

Minutes for the Called *Carolina Core Meeting*
May 31, 2016, 2:00-4:00 pm
Thomas Cooper Library, Room 204

Members Present:

Joseph Askins, Susan Beverung, Sara Corwin, Rob Dedmon, Helen Doerpinghaus (Administrative Co-Chair), Kris Finnigan (ex-officio), Augie Grant (ex-officio), Brian Habing, Chris Holcomb (Faculty Co-Chair), Manton Matthews, Alfred Moore, Ginger Nickles-Osborne (for Jim Cutsinger), Ed Munn Sanchez, Nicole Spensley (ex-officio),

Members Absent:

Pam Bowers, Ron Cox, Daniel Freedman, Andy Gillentine, James Kellogg, Kathleen Kirasic (ex-officio), Gene Luna, Chris Nesmith, Brian Shelton, Andrea Tanner,

Specialty Team Chairs Present:

David Hitchcock, Sara Keeling (for Sam Hastings), George Khushf, Adam Schor, Shelley Smith,

Specialty Team Chairs Absent:

Pat Gehrke, Mary Robinson, Francisco Sanchez, Jeff Wilson

Guests:

Beki Gettys, Clifford Leaman, Jed Lyons, Aaron Marterer, Claire Robinson, Sharon Verba

Helen Doerpinghaus presented the agendas for called meetings today and next week of the *Carolina Core* Committee. She clarified the Committee's designation as a Provost's Committee, to which members recommended by their Deans are appointed by the Provost. Decisions about curriculum and courses made by the *Carolina Core* Committee (CCC) proceed to the Faculty Senate Curricula and Courses Committee (C&C) for review and approval, then to the full Faculty Senate (FS).

Helen outlined the principles of participation for the meeting:

- Keep comments succinct (2 minutes or less)
- Everyone gets a turn
- Issues relegated to the "Parking Lot" will be addressed sometime soon (the Parking Lot is not a garbage can!).

Next Helen presented a Clear Statement of Problem, and a brief overview of the origins of the *Core*, which was launched in 2012. She commented on how much care there is for the *Carolina Core* on campus. People like the idea of the ten competencies, the fact that USC has instituted a systematic process for review and approval of *Core* courses, and the fact that *Core* applies to five campuses.

There also care for students of the *Core*. Applying the *Core* is tough for students, parents and advisors. Colleges are not necessarily advising for *Core* the same way. The Associates & Assistant Deans Council (AADC) brought this to discussion in May, and unanimously recommended that the process be simplified to the extent that if a transfer course comes in that meets the content of a *Core* course, it also shall be deemed as meeting the *Core* competencies.

The *Core* is a living curriculum. We began looking at the precursor to the *Core* 10 years ago, and much has changed since then. In 2008, the Great Recession removed funding from higher education. The number of students, and the number of transfer students are steadily increasing, as is the cost of

education. The need by parents to keep costs under control is leading to more and more students bringing transfer, AP, and IB credits. This is a subject of national attention and debate.

Already, 40% of our students are entering USC with some transfer work. Forty-two states mandate a transferable *Core*. South Carolina is not one of them. However, the state has taken some steps, such as the statewide course transfer tracking system called SCTrak instituted by CHE. Professional agencies like the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), and professional accrediting bodies are now focusing a great deal on the topic, many of them on the social justice aspect: the people with the least money suffer the most from transfer course difficulties. AACRAO, the American Council on Education (ACE), and others recommend that all universities move toward the “80/20 rule”, whereby if 80% of content is equivalent, a course should be accepted in transfer.

Where are we at USC? We agree that all students should receive the “native” experience, but we foresee the number of student of students and of student transfers continuing to increase. We also have a higher Pell Grant ratio here. And we now have standing *Carolina Core* Committee. Where we are in 2016 is not where we were in 2007.

Chris Holcomb noted that this is a local problem, as we desire to preserve academic integrity of CC. We agree we need to make *Core* policies more transparent.

Brian Habing described how ARP Chair Doug Meade and he worked on a solution to the overlay course transfer problem. The best solution in their view was to create a new course English 103, which was the same as ENGL 102, but ENGL 102 would be the course without the INF component. For every overlay, we should add a new course (higher) number, with the higher course number having both components of the overlay. Another alternative would be to add suffix or prefix to overlay course number, for example: STAT 112 would be just ARP, STAT 112i would be both ARP and INF. Beyond this, we could turn to articulation agreements with the technical colleges, like the one we have with Midlands Tech.

Jed Lyons also favors the new course number idea, with the overlay being the higher number. He also reminded the group of the already existing list of 86 universally transferable courses.

