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SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSEMBLY

Minutes of the meeting of December 4, 2000

Terrence Gavan, Speaker of the Assembly, presided.

1. **Call to Order and Minutes:** The meeting was called to order at 2:04 PM. The minutes of the meeting of November 6 were approved.

2. **Speaker's Announcements:**

The Assembly's Web-site is now in operation (<http://inside.salve.edu/assembly>). Ideas for expanding it are welcome. There are, however, some difficulties with the "threaded discussion" part of the Web-site.

An evening social event is being planned for Ochre Court perhaps during February. Faculty interested in helping should contact Fr. Michael Malone.

Because of the positive results of a survey of the faculty, the end-of-the-year social will be at the same place where it was held last May.

The election nomination package is full of errors. A new listing will be issued and the process will start all over again. The Nominations and Elections Committee is not part of the Assembly. The original idea was to have elections just for the Executive Committee in December, but the Nominations and Elections Committee decided to hold all elections at the same time, before January.

Sixty-one individuals have paid dues.

The date of the next scheduled Assembly meeting is February 5.

3. **Motion – Core Curriculum Steering Committee:** Jane Bethune, on behalf of the Core Curriculum Steering Committee, presented a Motion concerning guidelines for revisions of the Core Curriculum. An amendment was presented to add the following words: "includes explicit goals and measurable objectives." The amendment passed (31 for, 24 against). A second amendment was presented to add the words "as a Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy." The amendment passed (28 for, 25 against). With minimum discussion, the amended Motion was passed by a voice vote without any dissenting vote. It reads as follows:

MOTION: That the Faculty Assembly recommend the following as a definition of the faculty’s task and as a guide for curriculum proposals for the core:

Definition of Task

To create a core curriculum of liberal arts and sciences that includes explicit goals and measurable objectives, and

1. is grounded in the University’s mission, as a Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy, to encourage students to seek wisdom and “to work for a world that is harmonious, just, and merciful,”
2. is integrated by cooperation,
3. presents students with academic expectations and standards that promote the development of intellect and character, and
4. prepares students for a lifetime of learning, service, and career choices.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies described the Core Curriculum Steering Committee’s next step: it will invite faculty to send ideas to the committee and then release those ideas for discussion. He urged faculty to be as creative as possible and not just confine themselves to a modest tinkering with the present Core. Suggestions should be based on what is best for Salve Regina, not on what is “politically” convenient. Everything depends on ideas that come from the faculty.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 PM

[The original motion and supporting material are on the following pages.]

Original Motion and Supporting Material

Presented on behalf of the Core Curriculum Steering Committee
To the Faculty Assembly
December 4, 2000

MOTION: That the Faculty Assembly recommend the following as a definition of the faculty's task and as a guide for curriculum proposals for the core:

Definition of Task

To create a core curriculum of liberal arts and sciences that

5. is grounded in the University's mission to encourage students to seek wisdom and "to work for a world that is harmonious, just, and merciful,"
6. is integrated by cooperation,
7. presents students with academic expectations and standards that promote the development of intellect and character, and
8. prepares students for a lifetime of learning, service, and career choices.

Rationale:

The University's strategic plan, *Pathway to the Future*, calls on the faculty to "build a unique, contemporary core educational foundation." In addressing this task, Salve Regina can draw upon both its heritage as a Catholic institution of higher learning and its distinct mission grounded in the charism of the Sisters of Mercy.

According to John Henry Cardinal Newman, the hallmarks of Catholic higher education are:

1. a reverence for learning
2. a belief in the essential unity of all knowledge
3. an emphasis on learning in community
4. a foundation in Christian moral values
5. a respect for intellectual freedom

A reverence for learning suggests that intellect is part of the creation and ought to be cultivated for its own sake. The Catholic intellectual tradition is firmly grounded in Christian humanism, which does not reject the world and secular learning, but rather embraces and integrates them.

Our belief in *the essential unity of knowledge* suggests that our curriculum should model for students a comprehensive and integrated approach to learning. A core curriculum (as distinct from distribution requirements) should have a demonstrable unity and integrity; the courses should build on, make reference to, and integrate with one another.

