presentation skills even when your class context doesn’t allow for full-fledged graded speeches. For example, early in the semester it can be effective to have students give an informal self-introductory speech. These speeches can take a variety
of formats. You can have students choose a quote or story and explain how it illustrates some aspect of their personalities. Alternatively, you can have students pick a television, film, or video clip that illustrates something about themselves. This approach has the added benefit of giving students some experience using visual aids. If you have more time to allot to each student, you can use the “Any Old Bag” assignment. Ask students to bring a bag containing three items: one that represents their past, one that represents their present, and one that represents their future. Students explain how each item relates to them in chronological order.

Later in the semester you can have students do impromptu speeches about course content. Let students know that they will have to present one day, but don’t tell them when or exactly what they will have to discuss. This approach can be effective when students are writing papers or working on other projects. Simply let them know that they will have to give a “research in progress” presentation. On the day of the presentation, ask the student questions about his or her research and allow the rest of the class to do the same. The student must know his or her topic but also be prepared to speak without a lot of time to prepare for the specific questions. This can be excellent preparation for workplace situations in which an employee is often asked to speak to the progress of a project with little or no time to prepare.”

B. E-mail from Dr. Susan Van Patten to RU Faculty, March 17, 2011:

Dear Faculty,

There are still opportunities for faculty to teach in Core Foundations. This is our chance, as educators, to ensure that Radford University students have the skills, competencies, and knowledge required to be successful. CORE 201 and 202 are theme-based courses . . . .

Many questions have been raised related to program implementation and course development. Through the support of the Acting-Provost and Deans, many of these issues have been addressed.

- Monies are available to hire adjuncts for required major courses so faculty can teach CORE 201 & 202.

- One-time course development grants in the amount of $500 will be awarded to instructors for the first time they teach CORE 201 and/or 202 (maximum $1000 per faculty member).

- FTEs for teaching CORE courses will be credited to your program, department, or school.

- The limited size of CORE courses will be accounted for in Schedule-M calculations, with no negative impact . . . .

If you are interested in teaching a CORE 201 or CORE 202 course for fall, please discuss the possibility with your Department Chair and/or College Dean. Any questions can be directed to:

Dr. Susan R. Van Patten, Acting Core Curriculum Director
svanpatt@radford.edu or (540) 831-7644 tel:%28540%29%20831-7644

23
Statement on Core 2011

I would like to propose that university core A courses 201 and 202 be eliminated from the current core. These two courses present the most problems in transfer credits both in and out of RU. They have the most problems with staffing issues including cost and other personnel issues such as evaluation and assessment. They also have the least tangible content of any of the core curriculum and the material covered has no common value. This throws into question the very concept of a “core” “common” course.

I would also like to see core 101 and 102 counted as English 101 and 102 which they for all intents and purposes already are, especially for transfer purposes.

I believe that the CCAC and the senate Curriculum committee should work out a proposal concerning the 6 credits which are left if Core 201 and 202 are gone. They could lessen the credit requirements over all, add credits in given areas, or allow electives for students. I do not have strong recommendations on this but feel that the faculty through its IG system should work this out without input from the BOV, the President or any other outsiders

I have seen the entire process of the creation of this core program from the attack on gen Ed in the faculty senate voiced by [a faculty member] to its current form. This element of core is the most controversial and the most difficult to manage. Thus, I feel that it should be eliminated.
To whom it may concern,

Students who come to RU with say either a communication course or a philosophy course should be able to take only one additional class at RU and not both CORE 201 and 202. This is an issue for many science majors where the sophomore year is very crowded. The typical fall course load for a chemistry major would be:
- CHEM 301 (4) - organic chemistry
- CHEM 324 (4) - with 6 hours of lab per week
- MATH 152 (3) - calc II
- PHYS 111 (4)

This is a full course load and adding to the burden of our students seems punitive to what some are referring to as "native" RU students versus transfer students. My policy I suppose is:
1) All transfer courses are treated the same (does not matter if the student has attended RU or not before) and the terms native and non-native RU students is never heard again.
2) Students in consultation with College Advisors may take PHIL XXX and COMM XXX in place of CORE 201 and 202. You know better than I which courses are correct for the phil and comm. I would be more than happy to speak to anyone of you if desired.
History Proposal

Sent: Thursday, April 07, 2011 3:35 PM
To: ccac

Over the past several years, the Department of History has made numerous suggestions for Core Curriculum reform. The department supported several motions made before the Faculty Senate last year (the chairs proposal from CHBS and the College of Science and Technology; [a faculty member’s] proposal, etc.). The department sees numerous and significant issues with the current Core Curriculum but believes the most critical is that of CORE 201 and 202 hence:

The Department of History recommends Radford University remove CORE 201 and 202 from the Core Foundation classes, to be replaced with courses to be determined upon further study and reflection by the University faculty.

The above, although submitted by the chair, was approved by the department and is a departmental proposal.
FW: FYI
Sent: Wednesday, August 03, 2011 1:48 PM
To: ccac

Thank you for putting this together and sharing it. I think you could strengthen it by tying the idea that CORE 201-202 should have consistent content to the recently adopted QEP theme of Citizen Scholar. That would not only strengthen the courses, but also give us more direction with the QEP. With that in mind, could we pull in [a faculty member who is] also a representative to the QEP committee.

Also, I think your “solution” is one step (at least) better than mine, which was approved of and then ignored as “they” put together the faculty to teach CORE 201/202 for this fall. Doing a kind of controlled lottery as the chairs devise their schedules for x semester, asking each of them to tell the Core Coordinator how many sections their faculty could teach and who could teach them, and then grounding the content in their discipline’s take on the central “Citizen Scholar” topic, would help us move towards making the courses more relevant, more like “sophomore seminars” rather than skills taught through pop culture topics.

With that in mind, I might also propose that we pull back 201 and 202 and make it one course only, with the Citizen Scholar theme, and perhaps add a required History or Literature course to University Core B. Should we discuss these ideas with [a faculty member], or just send them to GECAC where they might be dead in the water?
Sent: Wednesday, April 06, 2011 11:02 AM
To: ccac
There has been an tremendous amount of time and energy surrounding the implementation and continuation of the new Core Curriculum. It’s time to let the evaluation process and assessments of the core drive whether or not things need to change, not personal opinions and anger. Although there were numerous attempts to do assessments to see if the old General Education curriculum worked there is no data to support it was working. Change takes time, and right now it’s time to move forward in a positive manner.
FW: Core Curriculum Revision Process

Sent: Friday, March 18, 2011 10:13 AM
Subject: FW: Core Curriculum Revision Process
What a crock! How did they get permission to use the faculty/staff list-serv to put out negative propaganda about the Core? If they want to gather opinions and ideas to make changes; announce a series of forums. They are attacking first and asking questions later.
Appendix C
Responses from Honors Students

Suggestions to Improve University Core A Courses
From Students in CORE 202-34 (Honors)

Executive Summary

Background

I taught a CORE 202 course on the theme of public policy to 19 honors students during the Spring Semester of 2011. My teaching philosophy has been that students should have a comprehensive final exam to give them the opportunity to reflect on the whole course and solidify in their minds what they have learned. However, the students informed me that “no one gives final exams in the University Core A (Core A) courses.” (I have since found teachers who do, but they are rare.) In order to reconcile my belief that students need to reflect on what they have learned, I proposed that the final exam would be a response to the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee’s (CCAC) request for input into how to improve Core A courses. Moreover, I said that the grade on the final exam would not lower their grade obtained up to the final exam, i.e., the course grade would be calculated two ways and the student would be given the higher of the two ways. In addition, I reserved the right to give a student an incomplete grade if they did not adequately demonstrate a careful reflection on their Core A experience.

Results

The results of the students’ reflections are summarized here and the full text of each student’s paper is presented (in alphabetical order) in the pages following this summary. The bullets are ranked in the order of occurrence, with the number of students making such a point in parentheses. I hope that have fairly captured the students suggestions. However, to understand the intensity of their feelings that helped them develop these suggestions, the individual papers should be read.

- Change the structure because the University Core A sequence had too much repetition, mainly in the similarity of assignments (8).
- Reduce the number of Core A classes, partially because they are too repetitive, and perhaps make the English courses themed (8).
- Give credit for high school or community college courses that basically substitute for Core 103, 201, or 202; or give exams to opt out of these courses (7).
● Develop consistent guidelines for instructors, because letting too many flowers bloom created confusion in the minds of students, e.g., the textual analysis paper (TAP) had inconsistent instructions from class to class (6).

● Create more challenging Core A classes that go deeper into the topics presented, for example focus on tools for the future, not on skills that have already been learned (4).

● Provide better training to instructors because teachers seemed confused, unsure, or disorganized in what they were supposed to teach (4).

● Create Core A classes that can be taken with students in the same major to foster an environment where student will learn how to write in their specific discipline (4).

● Focus more on reading good literature, which helps students to write better (3).

● Continue and enhance opportunities for interaction among the students (small classes) and with the teachers (2).