Chris wondered if it would be counterintuitive to add more courses to the *Core* list. Helen asked what the ramifications would be of adding twelve more numbers.

Cliff Leamon mentioned the issue is most difficult for POLI 201 and ENGL 102, where advisors see the most requests for transfer credit. Ed Munn Sanchez, noting the unique circumstances of Honors College advisors, added that the same difficult transfer issues didn’t necessarily exist for the VSR competency.

George Khushf argued that the problem for transfer students is not those courses that are only VSR. The problem arises for overlay courses that include a VSR component, Engineering Ethics, for example, as it is very unlikely that Ethics courses from other units would count.

Aaron Marterer alluded to the difficulties with changing course numbers, in that it would take 5-7 years for old numbers to fully cycle out of student records.

Helen wondered if the CCC should prohibit any more overlays, and simply add twelve new numbers to match the twelve overlays that we have

Cliff worried that doing so would lead us into a deep rabbit hole, though not an untenable one. George said we could require that anytime a new overlay is proposed in the future, proposers should have second course/number already identified.

Helen was concerned what this would mean for a brand new overlay course – would we need two additional numbers – one for the overlay, and one new number for each competency component?

For Jed, the 80/20 rule is a whole lot clearer if considered in terms of course content: you have a list of ten topics, and if eight are covered by the transfer course, you're OK. But is it much more difficult to apply 80/20 to Learning Outcomes. We shouldn't throw away the *Core* speech component, for example; if a course appears on a student's transcript, it ought to mean the same thing for all students. Helen asked whether he would be unwilling to sacrifice that principle, if the INF component were only 20%, to which Jed responded yes.

Aaron commented on the variety of ways advisors may interpret a course. Given that the responsibility of determining degree applicability rests with colleges, maintaining the separation between content and *Core* will perpetuate inconsistencies that already exist between colleges.

Rob Dedmon stated that consistency is imperative for whoever is doing transfer evaluations of courses for colleges. Decision-making needs to be at a higher level in a college than the advisor. The bigger issue is social justice. If a program requires forty courses, a freshman student can complete them all here. But those who took courses elsewhere that don't count towards the *Core* Learning Outcomes are forced to take more courses. This is the tug-and-pull that all advisors feel.

Adam Schor noted that we're asking transfer students to take unusual things, very different from the courses they are bringing in. One solution is to multiply the opportunities to take these courses, i.e., create more *Core* courses.

Helen observed that this brings up the notion of moving elements of *Core* into the unit majors. Every college probably already has an INF-type course. Joseph Askins was hired by the Library to work on embedding the INF into major courses. Joseph argued that the major is the appropriate place to embed the INF competency. Adding INF into the majors will be relatively straightforward fix, because most majors already have suitable courses. However this is not a short-term solution.

Beki Gettys asked if this wasn't the original intent of overlay courses, to do be embedded into majors. Brian responded that integrative were set up that way, but overlays were always going to require approval by two Specialty Teams. Helen recalled in the original *Core* discussions that then Provost Mark Becker set the general education credit hour maximum at 31 hours; however faculty felt strongly that VSR, CMS and INF needed to be part of the *Core*. Beki commented that the Library is seeing lots of students and gaining these skills in other courses.

Adam reminded Committee members that at present all such courses are supposed to be teachable to students of any sort, and offered every semester (lower level). He advocated removing these stipulations for VSR, INF and CMS, so as to enable upper division courses to receive these *Core* designations. Ed remarked that Honors College students have the curricular flexibility to use higher division courses to count for the *Core*. He felt that locking all three competencies into freshmen lower level courses is problematic. INF, he agreed, students need as early in their curriculum as possible. But VSR is helpful to have later on, when students approach it from a more mature perspective. CMS they should have by the time they leave USC. These three requirements exist in different timeframes. Sharon Verba felt that INF is better in the middle. Brian however was concerned about moving these competencies into all majors. It doesn't work in STAT major courses. Ed noted the political problem of trying to prevail in telling departments where competencies fit into their courses.

Jed made the point that we can seek creative ways to embed competencies, but it doesn't address the transferability problem right now.

Sara Corwin agreed, noting that transferability is exactly what we are missing. She understood the social justice problem, and argued that our goal is to not penalize students at a disadvantage already. Are we going to land on the side of saying our *Core* is better than anyone else's, or on the side of social justice in the finance issues? Telling students they must take more courses and pay more money makes no sense. We need to tell students their courses count.

Alfred Moore posed a hypothetical question to the group: If you have a VSR course which is not an exact transfer, but meets Learning Outcomes, do you all accept it as a transfer or not?

