

# Loyola University New Orleans 2014 Common Curriculum Annual Report

## 1.0 Executive Summary

The Common Curriculum at Loyola University equips students to understand the world as it is and how we can work to make it better, to focus on the values that shape our lives, to free ourselves from prejudice and unexamined views, and to acquire knowledge and skills that inspire us to act and reflect critically on our actions as we seek the creation of a more just world. The Common Curriculum is the cornerstone of the nearly 500-year-old distinctive Jesuit tradition of connecting educational excellence with social justice. The mission of the Common Curriculum is to educate the whole person, a central tenet of the Ignatian vision of education.

In the tradition of Jesuit education, Loyola encourages students to be “contemplatives in action” who reflect on their knowledge and experience to become selfless in the service of others. This includes more than simply a collection of courses. It is an integration of critical components which, taken together, empower students to think critically, creatively, and reflectively in order to act justly. Loyola’s holistic curriculum, which is deeply grounded in Jesuit values and the liberal arts and sciences, is designed to form students of competence, conscience, and compassion who will graduate with a full understanding of disciplinary knowledge, the ability to think critically, a sense of self-awareness, and a commitment to a life of learning and service.

While the Common Curriculum has been at the heart of Loyola education for decades, it has recently undergone a significant revision following several years of campus-wide dialogue. From these dialogues, a new Common Curriculum emerged that best leverages Loyola’s strengths to provide all our students an outstanding contemporary Jesuit education.

The year covered by this report marked a milestone in the history of the Common Curriculum: students entering Loyola in or after Fall 2013 will participate in the revised Common Curriculum. Much of the year was spent easing not only students but especially faculty and staff advisers into the new curriculum. This was also the first year that the Common Curriculum was staffed by a Director (John Sebastian, Associate Professor of English). Throughout August and September, Dr. Sebastian made the rounds of the undergraduate colleges and departments offering Common Curriculum courses to help everyone acclimate to the new program. Before the academic year even began, it was also decided that a system of identifying all Advanced Common Curriculum courses using “J” as the fifth character in the course code would need to be rethought. The uniform use of “J” made it difficult to identify the particular requirement that the course was intended to fulfill, and a new alphabetic system was discussed and settled on. This new system will go into effect in Fall 2015; in the meantime, the previous system (U-Z) will continue.

Almost immediately, however, it became clear that implementing the newly revised curriculum in full in the midst of a financial crisis borne of a sudden decline in new student admissions would be an impossibility. The Standing Committee of the Common Curriculum was instructed by the Provost to explore opportunities for modifying requirements and delaying implementation of parts of the curriculum in cases where full implementation would require additional monies. As a result of these negotiations, two major changes to the previously approved changes were proposed and affirmed in time for the start of the spring semester: (1) a formerly two-year foreign language requirement was reduced to “placement +1” and (2) implementation of the Engaging in Science – Lab requirement was deferred pending further review in two years. Both requirements as originally conceived would have required hiring additional faculty at precisely the moment when the university was seeking means to eliminate faculty lines through voluntary severance and reductions in force.

Throughout the year, the SCCC continued to vet proposals for new Common Curriculum courses. To date, more than 200 courses have been proposed and approved, providing students with an enormous array of topics to study, particularly in the First-Year Seminar Program and at the Advanced Common Curriculum level.

The Director, the SCCC, and the professional staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) also began in earnest to make plans for assessing the newly implemented Common Curriculum. As part of the revision process, new student learning outcomes (SLOs) were articulated for each requirement in the Common Curriculum. General outcomes for the Common Curriculum were subsequently derived from these track-level SLOs. Because the process tended to proceed from the particular to the general rather than the other way around, SLOs proliferated, and drawing connections between component parts of the curriculum became challenging. As a result of this proliferation, the Director in conjunction with Dr. Brad Petitfils (OIRE) developed a new set of five Core Competencies for the Common Curriculum: Critical Thinking, Effective Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Information Literacy, and Ethical Reasoning. To help students develop these competencies, the Common Curriculum embraces an interdisciplinary approach to learning with an emphasis on the spiritual and intellectual, the moral and ethical, the natural and social scientific, the humanistic, and the artistic. These elements are central to the education of the whole person and integral to sustaining a learning community whose goal is understanding and serving the greater New Orleans community and the world.