● Provide better instruction in the art of public speaking, because learning by doing did not provide enough depth in how to communicate (2).

● Drop the Core A Handbook, because it lacked relevance (2).

● Find well-qualified and well-prepared teachers who care; if they are perceived as not caring then students will not care about the course (2).

● Organize Core A better with more balance and structure to help students and faculty succeed (2).

● Separate the Core A program into individual components instead of trying to teach all components in every class (2).

● Change it; don’t abolish it (2).

● Continue with the current structure of Core 201 and 202 (1).

● Develop ways to improve teaching the critical thinking skills (1).

● Develop a way to transfer these courses, if a student leaves RU for another school (1).
Student 1  
To: Core Curriculum Advisory Committee  
Assessment of University CORE A Experience  
The University CORE A section at Radford University states that I will have competency in the following four concepts upon completion of the course.  
Goal 1: Students will demonstrate competence in critical reading, writing, prose and other elements of composition.  
Goal 2: Students will be able to communicate orally in clear language appropriate to purpose, occasion, and audience.  
Goal 3: Students will be able to distinguish knowledge from opinion, challenge ideas, and develop strategies for belief formation.  
Goal 4: Students will be able to acquire, analyze, and synthesize digital and print information and explain how digital information is organized and communicated.  

There are many changes that need to be made to University CORE A as a whole and to the specific goals that University CORE A has. As I am finishing my sophomore year, I have now completed the University CORE A requirements in taking Honors CORE 103, Honors CORE 201, and Honors CORE 202. After taking all these courses, I do have competency in all four goals, but I do not think University CORE A courses were what aided me in these competencies. In my major, I began taking major classes my first semester sophomore year and had to use these competencies before I had finished University CORE A. This means I either had competency in these areas before college or learned them in my major classes. A big change that could improve this would be combining the University CORE A requirements into only two courses that would be completed at the end of freshman year. If this change were made, students that did not possess the skills for the four goals of University CORE A before entering college would learn this before they enter most of their major classes.  

Another change to the University CORE A as a whole would be to have the courses taken by people in the same majors. This way the goals could be practiced on issues and subjects that interest a particular major. In CORE 103 and CORE 202 whenever I could pick a topic independently I would choose an issue about special education and researched it for papers and presentations because these issues will affect my future career. Also, the group work in the University CORE A classes could be done with more common interests in groups with students in the same majors.
University CORE A as a whole in my opinion needs to be more difficult. The goals need to be more specific to make them less broad and more challenging. I found that the goals in University CORE A I had mostly met before college in high school. While the current goals are a good stepping-stone, college students need to be able to dig deeper than these to be better overall students. Adding more to the existing goals would create more learning than the high school level that they appear to be, especially since we are in college and are here to obtain higher learning than we previously have had.

The first goal, which is about critical reading and writing, is very basic and necessary, but needs to be expanded upon. More reading needs to be done in the University CORE A courses. In all the University CORE A courses that I took, I only read one piece of literature. How are we supposed to obtain this goal if we are not reading literature? I have written many papers in University CORE A courses, but the critical reading has been severely smaller than the writing sections of the University CORE A courses.

The second goal, which is about communication orally, is a very beneficial goal to all students. However, this goal was not focused on until CORE 201 and CORE 202, when I had already had to give many speeches and presentations in classes before this. Making University CORE A into two courses to be completed first year would greatly improve the helpfulness of this goal. In addition, in CORE 201 and CORE 202 I had to give presentations, but we were never taught in class how to. We were expected to learn solely by doing and not with any instructions beforehand. This goal could be obtained better by teaching how to communicate orally and not just requiring presentations.

The third goal, which is about opinions, facts, and belief systems, is an important goal, but is mostly obtained before college. I could distinguish fact from opinion before college so this was not new information to me. Instead of teaching students about these things, why not put our facts and opinions to the test through class discussions and assignments? We need to learn how present our opinions in a respectful way and how to understand why people will disagree with us. This would be much more helpful than to just learn what facts and opinions are.

The fourth goal, which is about digital information, is very vague and confusing to me. In the University CORE A courses we completed many power points and used the internet a lot, but I do not think that is really what this goal is, just what we did to try and fit the goal. I understood before how to use the internet and make a power point so I do not understand what this goal was trying to accomplish.
Overall, I am very disappointed in the University CORE A courses. I could have taken a literature course, a creative writing course, a public speaking course, and a technology course completed the University CORE A goals and learned much more. The changes I have suggested would greatly improve University CORE A and make it a worthwhile requirement and program.
The Core curriculum at Radford University has been in effect for just a few semesters, and has caused much division amongst this university. Although there are proponents for both sides of the program—those in support and those against, the curriculum has received more feedback deemed unsatisfactory. I experienced the Core curriculum in three semesters, as I took Core 103, Core 201, and Core 202 classes. I also experienced three different teachers who each possessed his or her own unique teaching style. Moreover, every teacher of the Core happened to be passionate about the particular theme of the class. Because I feel that I have been blessed enough to learn from such gifted teachers, I did not deem the Core curriculum to be as unpleasant as others seem to have viewed it.

Core 103, a class that I took the fall semester of my freshman year, entailed a group power-point presentation, research paper, numerous reading logs, and in-class exams. The actual class itself was enjoyable, as we read interesting articles and captivating novels. It also only required one group presentation, and the rest of the grading criteria involved individualistic efforts. My teacher was passionate about the English language, and so she motivated the class to discover new topics of interest, as I would have never learned that I enjoyed reading so much without her. Although the Core 103 class was enjoyable, overall, I would like to suggest that the curriculum disengage with the teaching of basic grammar skills. I believe that any college student who is capable of just that—getting into college—should be able to successfully write a paper without having to be instructed how to use a semi-colon. Furthermore, by eliminating the teaching of basic grammar skills in the Core curriculum, students will be able to input all of their energy into advancing those very abilities that are already possessed.

Last semester, I took the Core 201 class to enhance my knowledge of internationally known poets and Nobel Prize laureates. No group projects were required, but the class did entail a research paper, numerous reading logs, and an individual power-point presentation. I expanded the depth of my learning through numerous lectures and other learning devices; furthermore, I noticed that the course did not engage in teaching basic grammar and writing skills, as previously discussed. Because the course focused on broadening students’ cultural identities through instruction that regarded historic writers and Nobel Prize laureates, students were able to enlarge their view of the world past this nation’s borders. I feel that the required criteria—research paper, reading logs, and power-point presentation—also enabled students to enhance their research and public speaking skills. I did not view the graded
criterion as simply busy work, but observed them as opportunities to progress my knowledge concerning the given theme.

Core 202 was the final class of the Core curriculum that I was ordered to take. The class was based on public policy issues and ethical reasoning. Although ethics is not a particularly interesting topic to me, I felt that the discussions and debates held in class were very beneficial in boosting my knowledge of these issues. I feel that every person should be aware of the occurrences going on in our society; moreover, this class benefited me overall. This course also entailed a relatively large amount of group work, as we were required to present projects to the class twice. Although I would personally rather work individually, the real world demands that people be capable of working effectively with other people. I can vouch that I walked away from the class as a more knowledgeable and attentive person. This increase of knowledge regarding public policy issues and ethics causes me to be a more educated person. However, the Core handbooks and other texts with the purpose of developing basic grammar skills should be disposed of. Students should focus more energy on improving their critical thinking skills, since these are proficiencies that have not been stressed in the past nearly as much as the basic writing and reading skills. If the Core curriculum was developed to improve key tools that will be utilized in the future, instead of focusing on skills that should already be in possession, students would benefit greatly from the overall Core program.

Moreover, I benefited from the Core curriculum more than the average Radford University student. Although there are some flaws in the program, I think that it is odd how so many people “hate” the Core curriculum. People get out of the program what they put into it, and so if a person wants to learn in a class, I think they will find a way to succeed in that. I am unsure how much different a standard English class at this university is from the current Core program. Stating this, I believe the curriculum is sufficient and minor changes should be implemented.
The University Core program was implemented my freshman year here at Radford. This was the first year that RU decided to try this program. My class was the guinea pig group, the class to first try out this “Core” idea. At first, no one really knew what Core was, we just knew instead of taking English and public speaking we just had to take 3 or 4 semesters (depending on honors) of Core. (For this paper Core refers to just the Core class not the University Core A program). I took Core 101, 103, 201 and 202 because I came into the honors academy spring semester of my freshman year. Every semester was the same it seemed like. The classes had different themes, mine included Nobel Prize Laureates, Economics, Feminism, and a Superhero/Movie type theme, but we still had to do a Textual Analysis Paper, reading logs, group projects and a multimedia project.

The goals of core are to demonstrate competency in critical reading, writing, and other elements of composition, communicate orally, distinguish knowledge from opinion, challenge ideas and be able to develop strategies for belief formation. Also, to be able to analyze digital and print information and explain how digital information is organized and communicated. These are the qualities that we need to be able to graduate and move on from University life. All of these qualities are very important in development not only educationally, but as a person growing up. Core has really good intentions and set a really high bar for its students to live up to, however I don’t feel like I’ve learned all of these in my Core classes. Most of this stuff I learned in high school, and in activities previous to college.