Sara said she refers to the Registrar transfer table, or requests custom reviews. Timelines are an issue, and one can always make exceptions. Renumbering overlay courses just shifts the problem.

Cliff is firmly on the side of protecting the integrity of the degree. But he feels it is opening a can of worms, making a case that our *Core* is better. We can't control it across campus; he doesn't think we can protect integrity.

Manton Matthews asked if Midlands Tech were to create a new ENGL 103 course to transfer to our new ENGL 103, would we have to accept it? Several thought probably so, according to law. Helen observed that not all technical colleges are created equal. If one says their course contains the INF competency, we have to accept it. But Jed noted that ENGL 103 would not be on the list of university transferrable courses.

George noted the problem of courses developed as overlays having names that are sound like transfer course names, but are not similar in content. Faculty here have creatively devised unique new courses. Integrity does not equal quality. There won't necessarily transfer equivalencies for them.

Chris asked about the process of adding new courses/course numbers, and it was explained that the departments would have to propose them. They would be vetted through the online approval system (APPS) through the department, College, the CCC Specialty Team(s), C&C, and then full Faculty Senate. Ed said renumbering would confirm what we've been doing all along: we think these three things (VSR, IND, CMS) are imperative enough that you need to take it or an extra course here at USC. Helen said but if we think those things are key, and try to find a way to fit them in, it doesn't change the problem. We still make students take extra hours.

Cliff argued that there are wide differences in advisement practices between departments/colleges. Some are rigid; some are not. They are not 100% uniform. The main question is regarding transfer courses is, are *Core* values essentially met? Ed posed the question, are we willing to have transfer students who have a different *Core* experience from the native experience? Helen queried whether we should simply reduce the size of *Core* to "31 clean hours" – should we take CMS, VSR and INF completely out? Ed protested that that would reopen the whole *Core*. Helen argued that what this meeting is about is reopening the whole *Core*. Times are different now: Student debt is higher; there is a new funding model. The humans paying for this are not happy with what they are getting. The *Core* is a living curriculum.

Adam asked whether we might allow students to overlay only two of three competencies, e.g., have students take two of them that could be met in combination with other things (not necessarily lower division courses) approved for the *Core*, like a major requirement. Departments could consider what courses in a major might convey that skill and meet that requirement. It is easy for INF; it would be harder for CMS, and not possible in some majors.

Alfred pleaded for us to revisit the transfer policy to make it more flexible, simple and transparent. Helen acknowledged that a major implementation failure of the *Core* is its lack of simplicity. Aaron commented on Clemson's practices, which preclude one-for-one equivalent transfers of key general education courses. We're not the same institution as Clemson, but there was a time where we didn't permit Sumter-granted grade forgiveness instances at Columbia. Clemson may not have to stand behind policies like we do with many campuses.

Helen read from CCC member Ron Cox's email with regard to the Lancaster faculty full support for complete transferability. She argued that we shouldn't be systematically failing our students. She summarized the discussion thus far, noting three different strands of thought:

- 1) transfer students must adhere to our *Core*
- 2) we should accept transfer courses fully for both content and Learning Outcomes
- 3) we should embed CC components (VSR, INF, CMS) at higher level in major courses.

Augie Grant asked Aaron how complicated it is in student records to track *Core* competencies. Aaron pointed to the fact that the newly implemented DegreeWorks degree audit system already does this. Helen queried how often exceptions occurred. Jed said that Engineering students have to petition for it, resulting in around 20-30 petitions per year out of 3000 students. Brian said three-fourths of STAT advisees have some exceptions, though most were not in the *Core*. Cliff said more than 50% of Music students did. Claire Robinson said thus far there was very little consistency to gauge by. Sara said 30-40% had transfer course exceptions regarding the overall *Core*; there was a smaller percentage of overlay exceptions, even across colleges. Rob said it depends on the type of exception. In Education they have been pretty strict, requiring one stand-alone course from INF, CMS or VSR. Education does not grant INF for ENGL 102 transfer. There are about 3% exceptions among Learning Outcomes for overlays.

Ed thought students wouldn't be kept from completing their degrees if we're stricter. Helen disagreed, noting how many people are calling her with problems. Loren Knapp calls, needing seats for Arts & Sciences students in a 1-hour course. Ed has strong preference for decoupling the three requirements – VSR, INF, and CMS – from the *Core*. He felt this was an easier problem to solve than having transfer numbers that don't match. He suggested we could use USC Connect, portfolio options, and other creative ways to solve the problem. The current practice is just causing confusion for advisors – we need to make advising simpler and doable.

