

Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Core Curriculum Draft Final Report

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Mandate:

The committee was mandated to make recommendations that will enhance the effectiveness of the core curriculum without reviewing in detail the specific content of core courses or considering the courses included in the core.

Overall Objective for Core Courses:

We quickly agreed that the key objectives for content and delivery that are required are:

High Quality, Relevance and Integration.

The core courses should be as good or better on these dimensions, to analogous courses at other universities, and differentiated from undergraduate programs, to ensure the brand of Columbia Business School is maintained.

Is there an issue with the Core Curriculum?

The Deans (Glenn, Chris and Amir) articulated their increasing concern based on their interactions with students over many years, and the impact the negative ratings are having on the various rankings (e.g., most recent Business Week). To assess the students' criticism, the committee obtained the detailed numerical student evaluations, by cluster and class for several years, for all core classes as well as the surveys held at the end of their first and second years. Examples are included in Appendix A, and the detailed annual data is available online to all faculty members. We did not run any formal analysis on the data but the pattern that stood out was a clearly lower rating of the core in exit surveys than in the surveys at the end of each course. We also observed many inconsistencies of student's perceptions of an individual faculty member across clusters in a given year. The committee members had mixed feelings about the value of these evaluations and how much people looked at them.

Irrespective of the ratings, the committee members were all in agreement that there are several issues in the core curriculum, although there is some difference in the degree of concerns for specific courses, especially over time. The issues identified are:

1. The content of many core courses is considered to be too easy and in a few cases, arguably less challenging than some undergraduate introductory courses. One cause of this is the perception that making courses easier leads to better student ratings which is the only indicator that is perceived to be important by the division heads and the Deans' office. The lowering of standards results from the perceived need to cater to the weakest students who complain about the courses being difficult, rather than letting weak students' fail if they

cannot make the grade. (The committee did not agree with these perceptions as being valid but felt that they were strongly held by many faculty members). It was noted that some courses that score well are considered to be quite light in the content and expectations of students.

2. The “culture” of the School as it is expressed in the core classes, is frequently a poor one with both students and faculty often unmotivated and with lack of accountability for excellence from **both**. This problem was discussed in some detail and stems from many sources including a view that students are being treated too much as customers versus as students who must earn their degree. Part of the culture problem reflects students’ seeing themselves as passive consumers of content, which puts faculty in the position of sole responsibility to delighting and entertaining, rather than it being a joint responsibility, and puts students in the position of judging or grading how pleased they are with the performance, rather than the content and learning. The issue in 1 is considered part of the cultural issue as well. Several committee members felt this cultural challenge was more difficult at Columbia Business School than at our peer institutions.
3. There was some concern that the administration spends too much effort trying to please students without demanding enough from them or promoting the idea that the primary role of an academic institution like Columbia Business School is learning. This exacerbates the negativity and leads some faculty to relax their expectations and lessen the quality of the content. It also increases the perception that it is less interesting and more difficult to teach in the core where students are more negative about having to take specific courses. Thus several faculty members (not on the committee) felt it is more effort to teach the core and thus these teachers deserved more reward.
4. There is very little knowledge of, and therefore very little integration across courses. The integrative case (Auto Industry) is considered too ambitious to use as a general model, but all committee members felt that there is a critical need for integration across subjects and courses within a subject. The committee feels strongly that this problem, and the perceived quality and relevance of the core, is exacerbated by the lack of integration with elective courses where it is rare that faculty in these courses acknowledge the significance of, or build on, the content taught in the core. Moreover, as an indication of the lack of accountability of both faculty and students many electives end up re-teaching core concepts because students indicate or act as if they did not learn the subject matter in the core. No one seems willing to demand this knowledge as an expectation. The problem of not understanding the content of the core and its relevance is considered to be particularly egregious and detrimental when adjunct faculty teach electives, especially when these adjuncts are drawn from practice.
5. Some committee members felt that despite having participated on past curriculum review committees, there had never been a real effort to define what was truly core content, what should be expected of the students (see point 3 above) and the level of what we teach and why? This is particularly true with respect to looking at these questions from a school or cross-disciplinary perspective rather than a divisional perspective.