The thought of Core is wonderful. Teach these students everything you can before they get to their major classes, but all Core did for me was drill certain skills in to the point where I can’t stand Core anymore. In my opinion, coming to college was supposed to expand my horizon and challenge my beliefs while enhancing my education but with these classes I feel like I’m still in high school learning to play well with others and figuring out the difference between fact and opinion. My Core classes are great because they are a GPA booster, almost a guaranteed “A” and I’m in honors, but I don’t really feel like I learned that much.

There aren’t certain things that I can say I don’t like about core, I just think the program is sort of annoying. Repeating things over and over again is redundant especially when you get to the college level. Coming into college I already knew how to read and write, use Power-point and distinguish fact from opinion, so taking these classes didn’t teach me much more than I already knew. I could have taken classes related more to my major or even an English class would have been better in my opinion. English
and Public speaking as separate classes worked so well in the past, it’s how college has been since forever, why change it now?

On the other hand, core isn’t all bad. One thing I do like about the Core program is the fact that the classes have themes. I learned more about the particular theme of the class than the “outcomes and expectations” of the actual core program. Having themed classes keeps students interested especially if they get to choose the class based on the theme.

I also like in core we aren’t just learning how to write a sentence using verbs and nouns like an English class would and we are applying the concepts to real world events, or particularly whatever the theme of the class is. We are still required to write papers and show our professor that we do understand the fundamentals of writing just in a non-high school, drilling fragments vs. run-on sentences into our brain, kind of way.

It’s hard to make a decision on what type of classes the University wants to implement because they only want what will help the students the most. The Core program has really good guidelines and expectations but just like anything else, you can’t really know what it’s going to be like until you try it out and that’s what RU decided to do, they tried out Core. In my experience, I don’t dislike Core per se it’s just not what I was hoping for. I was expecting to learn something different although I’m not quite sure what that is exactly.

Professors always ask us; if we don’t like something to make suggestions on how to make it better, so I would say to create a class that is like English, just make it themed. Students have been taking English and succeeding in their higher education curriculums just fine before so we shouldn’t change something that worked so well.
To begin with, I have mixed feelings about the Core system. Not knowing what the General Education process entailed fully in comparison to the Core curriculum, it is harder to make a proper assessment. However, there are a few things that I think may warrant some possible reflection.

First, better communication all around would serve to make the Core curriculum process much easier. I know some of my classmates had problems with high school English classes such as Dual Enrollment and AP English transferring. They were told in high school that these classes would count towards Core, and yet they did not. Then some of those who were told their classes would not give them credit in Core 101, 102, or 103, later found out that they could have counted—after they had already taken those courses. I do not know if this is misinformation, but I do know that any confusion could have been eliminated with better communication between the university and its students.

I felt I already had a strong grasp on most of the items laid out in the learning outcomes and expectations of University Core as listed in our Core 202 syllabus. The Core classes served to strengthen those skills and provide new ways and methods to approach writing, communicating orally, developing belief formation, and synthesizing digital and print information. However, I strongly feel that Core 202 Groups and Ethical Reasoning would better serve as the first or second Core class. Students have worked in groups throughout high school and already know what works and what does not. By the time they reach Core 202 (typically taken in their sophomore or junior year) they are already “group worked out.” I also feel that the ethical component of the Core 202 class would be more beneficial earlier on as well. Having just taken Core 202 this spring 2011 semester, I feel I would have benefitted greatly in other classes had I had the ethical and moral reasoning framework and knowledge that I have now.

There are a couple of components of the learning outcomes that I feel I am not up to par on. I feel induction, deduction, and logical fallacies were the most confusing concepts learned within Core A. I do not think that I am sufficiently capable in these areas and more thorough attention and focus to these topics would be a good idea.

One aspect of my Core curriculum experience that I feel should not have happened is the fact that the Core handbook was changed a year after the program was implemented. It made it not only hard on the students, but the professors as well trying to eliminate confusion and accommodate those students that had the white handbook instead of the new red one. It was not fair to anyone involved. It
made it hard on the students who either had to buy a new (expensive!) handbook, struggle to find the corresponding pages, or ask the professor to find the corresponding pages and relay the information.

I think reviewing parts of the Core curriculum process is a good idea. I do not know how it compares to the Gen Ed program, but something is obviously wrong seeing as so many have had their feelings hurt or have been greatly upset. I also feel that these wounds could have been avoided through better communication and education of the program itself. I think the program should not have been put in place without a majority consensus and a less abrupt transition could have avoided inflicting any wounds.
Reflections on the Core Experience

The Core experience overall has been helpful in my academic career thus far. I feel that the emphasis on communication is valuable and the experience it has provided as far as cooperative group work will prove useful in the professional world. According to the Radford webpage, the goal of the Core curriculum was to “give students a foundational learning experience where they improve their ability to think, both critically and analytically, and begin to take possession of the learning process”. In that regard, I think it has been particularly successful whether students wish to acknowledge it or not.

Personally, I came to Radford with developed critical thinking and communication skills as a result of my participation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in high school. This program is an internationally recognized academic curriculum focused on promoting critical and well-rounded individuals while emphasizing advanced coursework. As such, I entered the Core program with a strong foundation in critical thinking and written communication. The program did not really challenge me in any way as far as either of those two topics is concerned; however, I was challenged when it came to developing my oral communication skills on which I intend to focus this discussion.

Prior to going through the Core program at Radford, I was terrified of speaking in front of other people, even my peers. I would stand in front of the class and stammer, trip over my words, and shake like a leaf. Through repeated exposure as well as constructive criticism, I gradually gained experience and, as a result, confidence in my public speaking skills. Whether it was a formal presentation before the class or voicing my opinion during a roundtable discussion or debate, I developed the ability to convey my point clearly and with confidence and for that I am truly thankful that I went through this program. It has already helped me in my research presentations at various national conferences.

While the Core program definitely helped me to develop my oral communication skills, I feel like the same end could have been accomplished with a public speaking course as opposed to an entire curriculum stretching out over the span of two academic years. On the other hand, I realize that my situation is not the same as that of everyone else. I recognize the need for strong analytical and communicative skills in the job market and I am glad that Radford University has done the same and managed to work it into the curriculum. There are several changes that could be made that I feel would benefit the program as a whole. Personally, I would have separated the Core program into individual components such as analytical writing, reading for comprehension and analysis, and oral communication. Each section would have specific emphasis on those topics. Individuals entering the program could take entrance exams in order to determine if the program as a whole or simply one or
two components were required before registering for classes. Personally, I would have preferred this method even though it would have involved an additional examination. In the long run, I think this would result in greater overall satisfaction with the program which can be painfully dull if the student goes unchallenged. If this can be avoided by making him or her exempt, I feel like that should definitely be considered as an option.

I would also recommend gearing the focus of the components towards the student’s major or field of study. That way, science majors could learn more about writing specifically for their field, presentation and communication skills particular to the scientific community, and how to read and comprehend scientific literature. For me personally, that would have been significantly more beneficial than studying poetry and Appalachian literature.

I understand that these changes would be difficult to establish and more time-consuming for the individuals involved, but I feel like they could make valuable contributions to the overall success of the program. Overall, I feel like the Core program accomplished its goals; however, I feel that it has the potential to do a great deal more for the students and the faculty involved if a few changes are made rather than abolishing it entirely as some have suggested.
Reflection of CORE Curriculum

I would say that my experience going through Radford University’s CORE curriculum program was a good one. I liked the fact that the program tried to improve communication skills and promote skills for working in groups. These are very important skills to have when you are working in a professional career. I also liked the fact that the CORE program tried to improve writing skills, which I feel, is another very important skill to have in the workplace. I like the goals that the University is trying to accomplish through the CORE program; however, I do think that there need to be many improvements made to the program before it functions the way that the University wants it to.

The main changes that I would make to the CORE program would be the depth of the material covered in the CORE program and the structure of the program itself. The main problem that I had with the CORE program was the fact that I never really learned anything new. The writing skills that were taught in the program were about as advanced as those taught in a high school English class. I would like to believe that most students in the University already possess the basic writing skills that the CORE program tried to teach us. The same thing goes for the public speaking portion of the program. Most people were taught basic public speaking skills during high school and I felt that the CORE program only reinforced these basic skills and did not provide much new information on how to make myself a better speaker. I would improve the program and fix these issues by making the material go a little more in depth. The program should still reinforce the basics but it should also teach more advanced writing and speaking techniques that will make Radford University students stand out from the crowd.