Chris wondered if this doesn't just kick the can down the road. It doesn't help the student who says, "I took ENGL 102, and it still doesn't count." Others asked whether we need to rethink how we do ENGL 102, and INF, and whether transfer students should have a different experience. Ed argued that every student at USC needs to have the same experience. Jed said he just needed DegreeWorks to work, without worrying about portfolios or extras being introduced onto student records. He noted that many students make decision the decision whether or not to come to USC based on our requirements. Cliff commented that if advisors don't understand it, students won't.

Aaron asked if there were some other way students can show they've met competencies. Helen mentioned that LIBR 101 administrators do pre- and post-testing. Aaron remarked that liberal exceptions seem to be made for AIU, but not INF. Jed noted that the concept of "exceptions" was defined differently, and could mean course substitutions. Rob said that in Education, allowing one transfer course to meet two requirements was very rare. George commented that with VSR, a distinctive competency was being met, one tied to classical ideals. Through the overlay course concept, efficiency was introduced to try to double up creatively in certain courses. Now if the competency requirement is removed, it makes it too easy. The mechanism used to solve the problem shouldn't eliminate the competency.

What if we went back to 31 clean hours, wondered Helen: eliminate INF, VSR and CMS, and let the colleges pick them up where they want to. Would this fix the problem? Sara felt it would add hours, for those who want to change majors. Ed stated that this would change the nature of the institution. It tells students “we don’t demand competency in ethics, information literacy, and speech.” This makes substantive difference. It’s a mistake to eliminate these three. Jed just wants *Core* course numbers to be the same for all students. Brian noted how STAT establishes equivalencies that apply *Core* learning outcomes, using STAT 002T. Aaron explained that such courses as “00IT” are built only in equivalency tables, not in the bulletin or course catalogue. These are considered “pseudo-courses”, and are not real course numbers; T=transfer. The Registrar’s staff have not been able to sit with everyone to build *Core* competencies, as they have with STAT.

Sara asked what advisors should do in the meantime about transfers, which are confusing and costly. Say we renumber overlays, but also set up a one-hour course INF, and a one-hour course VSR. In fact, Computer Science and Engineering already have a one-hour VSR course. Helen expressed concern that this was reintroducing complexity, and Cliff agreed, arguing that the *Core* was designed to simplify and make it easier for students to graduate. It should be universal. We have so many components to be mindful of in advising, with major requirements, college requirements, the *Core*, etc.

Helen considered calling for a vote. Brian wondered if was necessary to have this resolved by Fall, given how long it took for the problem to become so complex. Helen replied that we need not vote today, but soon. Aaron, agreed, noting that the variability in college practices will continue until we resolve the transfer issue. The immediate timeline is that the next C&C meeting is Aug.15, and a long term solution needs to be in place by Fall 2017. Chris said he did not feel comfortable voting today; he would like to give it a week. Nicole Spensley suggested viewing the problem in terms of two issues: either overlays are not important enough that all students should take them, or we feel they are sufficiently important to make students pay extra to take them.

Helen asked if it would help for CC members to see data on transfers to POLI 201 and ENGL 102, and AP/IB credit, to better understand how many students would be affected. Jed mentioned that 1500 of 5000 were INF-eligible, in Engineering. Helen asked if preserving the integrity of *Core* by having transfer students have same experiences as regular students more important; or is the number of people impacted financially and dollar costs of taking additional courses what matters more?

George suggested we could identify certain courses that are consistently taught similarly elsewhere, such as POLI 201. The VSR Specialty Team had a fairly broad consensus that POLI 201 always covered the VSR component. Brian asked whether the same was true for AP credit, and George responded that AP coverage still seemed to work for VSR. Ed noted that his son took ENGL 102 in high school recently, and he doesn’t get INF competency. Joseph said if a particular college doesn’t want students to pay for extra courses, they could identify a course in discipline that will cover the competency, while counting toward a major requirement. Brian wondered whether a tuition rebate for one hour might be offered to compensate for having to take extra courses. Ed mentioned that there are “0” credit course that might be a possibility.

Alfred reminded the group that students can’t see DegreeWorks until they register, and reiterated his plea to revisit the transfer policy to ensure it factors in the items discussed today. Aaron said he could run a 2015 report on the attribute “INF-eligible” courses.

Helen urged participants to read the “Transfer Friendly USC” handout for the next meeting. Forty-two states are all going in one direction. We are enrollment dependent. We want to stand the test of time, and we don’t want to be operating in a bubble.

Chris agreed, noting that this is a very complex issue. He wished everyone “Godspeed!” in their contemplation of the issues until next meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Kris Finnigan

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