

Revising the Common Curriculum

The new Common Curriculum – Fall 2013

Loyola University New Orleans inaugurated a new set of Common Curriculum requirements in Fall 2013. The work of many faculty over several years, this new core **totaled 57-58 credit hours** distributed across requirements in the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and arts:

Introductory Common Curriculum – 21 credits

First-Year Seminar	3 credits
ENGL T122 Critical Reading & Writing	3 credits
MATH T122 Math Models or MATH A115 Introduction to Finite Mathematics or MATH A257 Calculus I	3 credits
HIST T122 Global History I or HIST T124 Global History II	3 credits
PHIL T122 Philosophy of the Human Person	3 credits
RELS T122 Religions of the World or RELS T124 Christianity & Society	3 credits
SCIE T129 Investigating Nature	3 credits

Advanced Common Curriculum – 24-25 hours

Writing about Literature	3 credits
History	3 credits
Philosophy	3 credits
Religious Studies	3 credits
Natural Science in Context	3 credits
Engaging in Science: Lab	1 credit
Social Science	3 credits
Creative Arts and Cultures	2-3 credits
Foundational Ethics	3 credits

Foreign Language – up to 12 hours¹

A100	3 credits
A101	3 credits
A200	3 credits
A201	3 credits

Requirements across the Curriculum (RACs)²

Catholic Tradition	0 credits
Diversity	0 credits
Premodern	0 credits

By the conclusion of the Fall 2013 semester, the Foreign Language requirement was reduced to 6 hours³ and the implementation of the Engaging in Science: Lab requirement was deferred for a period of two years pending further evaluation of the feasibility of adequately staffing a sufficient number of laboratory-based courses to meet demand. **These revisions resulted in a decrease in the total number of credit hours of required Common Curriculum from 57-58 to 51.**

Elective-challenged majors

During the revision process the Common Curriculum Implementation Task Force (CCITF) and its successor, the Standing Committee on the Common Curriculum (SCCC), developed provisions that allowed for academic programs that require substantial coursework in the major to apply for so-called “elective-challenged” status and a corresponding reduction in their total Common Curriculum burden. Degree programs are eligible for elective-challenged status if they (1) allow for 12 or fewer General Elective credit hours and (2) can show that additional content in the major and/or a reduction in general education coursework is necessary to conform to accreditation principles and/or best practices in the discipline. Most academic programs in

¹ Students’ placement determined by a placement test; all students must complete or test out of A201. Students placing above A100 have the balance of Foreign Language credits reassigned as General Elective hours.

² RACs double dip with Advanced Common Curriculum, Major/Minor, and General Elective courses and therefore do not require additional credit hours.

³ The A201 requirement was superseded by a so-called “Placement +1 requirement”: students complete language coursework at the level in which they place through the placement test plus the next course in the 100/101/200/201 sequence beyond placement up to A201. Students placing at or above A201 have the balance of Foreign Language credits reassigned as General Elective hours.

business, music, and the natural sciences applied for, and were granted, elective-challenged status, resulting in reductions ranging from as few as 3 credits of Common Curriculum coursework up to 27 in the most extreme case (Music Therapy).

As of Fall 2014, 55.9% of first-year students and 52.8% of sophomores were enrolled in elective-challenged majors and were therefore not required to complete the full 51-hour Common Curriculum:

<i>% students enrolled in elective-challenged majors^A</i>	<i>First-Year</i>	<i>Sophomore</i>
<i>Humanities and Natural Sciences</i>	42.4%	40.5%
<i>Social Sciences</i>	0%	0%
<i>Business</i>	100%	100%
<i>Music and Fine Arts</i>	85.8%	76.5%
Total	55.9%	52.8%

These totals are likely to increase in the coming years. Four of the five new degree programs approved thus far during the 2014-2015 academic year for debut in Fall 2015 require only 39 hours of Common Curriculum work.

Total Common Curriculum hours required for a degree program currently range from 24 (Music Therapy) to 54 (Physics Liberal Arts, which substitutes 4-hour non-Common Curriculum math and science courses and labs for 3-hour Common Curriculum math and science courses, thereby increasing the total number of Common Curriculum hours).

In the **College of Humanities and Natural Sciences**, most humanities degrees require 51 hours of Common Curriculum coursework. Those that call for 45 or 48 (e.g., Philosophy, English) substitute courses in the major for Common Curriculum courses, thereby reducing the Common Curriculum total; these programs were not counted toward the percentages indicated in the table above. The outliers are the Teacher Certification degrees, which reduce the Common Curriculum to 42 hours. Most natural science degrees permit students to “double dip” the Foundational Ethics course with either the Advanced Common Curriculum Philosophy requirement or the Advanced Common Curriculum Religious Studies Requirement. Several science degrees also allow students to substitute programming language for foreign language courses.

In the **College of Social Sciences**, all degrees require 51 hours of Common Curriculum coursework.

⁴ Figures based on data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. See “Enrollment by Major with Registered Hours,” September 30, 2014, <http://academicaffairs.loyno.edu/sites/academicaffairs.loyno.edu/files/pf5%20enrollment-by-major-wth-reg-hrs-final-9%2030-1.pdf>.

In the **College of Business**, all degree programs require 39 hours of Common Curriculum coursework. Students complete all 21 hours of the Introductory Common Curriculum and 18 hours of Advanced Common Curriculum coursework, including Foreign Language, selected from a menu of choices.

In the **College of Music and Fine Arts**, all School of Music degree programs require 39 hours of Common Curriculum coursework. Students complete all 21 hours of the Introductory Common Curriculum and 18 hours of Advanced Common Curriculum coursework, including Foreign Language, selected from a menu of choices. The exceptions are Music Education, which requires 30, and Music Therapy, with 24. Most degree programs in Art and Theater currently require 51, but all of these programs are planning to request reductions to 39 hours; the new Bachelor of Design degree requires 39 hours, as do all of the recently approved degree programs that will become available in Fall 2015 (Digital Filmmaking, Popular and Commercial Music, Musical Theater).