Another problem that I had with the CORE program was the structure of the courses. During all of the CORE classes that I took the professors seemed to just wing their way through the class. All of the professors seemed to have almost no idea of how they were supposed to teach the class. I feel that this made the CORE curriculum very disorganized and nobody was on the same page. While all of the classes had the same basic projects, I found that my friends who had different professors were usually doing something that was very different in their class then what I was doing in mine. I would fix this problem by providing CORE professors with more specific instructions on how to teach the course and maybe give them a little bit of training on how to teach the CORE program. I feel that this will take a lot of the confusion out of the classes and will make the program much more informative. Another thing to
consider would be to hire CORE specific professors instead of pulling professors from other parts of the University. I think that this would help the program out a lot because the professors will be able to focus entirely on the CORE program and I believe that this will make the quality of instruction that much better.

All in all I had a good experience in the CORE program and I did learn a little bit about belief formation and how to recognize fact from opinion, so the program did at least accomplish one of its goals. While I believe that there needs to be a lot of improvements made to the CORE program I also realize that I was in the “test” class and that there are bound to be some problems that arise when something like this is first implemented. I believe that if the CORE program can survive its growing pains it will be a great asset to the University.
Radford University has a new policy requiring students to take four semesters of the Core curriculum. After the four semesters, each student is required to have a general understanding of critical reading, a proper ability to speak and write English, clear and effective prose, the ability to distinguish opinion, challenge ideas, form strategies for belief formations, and have a general knowledge of this generations’ technology. This is not a difficult requirement of students, but the question is whether taking all four Core classes is needed for this knowledge.

I am a student at Radford University and I have successfully taken three and a half semesters of Core. I have never missed one class in my college career, so one could say that I have a good understanding of every Core class I have been in. I have been in an environment class, an ethical inquiry class, as well as a Middle Eastern class and to me all of these classes gave each student the same information. Each Core class I go to I hear teachers tell other students and me how we can improve our writing skills and they tell us interesting facts about the specific concentration of Core we are taking. In my opinion, all of the Core information is repetitive and can be summed up in one or two semesters.

The reason I say this is because college is a hard time in anyone’s life; it is a new beginning for everyone. As soon as students get to college they assume they will be studying their specific major and yet they are wrong. They are required to sit in classes, like Core, that they have been in for their whole life. The overall aspect of Core is just an enhanced version of high school English. The only difference between the two is that it is only found in college and it brings another concentration to the class. The goals that Core places on its students are fulfilled through each class but are seen throughout every single other class.

I am a Psychology and Religious Studies major. Within my Religious Studies major I was required to write eleven page and twenty page papers; in the Core classes, my longest paper was eight pages. I refined my writing skills because of my majors, not because of Core. Also in my Religious Studies major I had to read eight books for one of my classes, and the heaviest book load in Core was three books. Another goal for the Core curriculum is distinguishing opinions and challenging ideas. My Religion classes definitely pertain to opinions and challenging other people’s thoughts and ideas. I have never been in such a controversial class like my Religion and American Nationalism class because it pushed my
thoughts and opinions far beyond measure and Core classes do not push the boundaries that I have been introduced to.

My Psychology major prepares me for communicating orally and presenting with new technology because I am required to present research proposals to both my classes and forums. Psychology gets me prepared for a career in presenting research and Core prepares me for presenting information in a classroom setting. Again, my majors are sustaining my success.

I personally believe that the people who are in charge of Core are trying to accomplish a difficult task. In a college setting it is hard to appease everyone and they are attempting to do so by integrating some majors into these classes. If I were to attempt to make the Core classes better I would give the option of all majors to have the opportunity to be involved in Core. Another way I would attempt to make it better would be to reduce the number of Core classes we need to one or two; four classes simply becomes too repetitive when English is a priority in every elementary, middle, and high school. Overall I really do appreciate schools trying to enhance students’ reading and writing skills but I believe that these skills should be enhanced through students’ specific majors instead of a generalized Core class.
Core Reflection Paper

The Core Curriculum here at Radford has been an experience in itself. I have learned many skills through the Core program, but I have had conflicts with it also. The Core program is a great idea with it involving writing, group work, oral presentation and critical thinking. However some changes can be made to make it even better. Some overall problems I had with the Core classes I took was that there were few grades, and the grades we did have were major portions of our overall grade. Also every class was structurally differently, so a lot of the time I felt the information I had learned in the previous class only helped me with the new class a little.

Core 103 was my first English and writing class at Radford. During the course of the semester APA citations and writing good papers was the main focus. One thing I liked about this course was that we had free range to write about whatever we wanted. I was able to explore the topic of food and also research chemotherapy which was a subject that was close to my heart. We did mostly in class work and had very little lecture which was nice to have the professor there to help with writing. One thing we did discuss that I did not like as much was lectures on grammar and other petty things I had already learned in college dual enrollment English. Our professor was very helpful with the in class writing time and also taking the time to meet with us in outside classroom conferences to go over our papers. Overall, this Core class was the most helpful and beneficial out of all the Core classes I have been enrolled in. Core 103 was the one class where I actually felt my writing improved.

Due to taking Honors Core 103 I was able to take a semester off from Core and pick it back up in the fall of 2010. When I started looking at classes for Core 201 I realized that Honors Core 201 was very limited in the topics chosen, so I decided to enroll in the regular Core classes. One thing that I enjoyed about this class was learning the different fallacies associated with ethos, logos and pathos. In the fall of my freshman year I bought the first Core A handbook and was told that it would suffice for all four semesters. However, when I came back the following fall I found out that they had come out with a new addition and that I needed to buy the newer edition. This made matters complicated before I had even begun the course. This class was also my first encounter with the concept of textual analysis. In Core 103 we had never even spoken about textual analysis so this was a new topic for me. My textual analysis was mainly focused on a video and had a very specific outline of how to complete it. The outline did not
follow the Core handbook guidelines. When I spoke to fellow classmates in other Core classes they had different outlines of how to do the textual analysis as well. Also in other classes group work was a focus in their classes where mine was mainly individual work, which is also how it was in my Core 103 class.

Core 202 was my first class where I actually did almost all group work. We focused on the fundamentals of how to be efficient in groups and how to be successful in a group. I liked that the class was focused on the ethics behind situations and the in class case studies helped me to learn the different ethical and moral theories. I liked how our class was always an open ended discussion and was very laid back. We could always voice our opinions on the different ethics without feeling of rejection or feeling as if it was a wrong statement. However, once again the choices for Core 202 were limited and I needed to have an honors class to fulfill my honors academy curriculum. We did have a textual analysis to do in this class; however, it was very different than how I was taught to do one in my Core 201 class. I felt as if I was writing my very first textual analysis. From my understanding of textual analysis, a person is suppose to analyze one text; however I felt that I was analyzing a topic using different articles and texts. Overall, I feel this class was a very helpful class but it needs work with its structure and concepts learned in the class itself.

Some suggestions that I would make to improve to Core Curriculum would be mainly focus on reading and actual English in the first two core classes. I feel as if most of my educational time here at Radford was spent on writing and speaking. Core 101 102 and 103 should focus mainly on the different readings such like Shakespeare and Walt Whitman. By focusing on such authors as these, students will still be able to critically think about the texts they are reading. Core 201 and 202 should remain how they are with focusing on group work, textual analysis and research papers. Throughout all my classes I felt like I was doing the same thing in every class, but just with different topics. However, I feel as if within the Core 101,102, and 103 classes there should be some emphasis on group work due to having group work in other classes besides Core. By the time I enrolled on Core 202 I already learned the fundamentals of how to be successful in groups through personal experience. By keeping Core 201 and 202 the same, the university can still stay within the learning outcomes of communicating orally and working in groups. Overall the Core Curriculum needs to have more balance and structure throughout all Core classes. Every Core class is different and students are learning different ways to do speeches, textual analysis, and even writing in general.

The Core Curriculum is a good aspect to Radford University, however I feel it was just thrown together. Through improvements in structure and actual curriculum behind the class the Core program can amount to great heights and help students improve their writing, reading, and public speaking skills.
Core: Should it stay or should it go?

Throughout my college career I have been subjected to the core system. This system is meant to make students well rounded and give them the skills to be successful out in the business world. Personally for me the core system is not as good as it could be. The core curriculum has many problems which include teachers not enforcing it/liking it, teachers that don’t know how to teach it, and students seem to just be uninterested and the topics are not very interesting at all. These problems have been taking the core curriculum and giving it a bad name even though it can possibly be a really good program. This system needs some reform to it because it is not working right now the way it could.

I think that the first thing that needs to be changed is that the teachers that are teaching it should enforce the class. There are students that can easily skip their core class every day and still get an A. They should be expected to do more than just go to class and do papers for the class. This class teaches students to write papers, and do research, that is it. It doesn’t enhance our ability in a specific area and the class seems pointless to students. We should learn something of use in the core classes. It seems like some of the teachers do not like core and so they do not put their passion into it as much as they could. Some seem to dislike coming to class and dislike not being able to teach their subjects. The problem is that students don’t care because the teachers seem like they don’t care/ know how to teach core. To fix this I think that teachers should be allowed to teach core how they want. Give them the basic outline of things that should be covered and let them decide because then teachers will be more on board I feel. Make the class different and more interactive not just read and do papers. I would say give group projects and make the topics for each section interesting and find a teacher that wants to teach it.

