

Revision and Assessment Plan for the *Neumann University Core Experience*

Revision of Core Program

In 2009 a Core Curriculum Task Force with representatives from every academic division was appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs to review the Core curriculum and recommend revisions. From 2009 to 2012, the Core Curriculum Task Force engaged in dialogue with faculty, staff, students, administrators, and Board of Trustees. The Task Force examined relevant research, including the requirements of accrediting and licensing agencies; reviewed the Core programs of institutions similar to Neumann in size, demographics, and mission; consulted with Core administrators in other institutions; and explored best practices related to Core. The Task Force considered the unique needs of Neumann students, examining relevant data from the 2005 Core Program review, the 2006 Middle States Self-Study and Evaluation Team Report, assessment information available from faculty workgroups, results of testing of incoming First Year students, results of ETS Proficiency Profile exams, and results of institutional surveys conducted through the Neumann Office of Institutional Research.

In addition to the feedback received from stakeholders at Neumann and peer institutions, the Task Force considered and adopted recommendations from three national organizations: the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Approved by Faculty Senate in December 2011 and by the Neumann University Executive Council in February 2012, the revised Core philosophy emphasizes that Core is an experience, rather than a set of courses. As its name implies, Core is at the heart of the Neumann University undergraduate experience and applies to students in the traditional undergraduate program and the adult accelerated degree completion programs. Although the revised Core includes specific required courses, there is an expectation that the knowledge, skills, competencies, and values will be deepened by every experience, every course, and every encounter that a student has both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, the Core learning outcomes are supported and promoted through specified Core courses, courses in the major programs of study, and co-curricular activities.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the Core Experience Committee prepared a self-study of the Core program in preparation for the required 5-year review. An Evaluation Team appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs conducted an on-site visit in November 2017 and submitted several recommendations. The Core Experience Committee and the Vice president for Academic Affairs reviewed the recommendations, and task forces were established to develop proposals for changes that required Faculty Senate approval. In Spring 2019, Faculty Senate approved revisions that required that every student would take a diversity-certified course, chosen from approved options; all Literature courses would be writing intensive and every major program would designate one or more courses as writing intensive; and students would take a Foreign Language at Elementary level II or higher or a Computer Science or Bioinformatics course, with major programs having the opportunity to specify the most relevant language option.

Development of the Core Assessment Plan

Consistent with the integrated nature of the revised Core experience, the first step in the development of the Core Assessment Plan engaged all members of the Neumann University community in developing a Core Map. Faculty members teaching Core courses and major courses, and staff members whose responsibilities support the achievement of the Core learning outcomes collaborated with the Core Curriculum Task Force from March to May 2012 to identify the courses and activities which support each Core learning outcome.

Based upon the Core Map developed in 2012 and revised in 2015, the Core Curriculum Task Force (now the Core Experience Committee) planned a three-year cycle of assessment. The Core Experience Committee will invite faculty members and representatives of co-curricular areas to review the Core Map on an on-going basis.

Core Curriculum Task Force members adapted the VALUE rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities for use in the Core assessment process. The Assessment Plan identifies the specific VALUE rubric associated with each Core Learning Outcome. In most cases, one basic rubric has been associated with each learning outcome; additionally, aspects of other rubrics will be incorporated as Committee members and other members of Neumann University continue to adapt the rubrics for use at Neumann University.

Where there is not a VALUE rubric appropriate for a learning outcome specific to the mission of Neumann University, Committee members have developed such rubrics. In addition, members of the Neumann University faculty are developing rubrics for assessing scientific literacy and technological competency.

The ETS Proficiency Profile was also identified as a direct measure of assessment of Core Learning Outcomes related to math, writing and reading/critical thinking. In fall 2012, the ETS was administered to senior students to complete the first cycle of testing; thereafter, the ETS Proficiency Profile was administered each year until spring 2015.

The Task Force also identified several surveys regularly administered at Neumann as indirect and direct measures of assessment. Surveys include the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), administered to First Year and Senior students; the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, administered to all students; the Neumann University Undergraduate Alumni Survey, formerly administered one year after graduation, and now replaced by the First Destination Survey; the Undergraduate Mission Survey, administered to graduating seniors each spring until 2013; the NSSE Catholic Colleges and Universities Mission Survey; the Employer Survey completed by supervisors of Business and Arts and Science students engaged in internships; and the Preceptor Surveys that assess Athletic Training students. The Office of Institutional Research oversees administration of most surveys; the Career and Personal Development Office oversees the administration of the Neumann University Student Internship Employer Evaluation and the First Destination Survey.

Assessment Process

The Assessment Plan was originally reviewed and approved by the Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs (AVPAA) and the Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOAC) Task Force in June 2012. The Director of Core shared the original Assessment Plan with Division Deans in August 2012 and with faculty and staff members at information sessions early in the fall 2012 semester. The Core Assessment Plan was updated in 2016 and reviewed and approved by the LOAC.

The Assessment Plan and relevant rubrics, surveys, and other assessment measures are shared with faculty and staff members on a regular basis. Faculty and staff members identify the most appropriate course and/or activity and the best assignment to use as an artifact for assessment. It is expected that the assignment, project or activity chosen is a regular part of the course or activity. Core Committee members collaborate with faculty to select artifacts from an appropriate sample of students enrolled in the targeted courses.