The traditional Catholic emphasis on *learning in community* suggests that a Catholic university should provide its students with a common learning experience. While this ideal of learning in community does not mean that all students must take all of their courses in common, it does suggest that they pursue a

distinctive, identifiable course of study which links their majors, minors, and electives to a common core of knowledge.

A foundation in Christian moral values suggests that, wherever feasible, faculty should include in their courses some consideration of relevant moral questions with reference to the teachings of Christ as well as other ethical systems. This aspect of Catholic higher education does not imply proselytizing or indoctrination, but intentionally avoids taking the path of a “value-free” education.

A respect for intellectual freedom recognizes, for both teacher and student, the primacy of individual conscience. It also recognizes, as Newman points out, that the Catholic university must be freer than the rest of the Church to explore moral questions.

History Since the mid-1980s, the faculty and administration at Salve Regina have been talking about possible revisions for the courses required for all undergraduates – what is usually called the Core Curriculum or General Distribution Requirements. Because of the process for dealing with a general revision of the Core, it was difficult to keep momentum going. Committees deliberated and then disbanded; proposals surfaced and then disappeared.

Throughout all of these years, discussions continued and they have always been about one simple question: “What can we do to improve?”

In 1999 the Board of Trustees recognized the Faculty Assembly. On May 1, 2000 the Assembly approved a Protocol for requesting its endorsement of a change in the Core Curriculum. With this Protocol in place, the University now had an established deliberative process for faculty to make recommendations about changes in the Core.

At the October 2, 2000 meeting of the Assembly, Stephen Trainor, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, urged that this long discussion about improvements to the Core be resumed. Following guidelines in the Protocol, he asked that a joint faculty-administration steering committee be formed, in order to coordinate faculty proposals and facilitate the process. He and the Executive Committee of the Faculty Assembly cooperated in appointing the membership of the Steering Committee: Jane Bethune, Thomas Day, Mary Louise Greeley, Patricia Hawkrige, Louise Murdock, Victor Tonn, and Stephen Trainor.

The Steering Committee has submitted the attached “Definition of Task” in the form of a Motion and requests the Assembly’s recommendation of it. If passed, the Assembly’s recommendation will provide direction to both faculty and the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee is only requesting the Assembly’s recommendation for the “Definition of Task” – the Motion. The Rationale, History, and Commentary are not part of the Motion.

Commentary This commentary is intended to help the reader understand the thinking that went into the “Definition of Task” and also provide some ideas on what a revised Core might have in it. The Steering Committee invites faculty and others to submit their own ideas to the committee; it also recommends that these proposals be

made in light of the Rationale for the above Motion. The following are just some editorial observations on the Motion and Rationale:

1. **Common learning.** The Core should give all undergraduate students at least some minimum form of a common, shared body of intellectual knowledge. Ideally, undergraduates at each level should be able to sit in the cafeteria or meet in a dormitory and talk informally about challenging texts, books, or ideas they have all encountered. It is hard to build a “vibrant learning community” if students cannot discuss at least a few texts that they have all encountered.

At some institutions “common learning” can be as simple as all teachers of English or Religious Studies courses agreeing to cover certain readings. At other institutions it can mean something as complicated as a series of interconnected interdisciplinary courses.

The Steering Committee recognizes the practical need for some kind of Distribution system that allows students to choose or be placed in certain courses. At the same time, the committee also sees the need for some kind of common learning shared by all students. A revised core has to accommodate those two opposite needs.

2. **Preparation for a lifetime of career choices.** Most SRU graduates are going to change their careers perhaps three or more times in a lifetime. Even within the same job, they will be making shifts in assignments, duties, and responsibilities. This is the reality.

A good Core Curriculum prepares someone for these career changes. One way the Core does this is by developing confidence – the feeling of security that comes from knowing, “I have encountered a variety of intellectual challenges and I have developed skills to accomplish something outside of my major.” The Core also makes students aware of the larger world beyond the major and the possibilities in that world.