The second problem that I have seen in the past 2 years is that teachers are only “trained” to teach core and it is in subjects that the teachers have gone to school for. Thus the class becomes boring because the teachers do not know what to teach and how to teach it. Some teachers have made the core classes interesting and engaged their students to think outside the box but others seem to be confused and uninterested. Most of these teachers are not English teachers and the classes fall flat a lot of the time. From what I have seen of the core system the only work that students do in their classes is long, extensive papers and readings that are boring and hold no meaning to students. Since one of the key outcomes of the core system is to improve student’s written communication, it only makes sense for
students to learn how to write for their respective majors. With this solution teachers would be able to teach a writing class and students would be able to focus in on their major and become better at their written communication. This would in turn make students better writers and I believe more successful in their majors/work force. The core classes look to improve the written communication of its students and I believe that making a core class for each major will enhance students ability to communicate both written and orally and it would make them more favorable in their field of study. For teachers it would allow them to still teach their respective majors but it would also allow them to help students to be able to write successfully.

I think that if changes were to happen to the core system, the above solution of making core classes for each major would do a lot of good and would gauge interest among students. The solution I am proposing would gauge interest among students because it would be topics of importance to them and their futures. Being Anthropology major I always have to write papers, articles, article reviews etc. If I had a core class that could help me to be able to analyze and write like an anthropologist then it would help me to be more successful in the workforce later on in life. There are different criteria for writings for every major. This solution steers students to be more effective writers and communicators in their majors. Many people come into college not knowing what they want to major in. We could even do core classes that help students to pick a major and find their niche in society. I think that there is just a bad reputation that has been given to core system and so students dread having to go to their core class. I think that the problem of uninterested student could be rectified if students had the ability to pick core classes that were geared towards their majors. If there were core classes each year that would allow them to excel in their majors it would spark interests and be beneficial to students at the same time.

The core curriculum has many things that are wrong with it but it is a newer system. There will be bumps in the road and I am hoping that I can see some of my suggestions come to light. The core system could do a lot for student if it was geared more towards them and less towards an unknown class. These classes are taught by teachers who are taught on the spot how to teach it and the topics are just not interesting to students. With the suggestions I have made, there will be a class for everyone and the community at Radford will grow because the departments will have to work together. I believe that if done right the core system could work and could be very successful but it is finding the right balance that is the hard part. There are a lot of problems and they can easily be fixed but it is up to the committee to take the first step.
Radford University’s CORE A was a great idea when it was brought up for the first time and then later passed. In my opinion, I don’t exactly think that everyone should have to go through the series of CORE A classes. It was to my understanding that after I graduated high school; I would not have to take any other basic English class during college. I took College Composition during high school so that I could avoid that situation but the CORE A Curriculum changed all of that for me. Don’t get me wrong, the CORE A Curriculum is not a bad thing, but I believe that not everyone should not have to go through it. Also, a lot of the CORE A Curriculum is repeated. I feel as if I have learned a lot of the same things in each CORE class.

I guess that my last statement is probably one of the greatest reasons why I don’t completely agree with the CORE A Curriculum. I feel that the students who took the extra initiative in high school to take an upper level class should then be rewarded for completing the course. The reward would be not taking a basic English class in college. Many of my peers as well as me took that initiative, yet we still had to go through the CORE A program. I think that one way to fix that situation is to only make incoming freshman who hadn’t taken a college level English class take those CORE A classes. I do understand that some high schools don’t offer these types of classes. Those students who couldn’t take a college level English class should also go through the line-up of CORE A classes. This solution makes sense to me because it doesn’t require the entire freshman class to take those classes. More room will be then left for students to take other courses that they may be required to take or just want to take to expand their horizons. I feel as if this is a great idea for solving a slight problem of who should take the CORE A classes.

I understand that each CORE class has its own objectives and goals for that class. I think that one of the fundamental problems with the system is that each teacher is always on a different page. The committee in charge of the CORE A Curriculum, in my opinion, has a great idea of using different teachers from different areas to teach such classes. I don’t think that the idea has been completely satisfied though. Some teachers in my opinion are more qualified than others. I also feel as if I had learned the same techniques in each class. Even though I have mentioned the things that I didn’t like about the CORE curriculum, I still took some techniques and learning experiences away from my whole CORE experience. I can now identify moral theories as well as evaluate their importance. I feel as if I am more prepared to give presentations because I was required to do so during my experience dealing with
CORE A. Since I am a Computer Science major, I was happy to see some type of multimedia project mixed into the goals. Some of the variety that the CORE A has given students has been helpful, but for the most part, I feel as if a lot of the underlying objectives have been repeated. Overall, CORE A isn’t a bad idea; I just feel that some exceptions need to be made for those students who have already had a similar type of class. CORE A hasn’t necessarily been a burden, but if I were to fix one thing about it, I would have to shorten the amount of classes that each student has to take. I feel like that would be a successful compromise to combat the amount of negative responses to a situation in which every student has to take CORE. Some revision is necessary in creating a successful program and I feel as if we are on the right track to doing just that.
The University Core Experience at Radford University

Student 11

The recently established CORE curriculum at Radford University was conceptually a good idea, though I feel its execution was disorganized and rushed, which greatly impeded its success. The classes themselves were irksome, as they very nearly resembled English courses, which I was technically exempt from due to transferred credits from Advanced Placement classes taken during my high school career. I found this incredibly frustrating, as I felt I was being cheated my money and time, being required to take part in the CORE classes which were near identical to those from which I had been supposedly exempt. In addition, the high-priced textbook required for the course left me feeling even more cheated as since I have purchased it, I have used it but once in my two years so far at Radford University. To my dismay, it cannot be sold back for any percentage of its original value, and I know such an additional expense only further contributes to the frustrations of the students. Especially since its content was full of basic English and literary teachings, most of which was taught in high school: standing as repetitive and redundant when presented once again to students in college.

I feel a more logical and successful implementation of the CORE program would have been to group it with the requirements of the General Education curriculum, as opposed to having it exist separately from these base courses because it is so like basic English and Literature Analysis classes. When assessing the curriculum individually, it does stand as somewhat of a success with regards to achieving a percentage of its own goals, namely Goal #3 within the “CORE Learning Outcomes and Expectations”. This Goal states “Radford University Students will learn to distinguish knowledge from opinion, challenge ideas, and develop reasonable strategies for belief formation”. Not only is this the only goal of the curriculum I feel possesses any actual value, but it is the goal which I feel was also well achieved, though not until the later courses.

Goal #3 was most successfully achieved, not by the program itself, but by the professor whom was instructing the class. The other few CORE courses I took seemed to have no real value as though they are simply “filler” courses. This was largely because the professors conducting them were unsure of how to do so in an effective manner, as many of them had expressed that they had only a few weeks of training in preparation for the course prior to teaching it: making the effectiveness solely based on how well the professor themselves could relate and communicate the ideas posed in the learning objectives to their students. It was not until my most recent CORE class that I really felt I learned anything. This is because during this class, the professor took the initiative to ask for feedback from his pupils midway.
through the course and used said feedback to tailor his teaching to better accommodate the learning styles of the students. It is through this proactive conduct that the classes as a whole was able to more effectively learn through interaction with the professor, group discussions, and group analysis of the material in the particular class.

I feel the CORE was set up to teach students crucial skills, which are invaluable in the working world and life in general, a most noble intention, though it fell short and was not quite as effective as it could have been due to error in planning and sloppy organization. Since not all professors who volunteer to participate in teaching the CORE curriculum are as qualified as the previously described mentor who taught so effectively, I believe a possible solution to this predicament would be to refining the curriculum through better training of the instructors heading each class. By providing additional and more substantial training for the professors, they will be much better equipped to effectively achieve the goals of the curriculum and bestow upon their pupils the knowledge which will serve them beyond their college careers.

In my most recent CORE course, I learned how to analyze the ethics and morals of various types of arguments and distinguish which arguments are legitimately based on fact, and which were largely based on opinion. By learning how to effectively do this, I have been able to successfully apply these skills in my other General Education classes and excel in learning and other academia because of it. Therefore, I feel I have grounds to say that at least one key aspect of the CORE curriculum itself was achieved, based on my increased awareness of ethical arguments and sharpened ability to compose arguments in support of my points of view. Had I not learned at least one skill, which I can use to further other aspects of my education, the CORE curriculum, in my mind, would be validly rendered as useless, and a “filler” course.

To avoid such controversy in the future, I suggest the Advisory Committees of all colleges take greater care and refine any new curriculums thoroughly prior to their implementation of said curriculums. Only if the professors themselves are fully qualified and prepared to teach these new courses will the courses achieve their desired goals and a greater level of effectiveness.
The core curriculum at Radford University is meant to be a successful program that carries the responsibility of making sure students graduate with skills and competencies required by SACS and SCHEV. The core program provides these skills through the use of group work, textual analyses, research papers, and reading logs. However, the core curriculum does have its faults in organization and length. Personally, I have developed an improvement in several skills through this program, but at the same time I have dealt with drawbacks in each core class as well.

