

HUMANITIES

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The Humanities have always been about transformation, and that, ultimately, is what any good education—but particularly a Catholic Jesuit education—is all about. Santa Clara’s Mission Statement parallels the goals of the Humanities perfectly in its combination of the intellectual and affective aspects of an education aimed at the “whole” person. Our mission is to provide an “educational environment that integrates rigorous inquiry and scholarship, creative imagination, reflective engagement with society, and a commitment to fashioning a more humane and just world” within a “humanistic orientation” while fulfilling an “institutional responsibility as a voice of reason and conscience in society...primarily through discovering, communicating, and applying knowledge.” The study of history, art, literature, philosophy, religion, language, and culture—whether native or foreign, mainstream or marginalized - sharpens (and changes) minds, opens hearts, emboldens souls. The Humanities are the very heart of a curriculum that teaches and reinforces rational, critical, and self-critical thinking about the world and one’s place in it and of an education that both encourages an empathetic response to the human condition and instills a desire to act upon that response. It is what students of the twenty-first century must possess.

The current moment for reconsidering what the humanities might contribute to the renewal of the university’s curriculum is well-chosen. To judge only from the latest meeting of the MLA, a sense of crisis pervades those disciplines in the humanities that have been most heavily influenced over the last two decades by postmodernist theoretical reflections. As richly productive as that theorizing and its applications have been for multiplying perspectives on human creativity and for undermining claims to absolute truths and immutable meanings, even former proponents of the postmodernist turn in literature and philosophy have recently called for new avenues of critical inquiry that respond in compelling ways to issues beyond the deconstructive intellectual project of postmodernism. There is nothing unusual about a demand for relevance in the humanities. Since their invention in the ancient world, humanistic studies have always thrived on a creative response to current societal needs. The humanities engage by their very nature what each new generation considers relevant to the world at hand. Our own university-wide discussion of how to reach our goals as a Jesuit and Catholic institution preparing a diverse student body for the twenty-first century simply reenacts the basic tenet of the humanities. Fortunately, we do so from a position of intellectual strength rather than in a state of intellectual crisis.

Our decision over a decade ago to devise a core curriculum requirement that recognizes the centrality of Western Culture to a Catholic and Jesuit perspective on the world appears in hindsight to have positioned us well for a curriculum designed to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century in a global age. Our core requirements aim to preserve the Western tradition while deliberately fostering the self-critical spirit within it through courses on ethics, gender and ethnic studies, comparative and non-western religions, the environment, and the histories and cultures of peoples outside of the United States and Europe, to name only the most obvious components of the core that challenge students to consider alternative points of view. We already have in

place a curriculum oriented to the global challenges of the twenty-first century. Our common effort to renew the humanities curriculum merely presumes that we can do even better.

We in the Humanities are eager to review and renew our curriculum in light of the University's mission to serve the needs of our students and the larger community with increasing effectiveness. The challenge is to educate students with the skills and passions that will serve them throughout their lives, lives that will extend well past the middle of this century. Outside of particular majors and minors (which are currently being assessed by individual departments), the Humanities reach students primarily through the core and programs for integrated studies across disciplines. Our "thought paper," then, offers possible curricular suggestions in these two areas.

Revised Core Within The Purview Of The Humanities

- 1) Religious Studies requirement. One of the Religious Studies requirements should specifically address the challenges of living a faith-based life in a multicultural world in which an intolerant fundamentalism (in all shapes and sizes) increasingly evokes conflict and stifles dissent.
- 2) Ethics requirement. We recommend a university-wide discussion about how this important component of the core curriculum might be redesigned to elevate ethical consciousness on campus without losing the intellectual rigor associated with the study of ethics in the disciplines of philosophy and religion.
- 3) Western Culture requirement. While the central task of this requirement remains an examination of the highest ideals of Western culture through studying its past and present institutions, ideas, protocols, and creative productions, this requirement should also include an understanding of the historical encounters and interactions between ideals of the West and belief systems of non-Western cultures and peoples. The perennial questions in Western thought provide the lens through which to take up the pressing issues of our day, including the dynamic interchange and contestation associated with a globalized twenty-first century. More courses designed to examine such encounters could provide an important sub-theme within the Western Culture requirement.
- 4) Global Culture requirement. More courses should be introduced to cover areas of the world crucial to issues of both poverty and power in the twenty-first century. Knowledge of the histories, societies and cultures of China, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa constitute essential understanding for the global leadership and global civic conscience that we expect from graduates of Santa Clara.
- 5) Third Writing Requirement. This requirement should be redefined as "discipline-based" and offered in specific upper-division courses in a student's major. Each discipline offers critical questions, stances, and a particular discourse; each discipline demands organizational skills, writing tasks, and formats specific to that discipline. Since writing is a way of discovering and thinking through ideas, a discipline-based writing requirement would facilitate learning in an area that students, having chosen their majors, would consider relevant and important. This last point is a particularly critical consideration as we seek

to connect the education that our students receive with what they themselves value and need to shape the worlds that they will enter after graduation.

- 6) Language requirement. If we truly expect our students to engage empathetically and creatively with people of other cultures either in the U.S. or abroad, they will need speaking facility in at least one foreign language. This might be obtained by requiring all students to take one additional course beyond the current three course introductory sequence that would focus on conversational skills. The university might offer intensive language courses during the summer. Students who study abroad could be encouraged, whenever possible, to take some of their courses in a foreign language. More students should be encouraged to take an entire year of study abroad, but only if their chosen course of instruction is undertaken in a foreign language.
- 7) While recognizing that the extensive core curriculum required of all our undergraduates constitutes a valued and distinctive part of a Santa Clara education, we recommend that the university consider ways to simplify and consolidate the core requirements so as to enhance the opportunities for students to select, in addition to their major, an integrated course of study from among an expanded selection of minors offered at the university. A somewhat simplified core curriculum would also facilitate plans for studying abroad.

