

Open Letter Concerning the Curriculum Review

December 5, 2001

Father Jenkins
300 Main Building
Notre Dame, IN 46556
cc: Curriculum Review Committee

Dear Father Jenkins:

As the Student Union Senate Committee on Academic Affairs, we are interested ⁱⁿ voicing students' concerns throughout the curriculum review process. Therefore, in order to aid you and your committee, we have started gathering student input in regards to the curriculum. We started this process with a focus group, gathering students from all of the colleges to discuss the things that they liked and the things they wanted changed in the curriculum. We followed this focus group with a survey administered in the dining hall, asking students' for their views on requirements, experiential learning, and whether they are interested in a schedule with four as opposed to five classes. Throughout this time we have also been in close contact with the students in our dorms, asking them for input as well. We have attached the most notable points gathered in the survey and the focus group session.

As a result of the information we have gathered and the discussions we have had with committee members, we have decided to narrow the focus of our research to the following five areas:

Experiential learning: We believe that students who compliment their classroom studies with practical first-hand experience should receive academic credit for their endeavors. Having met with various faculty, administrators and students, we feel that there needs to be greater clarification and consistency in identifying which experiential opportunities are worthy of academic credit and what procedures are necessary to obtain such credit.

Course variety: Students generally support the requirements that Notre Dame has in place, but students also desire greater selection within the established requirements. This is a particular concern in the area of theology. Many students at Notre Dame come from Catholic high schools and have already studied the Bible. For these students, Theology 100, with its focus on Biblical foundations, is nothing more than a review. One option would be to offer courses on Catholic Social Teaching and prayer, in addition to Theology 100. Another concern is that many courses are only open to students in that particular major. For example, many arts and letters students would like to be able to take business courses currently only open to business majors.

First Year Registration: After listening to Dr. Light's lecture and the concerns voiced by numerous first year students, the Academic Affairs committee has chosen to address the way that freshmen register for their fall classes. In particular, the seminar course registration is a focus of the committee. Students expressed concerns indicating that the lack of variety, availability, and, most importantly, information about seminar courses hurt their seminar experiences. Moreover, often students are not given the freedom of a year of exploration, but rather are forced to begin the class sequences within their major during their freshman year. If students do not choose to specialize at the beginning of their studies, it is very difficult for them to fit in all of the requirements in four years. Therefore, the high number of major requirements in combination

with general requirements often undermines the First Year of Studies' intention that every student gets a broad, liberal education.

Class schedule: Knowing that the committee is seriously considering changing the course load each semester from five classes to four classes, our committee is also examining this issue. As of yet, the students have not voiced a strong preference for one system or another. This, however, this is most likely due to the fact that students are not aware of this possibility or the definitive shape that a four class semester would take. This leads us to believe that it is essential that we have an opportunity to gather input from a more informed student body on this issue. This will take more time, though, considering that we must first get students to understand this possibility and then get the ensuing feedback. In the meantime, we would simply suggest a few things. First, the university requirements must be reduced in order to fit a four class semester. In addition to this, the amount of credits for classes and that are needed for graduation must be reconfigured to fit this type of semester. Lastly, if there is one less class per semester, the four classes must be worthwhile to students, meaning that lower class sizes, enriching curriculums and more student/teacher interaction will be a must.

Integrating different departments:

We believe that it is important to connect the knowledge learned in various departments. Because every student is required to take the same core curriculum, we feel that the departments should try to utilize this base of common knowledge and further incorporate other disciplines in their classes. For example, students suggested that CORE classes serve to unify disciplines within Arts & Letters. CORE classes could be offered outside of Art and Letters as well, in order to give students in other colleges a broader, more liberal arts education. It has also been proposed that more classes be offered like medical ethics, which provides students with the opportunity to fulfill a second philosophy requirement that applies to the domain of the sciences.

Therefore, we are going to continue looking into these five issues, gathering together students' thoughts into the form of a proposal for your committee. We are willing to shift the focus of our research as new issues come up. Above all, we want to guarantee that students have a voice in this process and are very anxious to help you and your committee.

Thank you.

Sincerely:

Patrick Hallahan
Student Union Senate Committee on Academic Affairs

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