My experience with the core curriculum started with my enrollment into Core 103. Core 103 was the core course that was most beneficial to me during my core experience, due to the fact that my professor was very efficient in helping each student learn individually. One thing that helped me in this course was that my professor didn’t spend much time lecturing, but instead helped us improve our writing through: teaching us APA, giving us open choice on our topics, meeting with us individually, and giving us the opportunity to work on our assignments in class. My favorite thing about this class was our free choice of paper topics, which allowed me to tie in my major nursing into my Core 103 class. Even though this was the most beneficial core class for me at Radford, it did have its drawbacks that made me dislike it. The main drawback of this course was the lectures on grammar that were required by my teacher; however I had already learned this material in high school. The one other drawback was that there was no introduction to what a textual analysis is or how to write this type of paper, which was something that became very important in later core classes.

The next core course that I was required to take was Core 201. This course had less positive aspects to it, but instead had more negative characteristics. The few positives that this course did have were that I was introduced to what a textual analysis is, group work presentations, and learning to argue one side of an argument. However, this course’s topic was environmental controversies, which was not interesting to me, but I signed up for it because I needed an honors core class to meet my honors requirements. As far as the textual analysis goes, yes I was introduced to it, however I was handed my core handbook and was told that the book would teach me how to write this paper. Also, the rubrics that went along with assignments like the textual analysis were very vague in this course and I felt like I
wasn’t completely sure what my professor was looking for most of the time. Lastly, I was told that the core handbook that would supposedly be sufficient during all my semesters of core classes was being revised and that I was required to buy the new copy in order to succeed in my further core classes.

My last core class at Radford was Core 202. In this class I highly enjoyed learning about the different ethical arguments of a public policy issue and how to decipher the correct moral theories to back up the argument. Also in this course we had plenty of group discussion, which helped me understand each public policy issue that we were covering and made me think of what my thoughts were on the issue. I was able to voice my opinion on each issue with my professor being highly understanding and listening to me fully without any judgment. However, in this course once again we worked on group work which I felt like was fully covered in Core 201. Also along with Core 201 the course topic of public policy was not optimal for me, however once again I needed an honors core class. Last but not least, the textual analysis that I wrote in this course seemed as if we were using texts to analyze an issue instead of analyzing one text on a specific issue. This caused me to be more confused on what skills exactly I was supposed to be getting out of core.

Overall the core classes were decent, however highly repetitive. I enjoyed that English was being intertwined with public speaking, yet I felt like public speaking was something that was never thoroughly taught. Also these core classes made me feel like I was cheated out of the classical readings that would be covered in a regular English course, which every student should have before graduating. In order to fix these problems in the core curriculum I have come up with a possible solution scenario.

The beginning of my scenario starts by removing Core 101, 102, and 103 from the curriculum and replacing them with regular English courses. These English courses would provide students with the classical readings, such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Dickinson, that they miss out on my being forced into core courses. These readings would allow us to still get the critical reading skills that are required by the core curriculum but in a more interesting and intriguing manner. To go along with these critical classic readings, these English courses would require reading responses and papers that would allow the students to improve their critical writing skills also. The next step to my scenario is to keep some core courses, like 201 and 202. In these two courses, assignments like reading logs, textual analysis, and research papers should stay consistent with every professor teaching them similarly. These assignments will pull in the core goal of learning critical reading and writing. Also, in these courses public speaking should actually be taught and demonstrated in a group oral presentation. The combination of public speaking and group work would be present and therefore contribute to the oral communication goal of the current core curriculum. I feel as if allowing students to take standard English courses and core
courses would provide a better variety of skills and competencies that the university is looking for in their graduating students.
Reflecting back on my experience in CORE, the classes I have taken have reinforced my knowledge of writing papers, communicating orally, and analyzing information. My senior year of high school I took a College Composition class with the local community college. This class was dual-enrollment and I was told I would receive college credit for taking this course. Being in the Honors Academy at Radford University, I was told that I didn’t have to take CORE 101 and 102 and that I would just have to take 103, 201, and 202. On my degree audit it now shows that CORE 103 counted as an elective because my College Composition counted as credit for that class, therefore I was misinformed that I had to take CORE 103 when it appears that I could have skipped that and went straight to CORE 201 and 202. I think that there is much confusion over how to count college English classes that students take in high school.

I think that the University CORE A curriculum has ideal goals for its students, but I don’t think that the instructors of CORE see the goals in the same way. All of my CORE instructors have seemed somewhat confused as to what exactly they were supposed to be teaching. It was nice to have a variety of ideas, but I think that the instructors should been given a more structured plan for the class. I learned quite a bit about good writing and presenting in my CORE 103 class and it reinforced what I was taught in my College Composition class in high school. CORE 201 and 202 just seemed to be repetitive of skills that I had already learned. Goal 1 states that students will demonstrate competency in critical reading, standard written English, audience-specific writing, clear and effective prose, and other elements of composition. I think that this goal was accomplished by the textual analysis projects that we were required to do in all three CORE classes. Once again, the repetition seems unnecessary when we have already shown that we know how to write a textual analysis. Goal 2 states that students will be able to communicate orally in clear and coherent language appropriate to purpose, occasion, and audience. I think that public speaking is very important for college students because we will all encounter times that we are required to give presentations or proposals in front of a group of people, therefore good communication skills are necessary for any job. I do feel that CORE has taught me good communication skills that I will use in the future. Goal 3 states that students will learn to distinguish knowledge from opinion, challenge ideas, and develop reasonable strategies for belief formation. I think that this is a good goal for students and I feel that I did accomplish this goal in my CORE 202 class. Analyzing articles for ethical arguments and moral theories helped me to understand the basis behind moral judgments.
and how to make better ethical decisions in the future. Goal 4 states that students will be able to acquire, analyze, and synthesize digital and print information. I feel like this goal was emphasized in my CORE 201 class because my instructor incorporated a lot of technology into lectures and projects. Also, this goal was emphasized in CORE 202 with the assignment of a Multi-Media Project and group presentation. I think it’s important to be able to use technology and evaluate sources out there since technology has become such a huge part of our society.

Some suggestions that I would make regarding the CORE A Curriculum would be to combine the goals and have two CORE classes that all freshmen are required to take. The first CORE class would combine goals 1 and 3. This class would focus on teaching students to write effectively, develop competency in critical reading, and developing strategies for belief formation. In my CORE 103 class, I had to read *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and then I had to write a textual analysis about the book. This assignment allowed me to evaluate the author’s use of logos, ethos, and pathos in his book and it helped me to understand effective writing strategies. If this class combined reading books, writing papers, evaluating validity of sources, and being able to develop opinionated arguments, then two goals of the CORE curriculum would be met and students would have a better sense of what it means to be an effective writer.

The second CORE class could combine goals 2 and 4. This class could focus on oral communication and digital information. Students in this class would give presentations individually and in groups utilizing various types of technology. These could include PowerPoint presentations, video presentations, etc. The main focus of this class would be oral presentation, so it would be similar to a public speaking class. I think that if CORE could be cut back to two required classes instead of four and still utilize all four goals, then students will be more satisfied with the curriculum and it wouldn’t take up so much of their schedule so that it becomes a burden on their major’s curriculum.

Another suggestion would be to have CORE taught by English professors. I understand how professors from other disciplines could bring about new ideas to the CORE program, but I think that those professors are not as well equipped with an English background to be grading papers, reading logs, textual analyses, etc. This may be a problem because there may not be enough English professors to cover all the CORE classes, but if there were only two required CORE A classes, then the number of professors needed would be less than if there were four classes like the current curriculum. Overall I have had a fairly pleasant experience with CORE. At times it did seem like a burden, but overall it really reinforced what I had already learned in high school and it helped me to develop better writing and presentation skills.
Since my freshman year at Radford, I have had to take three Core Curriculum classes and all of them had some impact on my learning experience. After I was accepted I found out that Radford was trying new curriculum that resembled English classes but were not the usual English class. In high school I didn’t take any college level English courses but because I was accepted into the Honors Academy at Radford I only had to take three Core classes instead of the usual four that other incoming freshmen have to take. I really enjoyed my Core 103 class freshman year. It was taught by an English professor and I felt like my writing skills improved dramatically. We had one big research paper and an individual presentation that we had to do so writing and public speaking were incorporated in one class. For Core 201, we had the chance to pick which class we wanted to take, each Core class having a different “topic.” I chose the environmental class that was taught by a political science teacher. Learning about all the different issues related to the environment was interesting and something different than just your normal English class. We still had to write a textual analysis and give a group presentation at the end of the course. In my Core 202 class, the topic was about ethics and moral reasoning. We did group activities and presentations along with reading logs and a textual analysis. I have learned something from all of my Core classes but there is always room for improvement.