The **Office of Professional and Continuing Studies** recently requested a reduction for Evening Division programs to 30 hours; that request was approved. Evening Division students are *not* counted in the percentages reported above.

College restructuring

The restructuring of the undergraduate colleges will place all of the degree programs with a 51-hour Common Curriculum requirement into the new Loyola College/College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, effective Fall 2016.

All College of Business programs will continue to require 39 hours.

Nearly all of the programs in the successor to the College of Music and Fine Arts will require 39 hours once the remaining visual art and theater degrees adjust to 39 hours.

The Communications degrees provide an exception; if they are placed in a new college of music and media, they will be the only programs with a 51-hour Common Curriculum in that college and outside of the new liberal arts college.

The Loyola Core

In light of the plan to restructure the colleges, enrollment trends that show a majority of students enrolling in elective-challenged majors, and the lack of commonality in Loyola's current general education program, the following proposals are offered:

Recommendation #1: Rename the Common Curriculum the Loyola Core.

The adjective “common” poses several challenges. (1) The current core curriculum is not common to every degree program. Indeed there is a high degree of variability in core requirements, especially at the Advanced level. (2) “Common” has pejorative connotations, including the suggestion that Loyola’s general education program is unexceptional. (3) “Common Curriculum” bears an uncomfortable resemblance to “Common Core,” the much-maligned set of K-12 education standards recently implemented by the federal government. Some students and their families mistake our core curriculum for the college version of an unpopular program.

By contrast, “Loyola Core” signals both the rootedness of our core curriculum in the spirituality of Saint Ignatius Loyola and its centrality (core < Latin *cor*, “heart”) within the Loyola educational experience.

Recommendation #2: Establish a standard 39-hour core curriculum for all undergraduate degree programs.⁵

Foundation Courses (*must be completed by all students during the first year*)

- o First-Year Seminar 3 hours*
- o Critical Reading and Writing 3 hours*
- o Math Models 3 hours*

Knowledge Courses (*includes disciplinary and multi-/interdisciplinary coursework*)

- o Global History 3 hours*
- o Philosophy of the Human Person 3 hours*
- o Religious Studies 3 hours*
- o Natural Science 3 hours*
- o Writing about Literature 3 hours*
- o Creative Arts and Cultures 3 hours
- o Social Science 3 hours

Values Courses (*PHIL T122 or RELS T122/T124 is the prerequisite for all Values courses*)

- o Ethics 3 hours*
- o Catholic Traditions 3 hours
- o Diversity 3 hours

39 hours total

** currently required of all degree programs except MUTY and MUED*

⁵ Exceptions: Music Education, Music Therapy, and Evening Division Programs.

In this scheme:

- **The distinction between Introductory and Advanced courses is abandoned.** These have never been meaningful categories. First-semester students are currently able to enroll in Advanced courses in Social Science and Creative Arts and Cultures that have no prerequisites, while students in many degree programs are only able to complete Introductory coursework during the junior year. This model replaces those designations with three new headings:
 - Foundation courses emphasize skills necessary to succeed in all college coursework.
 - Knowledge course expose students to disciplinary and multidisciplinary modes of inquiry.
 - Values courses develop students' appreciation for, and commitment to, Loyola's Catholic, Jesuit mission and the tenets of liberal education.

- **The RACs are discontinued.** RAC designations have to date been inconsistently applied to courses. Requests for RAC designations are difficult to track through our current course proposal system. The RACs also place additional burdens on already strained degree programs in business and the natural sciences, where there are fewer options for satisfying these requirements within the major.

- **In lieu of the RACs, Catholic Tradition and Diversity become standalone interdisciplinary courses.** Departments across campus would be eligible to contribute courses that meet established criteria for these multi-disciplinary requirements.

Recommendation #3: Colleges may develop additional college-, division-, or program-level requirements as appropriate.

The College of Business and the College of Music and Fine Arts already require students to complete college- and program-level coursework in addition to their Common Curriculum and major courses. The new Loyola College/College of Liberal Arts could add additional requirements in history, philosophy, religious studies, foreign language, and natural science, especially for elective-rich programs in the humanities and social sciences, where increased breadth in these disciplines is consistent with the aims of liberal education.

Conclusions

The curriculum proposed does not differ significantly from current practice. Whereas now we begin with a 51-hour core from which we subtract we would instead start with a 39-hour program and add.

A streamlined and standardized core curriculum will have the following additional benefits:

- A standard core across degree programs will facilitate efficient course scheduling and general education assessment. Both efforts are currently hampered by the great variety and unpredictability of existing Common Curriculum requirements.
- This revised core will dramatically simplify existing Degree Program Course Lists (DPCLs), thereby enabling more effective advising. This revision may also improve time to degree completion.
- In support of the new strategic plan, we can explore incorporating experience-based learning in the core. For instance, all First-Year Seminars could include an appropriate introductory-level experiential learning component. In a similar way we could require all Diversity courses to include a more substantial experiential component (e.g., service learning, community engagement, or collaborative research) in order to integrate key mission-related content with our institutional values.
- We could also take this opportunity to revisit the idea of a disciplinary capstone experience for all students. This Senior Seminar would include more advanced discipline-based experiential learning as well as preparation for graduation/transition with a special emphasis on reflection on moral and ethical values in the context of students' major areas of study and professional formation. We might even consider incorporating senior-level extra-curricular activities (e.g., a retreat) as part of the capstone.