6. There is a clear perception in some subject areas that the core does not merit the better faculty and it is a place to put the less experienced untenured faculty irrespective of their abilities to deliver the material in a manner that inspires the students.
7. There is very little perceived ownership of the core content and delivery, with a wide variance in the expectations and effectiveness of core coordinators, many of whom take on more of an admin than a content role.
8. There was some discussion about whether the negative perception of the core, especially with respect to the end of first and second year reviews, and the lack of integration, is hurt by the fact that the required core goes over 2 semesters, and that the length of the core impacts the student's ability to take advantage of the rich set of electives we offer. While there was a lot of sympathy for this perspective it was not our committee's mandate to look at the existing mix of classes and given the toxicity of the politics surrounding the link between core course offerings and perceived academic positions the committee was not willing to take a specific view on this without doing a lot more work and increasing the scope of our mandate.

Peer Analysis

Sid Balachandran conducted a series of interviews of counterparts at many other peer schools to review any issues and learn about their policies and processes. A summary of these interviews is provided as Appendix B. The interviews indicated that other schools have or had similar issues and that these have been dealt with in different ways. One important consideration in coming up with our own recommendations was the fact that Columbia Business School is unusual in the number of times a core course is offered in a given year, making certain potential solutions infeasible.

Specific Recommendations:

- *The Core Curriculum belongs to the School and the functional divisions are given the primary responsibility for delivering effective courses in the core courses aligned with those functions.*
- *The content of many core courses should be upgraded to be more challenging, taking advantage of the caliber of CBS students and the pre-MBA academic program they are required to complete prior to matriculation, with more expected of both students and faculty.*
- *Core course content and the materials used should be updated regularly ensuring a clearer link of the concepts with recent practical examples and decisions. There should also be broader consistency in the actual knowledge students leave the course with, given this is the core. Each course should be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, each year, with particular attention paid to the continued relevance of older examples and cases. There is also a tradition in some courses of over-relying on non-Columbia cases and exercises, which reflects poorly on the business school as branded school of content and learning. A related issue is that some individual faculty update and use their own materials, while others teaching the same course do not use the same material, often relying on more dated material and examples, thus creating a double-negative perception for those sections. Some view the*

use of visitors and adjuncts to teach the core as exacerbating this problem. *A general view is that full-time faculty should be teaching the core courses, and to the extent this is already a policy it should be more actively enforced.*

- *There is a strong need for greater integration of content across core courses, and between core courses and electives.* Integration does not necessarily need to be done across all courses. It should be achieved initially with courses where there are easier linkages. For meaningful integration to occur, faculty members need to understand what and how related concepts (topics) are being taught in other courses. Some committee members felt this goal is best achieved by each faculty member gaining a complete understanding of all other core courses, which can be achieved by sitting in on each section of other courses their cluster is in. Most agreed that this is likely to be difficult to achieve, especially when the core extends beyond one semester. A more widely held view is that each course should find points of integration with at least two other courses at least one of which will be in a division other than their own and ideally will also go across semesters, as pertinent. For these courses and the related sessions the faculty members should participate in the session in the other course. However, the committee acknowledges that even this limited integration learning process could be quite difficult to achieve for every faculty member given that we have so many iterations of the core courses and that the current core straddles 2 semesters. The set of two will continue to grow until more complete integration occurs, i.e., the same two courses should not be covered at each update of a core course. Thus the number of points of integration should grow over time as a result of the recommendation for continuous updating of each core course. We believe it is important for the effectiveness of the core that integration also includes elective courses leveraging the core and that faculty who teach the electives must understand and integrate the concepts in the core courses. The process for “educating” elective faculty was not discussed in detail.
- *The Core Course Coordinators should be given a more prominent role in developing and managing the content of the courses.* Currently, the core course coordinators play more of an administrative role and it is a responsibility assigned by a division head and perceived as a burden by most faculty members. The consensus is that upgrading this role is probably the most efficient source for achieving the above recommendations and enhancing the effectiveness of the core. While this may have been what was intended in setting up the teaching and curriculum committee, that committee has taken on many issues that are not related to the content of the core courses, and cannot be expected to deliver on the responsibilities we propose. There should be at least one coordinator for each set of divisional core courses who should be a senior faculty member who has had success in teaching (content and delivery), and is appointed by the divisional in coordination with the Dean’s office. Some of the specific responsibilities proposed are:
 - Evaluate and update the core course materials at least annually to ensure they are current and relevant