In the case of co-curricular activities, when the population of students is relatively small (e.g., students in the Institute for Student Leadership Formation or senior athletes), all students may be included in the sample assessed. The Director of Core invites members of the Core Committee, other faculty, and staff members to participate in an annual “Assessment Week” during which the collected artifacts are assessed. In some cases, the Core Committee may collaborate with an existing assessment group (e.g. Writing or Math) to avoid duplication of assessment efforts. The Committee shares assessment results with members of the Neumann community at the beginning of each academic year and monitors efforts to increase student learning, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

Benchmarks

The Core Assessment Plan identifies benchmarks to indicate satisfactory levels of achievement for both direct and indirect measures. In order to establish the original benchmarks, the Core Curriculum Task Force considered many factors. For example, the Task Force analyzed how other institutions have used the AAC&U VALUE rubrics and consulted with the Senior Director of Assessment for AAC&U in order to identify realistic benchmarks.

This analysis and consultation led to the decision to use data collected the first time each rubric was used to establish a baseline and set targets for growth over time. When the Core Assessment Plan was updated in 2016, the Core Experience Committee established an aspirational goal that 80% of the students included in the sample would reach the target benchmark on each feature of the rubric. The Task Force consulted the Office of Institutional Research to establish benchmarks for use with surveys. If necessary, the benchmarks specified in the Assessment Plan will be revised.

Assessment of All Students Prior to Graduation

The Assessment Plan reflects the best efforts of the Core Committee to ensure the collection of data related to every Core learning outcome at specific points in the academic and co-curricular program that will best reflect the achievement of “all students.” Where there is only one required course (e.g. history or science) which relates to a particular outcome, all such

required courses have been included in the Assessment Plan. In instances where an outcome is introduced in a required Core course and then developed in subsequent courses (e.g. writing, ethics, quantitative reasoning), samples of student work may be drawn from the required Core courses and related upper level courses in each major. Assessment includes traditional undergraduate programs, as well as the adult accelerated degree completion programs. In this way, the sample of artifacts assessed over each three-year cycle should reflect the achievement of all students, although every student will not be assessed every year in relation to every learning outcome.

Assessment and Professional Development

The Core Experience Committee supports faculty and staff to facilitate the implementation and assessment of the *Neumann University Core Experience*. Professional development opportunities to support the revised Core program have included:

- *Liberal Education in the Catholic Franciscan Tradition* with Timothy Johnson, PhD on January 10, 2012
- *Oral Communication* with Erik Palmer on May 8, 2012
- Service Learning workshop on May 10, 2012
- Information Literacy workshop on August 23, 2012
- Service-Learning workshop on November 15, 2012
- Meaningful Reflection and Ethical Reasoning workshops on January 15, 2013
- Understanding the ETS profile on January 15, 2013
- Information literacy presentation on January 28, 2013
- Results of Core Communication Assessment presented September 9-12, 2013
- Results of Information Literacy Assessment presented October 7 – 10, 2013
- Results of Oral Communication Assessment presented November 10-14, 2013
- Presentation on Plans for Improvement in response to Communication Assessment results January 14, 2014
- Preview of Comprehension and Compassion Assessment January 14, 2014
- Service-Learning workshops presented February 3-6, 2014
- Capstone development workshops presented March 17-20, 2014
- Service-Learning workshop on May 15, 2014
- Results of Core Contemplation Assessment presented September 8-11, 2014
- Results of Core Conscience Assessment presented October 6-9, 2014
- Capstone development workshops presented:
 - November 10-13, 2014 and February 2-5, 2015
- Presentation on best practices related to Contemplation and opportunities for collaboration with Institutes for Student Leadership Formation and Sport, Spirituality, and Character Development on January 13, 2015
- Preview of second cycle of Communication Assessment March 23-26, 2015
- Service-Learning workshops on May 13 and 14, 2015
- Presentations on oral communication by Erik Palmer at Faculty Development Day on May 11, 2015
- Results of Core Comprehension assessment presented on September 15 and 16, 2015

- Results of Core Compassion Assessment presented October 27-30, 2015
- Overview of three years of Core assessment presented at *Convivium* in October 2015
- Strategies to promote Critical Thinking and Reading Comprehension presented on January 12, 2016
- Lunch and Learn sessions to explore various approaches to developing Capstone courses offered in February 2016
- A summary of the findings from the Core Communication assessment presented to writing (English 101 and 102) faculty members on August 23 and to full-time faculty members on August 25, 2016
- Lunch and Learn sessions offered from September 13 to September 16, 2016 to discuss the results of the Core Communication assessments in greater depth.
- Results of the previous year’s Core assessment are presented at the August all campus Faculty meeting every year.
- Lunch and Learn sessions are offered regularly to examine the Core assessments in greater depth.
- Presentations on various aspects of the Core program are presented at the May Faculty Development Day.
- In August 2019, Dr. Christina LaVecchia, new Director of Writing across the Curriculum, offered a workshop for faculty in the major programs who will be developing writing intensive courses. Supported by Title III funds, Dr. LaVecchia will offer additional workshops throughout the 2019-2020 academic year.

The Core Director and Committee will continue to offer professional development workshops, on-line resources, and “consultations” with specific disciplinary and co-curricular groups to ensure an understanding of the Core, the meaning of each Core learning outcome, the assessment process, and how to best facilitate student achievement of the outcomes.

Special Note related to Technology

The Core Experience Committee continues to investigate standards for technological competency. Once such standards have been developed the appropriate information will be added to the Assessment Plan.

Schedule for Assessment of the *Neumann University Core Experience*

The dates for the first three cycles of assessment are listed below. Assessment continues on a repeated cycle with every Core learning outcome being assessed at least once every four years.

Communication outcomes	AY 2012-13/2015-2016/2018-2019
Contemplation and Conscience outcomes	AY 2013-14/2016-2017/2019-2020
Comprehension and Compassion outcomes	AY 2014-15/2017-2018/2020-2021

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