All of my Core teachers have been great teachers and were very enthusiastic about teaching and wanting the students to learn. I would have to say that having an English teacher teach the class was the most helpful for me. In all of my classes a research paper, textual analysis, reading logs, or a group presentation were all incorporated in some way. But each teacher had different expectations and guidelines for each project, which made it confusing to know how to write the paper or do the project. Having overall guidelines that are consistent for each of the projects would help students understand what they are supposed to be doing for each project and eliminate the confusion. The outcomes and expectations Radford has for the Core classes are good goals but could use some improvement.

I think instead of having to take three or four classes I think they can be combined into two classes leaving more room for other electives and major classes. The first Core class should be geared toward to freshman and it can focus on writing skills and reading to help refresh what high school taught and what college professors expect out of papers. In all of my Core classes I have had to write a research paper or a textual analysis that analyzes a certain article or topic. Both of these projects helped my writing skills along with improving my ability to find accurate sources. This would fulfill goal one of
Radford’s outcomes and expectations. The other class can focus on goals two, three, and four, which include communication skills, challenging ideas, and using technology. More projects and group presentations with different forms of technology can help improve the students’ skills. In Core 201, the class was divided into groups and given opposing topics to debate at the end of the semester. Throughout the semester we talked about each of the topics the groups would be presenting on then at the end we were able to hear both sides of the argument. This project not only helped my public speaking skills but I also had to form my own opinions about each topic and work with a group. Having the Core classes divided into a writing class and communication skills class will help students learn more. The Core Curriculum has its pros and cons but with improvement it can meet the needs of Radford’s expectations along with the students’ expectations.
Student 15
Final CORE Paper

When looking at the Core Curriculum goals and expectations it is easy to see why the program was adopted. The goals show an attempt to better develop the writing, oral communication, logical reasoning, and research skills of the Radford University students. These are very important skills to have as not only a college student but also as a successful adult. I plan on becoming a teacher and will need all of the skills in my future. I know that the goals of Core are important and respect the attempt that Radford is making through the program to provide a well rounded education. That being said, there are some aspects of Core that are slightly repetitive and could be improved.

The first goal of the Core Curriculum deals with writing skills. Core 103 and Core 201 had more focus on developing grammar, writing thesis-driven essays, and basic organization of papers than Core 202. However, they were a basic review of material that I had covered in a dual-enrollment English class in high school. By the time I made it to Core I already knew how to write papers that addressed different audiences and was capable of analyzing outside sources to determine their validity. In Core 103 and 201, one of the assignments involved writing argumentative research papers. I found each of these assignments interesting because the professors gave us guidelines and let us choose our own topics. In 201 I chose a topic relevant to teaching and gained useful information about children with ADD, it is information that I can apply to my future career. My favorite however, was the paper I wrote in Core 103. The guidelines required that we research a topic about our hometowns and present our findings to the class. My home is one of the things in my life that I care most about and I really enjoyed learning more about it. I chose to research a store in my town that is a large part of the entire county. The Floyd Country Store has music all weekend long and draws in tourists and locals to its dance floor. I chose it as a topic because it is something that my grandfather always really enjoyed and I wanted to find out more about it and share with him what I had learned, it was a great experience and turned out to be one of the best papers I have ever written. Before writing the papers in both classes we took trips to the library and sat through seminars on how to use the resources there and how to determine if an online source was credible or not. It was a useful class but sitting through it twice was a bit monotonous.

Goal 2 is even more applicable to my teaching career than goal 1, it focuses on the ability to express yourself orally in a clear and appropriate way. Core 202 has addressed this goal more than the other Core classes. They required a presentation for each class and a small amount of group discussion. Core 202 however was a class that looked at ethics in public policy and meant multiple group discussions a week. The syllabus also listed two different group presentations and projects. I am not
exuberantly fond of speaking in front of large groups of people, but the Core classes have helped with this. I can now stand up and address a class of my peers without shaking and having my voice crack. For me the knowledge presented by the curriculum about oral communication was much more beneficial in a practical since. We did not really discuss the influences on communication or effective listening, but we frequently exhibited our communication skills and I feel like that is just as important as talking about what the book says about the skills.

In my two years at Radford I have taken three Core classes and in each one we have had to write a paper that involved researching a topic. After researching that topic we then had to write an argumentative research paper pertaining to that topic. I understand that having the argumentative aspect involved is supposed to encourage critical thinking and make us contemplate why we make certain decisions. Core 103 and Core 202 had the most emphasis put on developing critical thinking skills. We had to read about and discuss fallacies and thought processes as well as ethical theories. I agree that having efficient critical thinking skills is important, but by the time I made it to college I had already been through classes that discussed making good decisions and the decision making process. I could look at problems or issues and apply previous knowledge of the issue and reasoning to determine my own solution to the problem.

Determining a valid stance on a problem often requires research and logical thinking. Core ground that into my head. With each of the three Core classes that I had to take, I had to write at least one researched paper. This was something that I was very familiar with because research is an SOL. Every year since fourth grade research has been an aspect of my educational career and it is something that I am extremely comfortable doing. I feel like other students would have also had to have done research before getting to college. However if they had not, the library and the LARC have excellent resources and workshops. Other classes also require research so I feel as though including it in the curriculum for every Core class is slightly excessive.

Overall the Core Curriculum has very good intentions. When looking at the goals and thinking about them actually being applied, it is clear that Core is a beneficial program. However, the information that is presented in the classes is very repetitive. In some aspects it is a basic review of topics taught in high school. The material also overlaps from one Core class to another. It might be better if there were fewer required Core classes or a greater amount of topics covered by Core. I think Core would be considered less of a nuisance if students only had to take one semester of it. I also think that having a pre-registration test of the skills presented in Core would be nice. Maybe have Core classes split into topics that involve the different goals that are meant to be met. That way when looking at the test
results if a person was proficient in oral communication and research then they could opt out of those classes and then take the courses that focus on writing and critical thinking. It is my belief that doing so would still meet the goals of the curriculum but would increase the rate at which students could meet the Core requirements. The students would have more positive attitudes towards the Core curriculum and would still benefit from its goals.
Final Exam

The Core curriculum has been a topic of heated discussion on Radford campus since the birth of the department. While some strongly support the curriculum, others abhor it. Though there are people on both ends of the spectrums, there are still others who neither hate it nor love it. While I have enjoyed my core classes, it certainly has been quite an inconvenience in my schedules.

The department strives to educate the students in written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, and technology/information literacy. With these as the ultimate objective, the administration has set specific goals for its students to achieve, such as demonstrating competence in: critical reading and writing composition, oratory skills, reasoning and comprehension of belief formations, and synthesizing digital and print information.

With these goals and objectives in mind, I would certainly say that all my Core classes have been thoroughly enjoyable. That being said, I would like to add that, I’m sure the pleasure of my Core classes was due to having the opportunity of taking Honors classes – which thoroughly challenged me and helped me excel in my respective Core classes. I was also pleased with being presented with a variety of different concentrations to choose from. This allowed me to select the courses that met with my preference and correlated with my major.

Another enjoyable aspect of Core has been the opportunity to engage in intellectually stimulating discussions with students who are equally knowledgeable on certain topics. This allowed for a collective growth of the student body by engaging our energies in rational analytical processes. Oral Communication is a significant aspect of the course that instructors focus on and spend a substantial amount of time on. It is not only important for students to present formal presentations in front of groups but also in informal settings such as group discussions and debates. I believe Core does promote reasoning and aids the students in developing key communication skills that are necessary in the work force. Also, the group activities allow the students in honing their interpersonal skills.

Most of these Core classes also challenge the students in improving their writing skills and developing strongly structured prose. The development of such composition skills is essential in being able to present one’s thoughts and ideas in a clear and concise manner. Along with writing, research is another significant part of the Core curriculum. Being able to research and utilizing the available tools prepare the students for the future research they will have to do for their respective majors.
While in essence, Core is a brilliant idea, there are some drawbacks to the program. One noticeable drawback that affected me was the inability to opt out of the Core program if students have equivalent AP or dual enrolment classes. I took AP and dual enrolment English and Literature classes all throughout high school, and upon admission I was informed by the advisors at Radford that it would be unnecessary for me to take any English or its equivalent in college. To my dismay, I have had to take Core 103, 201, and 202. This infuriates me as it simply puts to waste all my time, money, and effort of partaking in AP and dual enrolment classes. Since I was in the freshmen class that was forced to institute the Core curriculum, the previous classes were not required to take any such classes. One of my acquaintances who had taken AP and dual enrolment classes got her credits transferred and did not have to take any of their equivalents since she was in a year ahead of me. I am quite upset that our freshmen class was made the guinea pigs in the administration’s attempt in revamping the department. While I commend them for making the effort, I believe more thorough thought should have gone into creating the Core curriculum and it should have been implemented with meticulous precision.
The CORE Experience

After two years of studies at Radford University, I have now completed University CORE A. During this period I have heard an endless amount of criticism by both faculty and students alike, and expressed my own contempt for the program numerous times. As I reflect now, however, I can understand the objective sought by the new system, but believe it could have been better implemented.