Integrated Studies Across Disciplines And Their Rationales

In response to a number of recommendations in the thematic thought papers for a suite of related courses that confront pressing problems of the twenty-first century, we would like to propose the addition of three new minors to the university curriculum. We intend our suggestions to inspire reflection on other possible groupings of courses across disciplines that would provide a structured curriculum for the application of humanistic values and critical reflection to knowledge that exceeds the expertise of any single scholarly discipline. Students need to care about what they study and see its relevance to their own lives. We believe that thematic minors will help to give our undergraduates a sense of purposeful, ethical direction in pursuing their academic work.

Islamic Studies

All the issues raised by the various thematic thought papers related to the environment, poverty, diversity, spiritual inclusiveness, and an active citizenry point to the necessity of establishing a minor in Islamic Studies at Santa Clara University. Around the globe, Islamic populations live in geographic areas seriously affected by such natural environmental disasters as drought, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. Muslim communities figure among the most impoverished peoples of the world. For over two decades, Pope John Paul II has made Catholic overtures to the Islamic peoples of the world a signature feature of his spiritual message. Across our nation, the African American community has been particularly open to conversion to some form of Islamic faith. The Bay area contains a diverse immigrant community of Muslims from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Some people predict that conflicts between Christianity and Islam will shape international conflicts in the 21st century in the way that conflicts between communism and capitalism shaped the 20th. If we hope to graduate students who understand the most vexing social, political, economic, environmental and theological issues that confront our contemporary world

including our local communities, some of them must be familiar with the complexities of Islamic civilization and its diverse manifestations locally and around the globe. A minor in Islamic studies would attract many non-Muslim students. A well-developed program might also bring more Muslim students to the university campus and attract a more diverse faculty. Possibilities for civic action and internships in the local community abound.

Biology, Medicine and Ethics

Recent developments in the biological sciences and the application of medical research raise vital ethical issues that should be included in any educational program aimed at training young men and women for ethical and informed citizenship and/or leadership in the world. Some of the most obvious value-laden issues raised by scientific knowledge and research in the medical and biological fields relate to the cloning of humans and other mammals, artificial insemination, reproductive rights, scientific experimentation with animals, euthanasia, the right to suicide, and medical uses of illegal drugs. Reflecting on such issues requires scientific knowledge. One cannot make informed ethical decisions on such matters without some scientific understanding. At the same time, one cannot make informed value judgments without exposure to the science of ethics in one's own culture. It is equally important to gain perspective on one's own moral judgments by placing them in historical and cross-cultural perspective. The minor that we envisage would combine courses in biology with courses taught in a variety of humanistic disciplines that would include the history of Western science and medicine. The history of non-western medicine would add an important dimension to the ethical questions raised by scientific and medical issues in our own culture. Medical anthropology that examines disease, death and reproduction in other cultures would be a natural addition to such a minor as would "disability studies," an important new area of scholarly interest in the humanities. A course on science fiction could explore the impact of scientific and medical advances on the literary imagination. Some courses in the existing program on gerontology could fit within this minor. One might envision two different tracks within this minor that would differ in the number of required courses in the biological sciences to reflect a student's interests and scientific background. The possibilities for internships and applied projects are multiple.

Mobility and Transcultural Exchange

The high level of mobility - in ideas, individuals and material goods - that characterizes our contemporary world would seem to require some sort of conceptual framework within which undergraduates could study the cultural and social dynamics of globalization. The task of fleshing out such a minor could fall to experts in all fields of the humanities and social sciences. Many existing courses in economics and political science are already relevant. An historical perspective on mobile populations and cultural borrowing from ancient times to the present and in all parts of the globe would apply. Anthropology has entire subfields focused on cultural exchange and acculturation. English courses on 'Orientalism' and travel literature would relate to such a minor. A history of art or music that made cultural borrowing an organizing theme would be appropriate. Migration studies, generally, and ethnic studies of immigrant or migrating peoples, in particular, would be pertinent. Such a minor would fit well with courses in several existing programs: Study Abroad, Casa de la Solidaridad, International Studies, Urban Education, Ethnic Studies, Community Studies, and the Religious Studies Department's Local Religion Project.

Opportunities for internships and applied projects are extensive. The university might even consider inaugurating a student exchange program for Global Leadership in which a group of foreign students from Jesuit universities abroad and Santa Clara Students met during a single summer or over two consecutive summers both at SCU and at the foreign university to discuss together social problems local to each area. Discussions would take place in English and the language of the exchange students.

Conclusion

Our suggestions are informed by pedagogical concerns that we believe should guide all plans for renovating the curriculum. Our goal is to create a learning environment conducive to achieving the distinctive pedagogical goals outlined by our mission statement. But both students and faculty need sufficient time to reflect upon and engage creatively with ideas born of scholarship. Questions recently addressed in the Faculty Senate Council about the mental health, motivations, and self-direction of SCU undergraduates should be at the heart of our discussion of curriculum renewal. Equally important are matters related to the rising demand on tenured and tenure-track faculty for demonstrated scholarly accomplishment in a university devoted to engaged academic instruction of the “whole person.” We therefore challenge the university to consider ways to increase the time and opportunities available for independent scholarly work and reflection by students and their professors, separately and together.

Reflectors

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