

Mason Core Committee Summary Report AY17

1. Dr. Bethany Usher replaced Dr. Janette Muir as Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education in January. Dr. Usher assumed the chair of this committee at that time.
2. Course Proposals
 - a. Courses approved:
 - i. Arts: ARTH 206; ARTH 318
 - ii. Global Understanding: ANTH 382
 - iii. Literature: RELI 333
 - iv. Social and Behavioral Science: GGH 325
 - b. Courses not approved and returned to the department:
 - i. Global Understanding: RELI/HIST 384
 - ii. Literature: CLAS 370
 - iii. Natural Sciences (non-lab): PHIL 371; PHIL 377
 - iv. Synthesis: MATH 401
3. The committee engaged in discussion to respond to two separate student group requests (one in spring 2016 and a second in spring 2017) that the Western Civilization/World History category incorporate courses with more diversity content. Currently, there are only two courses that fulfill this requirement: HIST 100 and 125. Students had requested that more courses with diversity content be approved to fulfill this requirement (e.g. African American Studies). The committee agreed, and urged the students to work with the relevant departments to propose courses they would like for the Mason Core. The committee consulted with Chair of History and Art History, Dr. Brian Platt, who supports the inclusion of content in world history, and emphasized the importance for students of developing the habits of mind in the discipline to prepare for future study. Thus, Dr. Platt cautioned that should the category be revised, it should include courses that focus on this kind of instruction.
4. The Ethics learning outcome was removed from the IT category in AY16. The committee sought the consultation of Dr. Kinnaman from the Philosophy Department, who made recommendations about the appropriate learning outcomes for undergraduate students. The committee created and approved two learning outcomes for an equivalent of one credit of ethics, to be taught in the major. The proposal to adopt this new requirement was presented to the Faculty Senate in December, but was not well received. The committee consulted with Dr. James Steele from the Academic Policies Committee to discuss concerns raised by Dr. Steele's committee. It was decided that the topic will be revisited in the next AY.
5. Learning outcomes were revised for Global Understanding. The committee approved the substitution of a semester of study abroad for the Global Understanding requirement.
6. Learning outcomes were revised for Information Technology, with the goal of updating the language and meaning for the current era, as well as to clarify that the outcomes are not meant to be restrictive to the field of IT, but rather can be addressed by courses across disciplines.

7. Dr. Bethany Usher discussed the development of a communication plan to share changes to the Mason Core with the campus community, but especially with academic advisors, deans, department chairs, and undergraduate coordinators. The issue will be discussed further at the summer meeting.
8. Dr. Muir and Dr. Stephanie Foster have been participating in the SCHEV Quality Task Force with representatives from all of Virginia's public colleges and universities this academic year. The Task Force is providing consultation in the development of a new policy on student learning assessment, which is mandated by the state legislature. The policy is meant to delineate the requirements for learning outcomes assessment and reporting, and includes a reporting template. The Task Force concludes in April 2017, and the policy will be presented to SCHEV for approval in the summer. Upon approval, each institution will have a defined period to craft an assessment plan that meets SCHEV requirements. This policy will primarily impact the Mason Core, but may also have implications for degree programs and the co-curriculum. Drs. Foster and Usher will share the approved policy with Faculty Senate and discuss implications for Mason upon notification from SCHEV.
9. Dr. Stephanie Foster proposed to the committee an assessment plan for AY18-20, to complete an assessment cycle for Mason Core before the next SACSCOC compliance certification is due in September 2020. The assessment plan proposes a streamlined version of the course portfolio method that was adopted in 2008 and has been in use since that time to assess Mason Core learning outcomes. Drs. Foster and Usher will share the completed assessment plan with Faculty Senate in fall 2017.