Being an honors student, I took only three semesters of University CORE A classes, with CORE 103 taking the place of CORE 101 and CORE 102 combined. Even with one less semester than regular students, I experienced how different the classes could be even when the goal is to standardize the learning. In one class I had more writing assignments than I knew what to do with, yet in another I felt like there should have been more. Through talking with friends I’ve heard similar stories, with one jealous because he writes essays all semester while another friend watches movies all class. I’m not one to complain that I have work to do, but it seems a little unfair to force all students to take a set of classes where some get it much easier than others.

It seems appropriate to blame the issue of lopsided difficulty on the fact that each teacher has their own methods and no two will conduct a class in the same way, but this is another problem with the new CORE curriculum. It seems that the changes were not developed alongside the professors, but rather forced upon them. Each of my CORE teachers has seemed a little confused as to how the class should be taught, and the overriding purpose of the changes. Most have voiced their opinions in favor of returning to the old system, or at least to reexamine and fix what we have now.

One thing I would like to see take place in making CORE better would be better communication between the administration and faculty concerning how the program should run. It should be clearer what students should know upon completing a CORE course and through what methods they should achieve this knowledge. Staff should have more concrete training on how to teach CORE so that classes are more closely regulated across sections.

The biggest issue I see with University CORE A is the lack of certain courses on my degree that make it more difficult to transfer to another school, be admitted to pursue a graduate degree at another university, or find a job once I’m done at Radford. Many readers will see the CORE courses on it as meaningless, and pass it over for one with more particular classes like English, Ethics, or Public Speaking.
This has been one of the most outspoken complaints about the new system, and I know quite a few people who have been frustrated wondering whether or not their CORE classes would count for anything at the schools they were transferring to. I would like to see many of the same topics we go over in CORE, but in a different form much more identifiable to other establishments that allows for easier comparison.

Overall, it seems that the decision to overhaul the general education program at Radford University was made in haste. Instead of a few years of review and planning, drastic measures were taken when perhaps they didn’t need to be. Based on the feedback I’ve heard around campus, I’ve thought it was only a matter of time before the CORE curriculum was eliminated more traditional courses were restored. While I have my complaints, I am far from the biggest opponent to the CORE curriculum, but with the backlash around me I have felt that fixing the system is definitely necessary. Even without another massive change, it would do good to better organize CORE and focus in on what helps students and faculty succeed the most in this new arrangement.
Introduction

I have attended Radford University for the past two years and have taken three CORE classes. CORE 103, 201, and 202 each was supposed to focus on a particular subject that would help me throughout my college career and was supposed to be vitally important to my success. However, I found that much of what I learned, or re-learned, had been taught during two college English classes that I took in high school. During these classes we learned how to write a college paper, textual analysis papers, work in groups, and a plethora of other things.

The first CORE class I took was an introductory course to writing and oral communication and it was taught by an English professor. During this course I worked in a group, gave a speech, wrote a textual analysis paper, and wrote a persuasive paper. During my second CORE class we narrowed our topic down to the media and communication. Once again I wrote a textual analysis paper, a persuasive paper, and gave a speech. The only difference was that the class was taught by a communication and media professor that had never taught a CORE class. I am now in my final CORE class that I have to take here at Radford University and I am once again learning how to work in groups and write a textual analysis paper. The topic for this course is ethical inquiry and is being taught by an economics professor, in which this is also his first time teaching a CORE class. From my viewpoint it seems that I have taken the same class three times now and I haven’t increased my knowledge any more than when I took my college English courses in high school. However, I can see the value in having a CORE curriculum in insuring that students are prepared for classes in their major if it is done correctly.

Solutions

The first part of my solution is that the CORE program should be given back to the English department. An English class can teach a student to write a paper properly if they don’t know already. We should keep the introductory to CORE so students who haven’t learned to write a proper textual analysis or persuasive argument can do so, but we shouldn’t have to keep re-teaching them how to write one. I understand that writing and oral presentations are a very important skill to have in this day and age and they should still be taught to all students, but it should only take one class to do this. I learned the CORE objectives during my first CORE class, the other two classes merely made me repeat the process. The introductory courses of CORE would be sufficient enough to meet the learning objectives of this curriculum.
If this program is given back to the English department, then obviously the English professors will teach the course. They have already spent their careers teaching students how to write a proper paper, how to organize their thoughts on paper, and speak in front of their peers. The objectives of the CORE curriculum is to teach writing, oral communication, strategies for belief information, and synthesizing digital information; I strongly believe that English professors are simply better suited to teach these things in a more effective way than a professor from a different major.

Closing Statement

I know much of the campus is divided over these classes, and that is the reason that action needs to be taken. The program is not perfect right now but it could be more effective by condensing the curriculum down to one introductory class and giving it back to the English department. I know from personal experience that taking classes that are basically the same and are not increasing my knowledge is a waste of my time and money. I am finishing my final CORE class this semester and I know that any changes that take place will hopefully not affect me now, but I hope that the changes that occur will help students that come to Radford in the future. It is for the students of the future that I am writing for, and I hope that change is coming soon.
Student 19  
CORE 202 Final  
April 28, 2011

Final Exam: Suggestions for University CORE A Curriculum

The CORE A curriculum at Radford University has been under much discussion and debate for a while now. I am a sophomore at Radford and I am in the honors program here. Therefore, I have taken CORE 103, CORE 201, and CORE 202. In this paper, I plan to reflect on my own personal experience with the CORE curriculum and provide some suggestions that I believe would be beneficial to the CORE curriculum. I do believe that I learned information in these CORE classes; however, there are many ways that this program can be improved to benefit the students.

According to the learning outcomes and expectations of the University CORE A goals, there is a lot that the students are required to go over and learn in three or four courses. My suggestion for these goals is that they be divided up into individual classes themselves instead of incorporating all the goals into each class. My reasoning for this is because in each CORE class that I have taken they were all basically the same. There was always some form of paper, whether it was a research paper or textual analysis, an oral presentation using technology, and critical thinking. This is logical in the fact the first goal is basically grammar and composition based. The second goal is oral communication based. The third goal is critical thinking based by evaluating arguments and opinions. Finally, the fourth goal is technology and technology techniques based. If these are the goals of the core curriculum program, shouldn’t the students have to take three or four classes that each focus on one goal instead of having to take three or four that only touch on each goal a small portion of the time?

One way that these classes could be organized would be to have the students take a freshman English course. This course would satisfy the first goal. In CORE 103 my class had to create a research paper, in CORE 201 my class had to create a research paper, textual analysis, and reading logs. In the CORE 202 class that I took the students did a textual analysis and reading logs. In one class the students could be required to complete these assignments that focus on grammar, writing, and understand how to write papers that contain a thesis.

The second class could be focusing on the second goal. This course could be a public speaking course. In my CORE 103 class the students were expected to perform a speech at the end of the semester on our majors and careers and use technology. The students in my CORE 201 class were expected to give a speech using PowerPoint on a controversial issue and had small group discussions. In my CORE 202 class the students were expected to do a group presentation in which they presented a
public policy, a multimedia project in which we made an online blog on an ethical issue, and had small group discussion. All of these components could be put together in one course instead of repeating the same assignments each semester.

A third class could be a critical thinking course to satisfy the third goal. In CORE 103 my class was expected to write an argumentative paper. In CORE 201 my class focused on evaluating arguments by using ethos, pathos, and logos. In CORE 202 the students in the class that I was in were expected to evaluate decisions based on moral theories and a decision making process. I think that all of these assignments and topics could be in one class.

The last goal is about using technology and how to use technology. I think that this goal could be accomplished in each of these courses with the assignments that were previously discussed. For example in a research paper the students would need to learn how to properly cite materials obtained from a technological resource. In a presentation or multimedia project there could be a requirement for some technological involvement. In a critical thinking class the students could learn how to judge what a good source with credentials is over a source that is not very reliable.

When all of these components are combined into three or four separate courses the students begin to do the same assignments every semester. This can really burn out the students and make them lose their interest in the CORE curriculum. When each CORE professor tries to cover all the aspects they each end up only giving a little on each goal instead of a lot of information on one goal. If these classes were split up into different assignments and goals the students would hold more interest in the CORE curriculum. It is also a good idea to split up these classes because then students that took dual enrollment classes in high school would be exempt from that class hence they already know that information. I took a college English class in high school done through the local community college. When I entered Radford University, I was told that it would not count in the place of CORE 103. Therefore, I took the class CORE 103. However, when I look at my degree audit today it lists CORE 103 as an elective and my dual enrollment English from high school did count. If these classes were split up, students that had taken dual enrollment classes in high school in English or debate would be exempt. The reason for this is because I already knew how to do assignments such as the research papers and textual analysis papers. I understand the goals of the University CORE A and I agree that they are all goals that students entering college should learn. However, they need to be presented in classes that are new and different and not repeating the same assignments for the first two years of college.