3. **A liberal education (liberal arts and sciences) and the intellect.** What is generally called a liberal education in the Liberal Arts and Sciences is learning that “frees” the mind. It helps students to see implications, meanings, relationships, connections, possibilities, irony, humor, and even contradictions or dishonesty. The intellect, however defined, is stimulated, expanded, and given autonomy by the kind of learning experienced in the liberal arts and sciences

The Steering Committee recognizes that there are important parallel issues here. Some examples: computer literacy and the specific course needs for certain majors. Parallel issues have to be addressed, but sometimes separately. The Core is about a broad liberal education in the liberal arts and sciences.

4. **Mission based.** The University’s Mission provides excellent goals and is distinctive. The Core should bring the goals and values of the Mission into the education of undergraduates, and do so in a way that enhances the integrity, demands, and independence of each disciple.

5. **Values and character.** The Steering Committee found itself constantly going back to the importance of values (ethics, morals, integrity) and character in the Core. Members of the

committee agreed that a Core Curriculum could not somehow make students respect values or automatically develop character but, in discussion, they expressed all kinds of opinions about this matter. Here is a sampling of the discussion:

Opinions expressed during discussion (paraphrased):

- a. “We cannot talk about values and character unless we have a Core Curriculum that is built on high expectations and standards.”
- b. “Preaching in the classroom or pestering students with overarching ‘themes’ will accomplish nothing.”
- c. “Make students aware of the reality that life did not begin with them. We are part of a long and continuing human struggle for wisdom, justice, and survival. That will speed up their awareness of values and character development.”
- d. “Insist that students take an active part in their own intellectual development and not just parrot back what they have heard in class. The Core should tell them, ‘High School is over. Your intellectual development has begun.’”
- e. “Treat students with great respect as adults, not as children. Do not condescend. That will bring out their character and teach something about values.”
- f. “When students complete a Core program, they should have a sense of accomplishment, a sense of going through something important.”
- g. “There should be some Core courses with deliberately limited enrollments. In this type of course, where students must participate, character gets developed and values become more realistic issues. In the course:
 - Emphasize the reading of ‘primary texts’ – real things from real people – and not just textbooks.
 - Avoid Scantron tests as far as possible and demand certain standards for writing test answers.
 - Devote some class time to discussion and student presentations. Sometimes politely “pull” ideas out of students during class time. Avoid the habit of giving everything to students in the form of top-down lectures.
- h. “In the end, values and character in a Core Curriculum may not be a matter of a course syllabus or overall design of the program. But values and character can get into a student’s consciousness by indirect means through: (1) reasonably high standards and expectations and (2) teachers – who are dedicated, demanding, open, and can bring into the classroom an infectious ‘excitement’ about the subject.”

6. Integrated. The idea of an integrated Core is very broad. In general, this integration means that a few or all of the separate parts are somehow coordinated in a coherent design. Faculty who wish to send proposals to the Steering Committee should feel free to interpret “integrated” in any way they wish.

“Integrated” means something different at each college or university. For example:

- The structure of the Core is **interdisciplinary**: undergraduates go through “mega” courses that merge different disciplines, with more than one teacher for each course.
- The method is **multidisciplinary**: the separate departments give separate courses but they coordinate their efforts. A committee provides the coordination.
- In a **humanities course**, one teacher and students go through a variety of texts and look at them from various aspects. These same texts are covered in other sections of the course.
- In some cases, when a Core Curriculum is integrated and faculty are strongly behind it, the whole program or part of it will have a **name**. For example: “The Wagner [College] Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts,” “Core Studies” at Brooklyn College, “Humanities” at Columbia University, and “Western Civilization” at Providence College. Students do not take “the required courses to get out of the way.” Instead, they go through the integrated program with a distinctive name.

The “integration of knowledge” is a laudable goal – and an essential concept behind a Catholic education – but finding a workable method for that integration can be elusive. Proposals for highly “integrated” approaches to the Core Curriculum should come with detailed logistics for implementing these proposals.