To support assessment of these Core Competencies and of the Common Curriculum as a whole, beginning in Fall 2013 the ETS Proficiency Profile was administered to first-year students through their First-Year Seminars during the first two weeks of class. This tool measures students' proficiency at several levels in the areas of reading, critical thinking, writing, and mathematics. Students' proficiencies were measured at the start of their undergraduate career to establish a baseline; a subset will be re-tested in their fourth semester (Spring 2015) and the results compared to this baseline in order to evaluate whether Common Curriculum courses, which constitute a significant portion of most students' courseload during their first two years, are helping to develop proficiency in these areas.

In the coming year, 2014-2015, faculty workgroups will revisit Common Curriculum track-level SLOs in order to focus them and align them with the five Core Competencies. The workgroup responsible for the First-Year Seminar began this revision as a pilot program in Spring 2014, and their work will be reviewed by the SCCC and then shared as a model with other workgroups.

Also, in response to requests from deans and the Summer School, the moratorium on experimental Common Curriculum courses that was implemented for 2013-2014 was lifted beginning in Summer 2014. Faculty wishing to offer a Common Curriculum course experimentally may do so only once before having to take the course through the regular approval process. Faculty are required to submit a letter from their chair indicating the chair's support for the course and opinion that the course satisfies the criteria and approved learning outcomes for the particular requirement that the course is intended to satisfy.

Last but not least, a new web site, [www.loyno.edu/common-curriculum](http://www.loyno.edu/common-curriculum), was developed for the Common Curriculum.

## **2.0 Unit Profile Summary**

The unit, as such, consists only of the Director of the Common Curriculum, Dr. John T. Sebastian, with some administrative support from the Mr. Patrick Armstrong in the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Dr. Sebastian's appointment is concurrent with his appointment as an associate professor in the Department of English. During 2013-2014 he was reduced to a 1/1 teaching load to accommodate his work as Director.

### **2.1 Staff Headcount**

1 staff member: Director of the Common Curriculum (John Sebastian)

### **2.2 Faculty Headcount**

0 faculty. All faculty teaching Common Curriculum courses hold appointments in the university's colleges and departments.

### **2.3 Student Headcount: Past 4 Years**

0 students. The Common Curriculum is not a degree-granting program, so it does not have majors or students associated specifically with the program, although all Loyola undergraduate students are required to complete Common Curriculum courses.

### **3.0 Goals for Current Academic Year**

The current year was the first year of full implementation of the revised Common Curriculum and also the first year that there was a Director of the Common Curriculum. For those reasons no particular goals for the Common Curriculum were established for 2013-2014 prior to the start of the year. During the course of 2013-2014, the following goals emerged and were pursued:

- Educate faculty about the new Common Curriculum requirements that took effect in Fall 2013.
- Develop a plan for general and track-level assessment of the Common Curriculum.
- Create a new web page for the Common Curriculum.

Develop a process for offering experimental Common Curriculum courses.

### **4.0 Budget for Current Academic Year**

The budget for the Office of the Common Curriculum for 2013-2014 was \$10,000.00. This budget is adequate for the operation of the office. Funds were used to support the Director's travel to the SACS-COC and First-Year Experience conferences, faculty development initiatives, the purchase of office supplies, stipends for faculty who graded English placement tests during New Student Orientation, and an end-of-the-year luncheon for members of the Standing Committee on the Common Curriculum.

### **5.0 Assessment Report**

Because 2013-2014 was the first year of full implementation of the revised Common Curriculum, no plans were laid in advance for assessment. Indeed, the existing Student Learning Outcomes for the Common Curriculum were deemed likely to inhibit effective assessment. So the Director of the Common Curriculum worked with the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to revise the overarching SLOs of the Common Curriculum into the five Core Competencies. The First-Year Seminar workgroup was then directed to revise track-level SLOs for FYS in light of these competencies. The workgroups governing the other tracks in the Common Curriculum will undertake a similar revision process in 2014-2015. The Core Competencies, the revised FYS SLOs, and the results of the ETS Proficiency Profile administered in 2013 (see description in 1.0 above) are included in section 7, "Supporting Documents."

### **6.0 Summary of Achievements**

N/A

### **7 Supporting Documents**

7.1 Common Curriculum Core Competencies

7.2 First-Year Seminar Revised Student Learning Outcomes

7.3 ETS Proficiency Profile 2013 Results

### **Common Curriculum Supporting Documents**

[Core Competencies.docx](#)

[fys-criteria-revision-draft.pdf](#)