- Meet regularly with the other teachers of the core class(es) to *coordinate* new ideas and *facilitate* consistent quality of content and delivery.
- Meet with other core course coordinators regularly to facilitate the sharing of information about each course, select and work on the specific integrated materials, and evaluate the content of other core courses. This peer review will encourage each division to be clear about the relevance and significance of the concepts and practices they teach and require of the students and allow the coordinator to convey this to her/his divisional colleagues who teach both core and elective classes.
- Work with department heads and the Deans' office to facilitate any mentoring of faculty teaching the core courses, and provide constructive feedback on effectiveness of the course to faculty teaching the given core course. This may then include sitting in on some sessions of other courses.
- Work with other faculty teaching their course to ensure consistency in materials and content, i.e. within the 80-20 rule. This would apply to any examinations too.
- Ensure the quality of any exemption exam but the administration of the exam should be done by the chief admin of the functional area.
- Work with student academic representatives to review student feedback on course and faculty (see recommendation on course evaluations below)

The Core Course Coordinator will get appropriate "compensation" to be decided by the Deans' office and the Executive Committee, depending on the set of tasks they are actually asked to do, and potentially how effectively they perform those tasks.

The committee discussed the potential risks associated with this new responsibility and the related compensation. One of some concern is that this compensation attracts powerful but ineffective faculty members. Another is that the coordinator executes his or her role in a way that creates inappropriate burdens for the other faculty teaching a given course. If that undermined their performance, or drove them away from the course, it would not serve us well. So, the scope of responsibility, the compensation, and the accountability of this role deserve care that the Deans' office will need to monitor.

Additional Recommendations for Further Review:

While discussing the specific recommendations outlined above two additional recommendations were considered. While these are potentially outside the scope of our initial mandate, if they were implemented they are likely to increase the effectiveness of implementing the other recommendations. The committee did not reach consensus on these two recommendations and each would require significant effort to complete.

- *The Required Course Core Curriculum should be completed by the end of the first semester.* It was clear to many committee members that the effectiveness of the core was made more

difficult by the core extending beyond the first semester. Some of our primary recommendations are also made more difficult by extending the core over more than one semester including the critical role of the core coordinator and the integration objective. One major concern about our committee making this recommendation is that the choice is a political morass as many people perceive this would threaten the number of faculty slots available in a division. In addition, most of us believe that any decision of change should be based on the content that is truly considered to be core knowledge that students must have as a base. If our recommendation on core course coordinators is adopted this group would form a natural committee to evaluate the required content of course with an eye to find the best way to achieve this goal. It would also be important for the Dean to allay concerns of divisions about faculty slots to avoid the reality of divisional posturing that has been evident in all past reviews of the core curriculum that many committee members had experienced in the past. One idea to be considered in this future reevaluation is the use of more “flex-core” or “distribution-type” electives that allow faculty to link important topics in functional areas to their own interests and expertise. This approach could improve the motivation of the faculty and excite the students more as they are given more choice.

- *Substantially revise or eliminate current student ratings in the core (while leaving them intact for electives) and replace them with an alternative feedback process that occurs through the semester.* One of the issues we see in the data is that core courses and core faculty have varying ratings across clusters in one semester, and that the later assessments are generally lower by the end of the year and the program. The relevance and use of these ex post ratings, is neither constructive nor positive to the students’ overall experience given both the students doing the evaluation and future students are required to take the core courses and have no ability to choose the faculty teaching their section. Also and very importantly, the committee felt that too much of the evaluation process focuses on the faculty and not on the students’ responsibility to provide a successful learning environment. While the majority of the committee is ready to recommend for elimination of the ex-post evaluations, some members articulated a view that the scored ratings are a motivating factor for high-achieving faculty. Also, the Dean’s office indicated these were useful evidence for convincing low performers that there really is a problem.

On reflection, it seems the current student ratings of the core are not independent of the irritation they have with the lack of choice in the core relative to the electives, and this negative feeling is exacerbated over time, as they miss out on courses they want to take.

Some alternative ideas we considered but could not reach consensus on are:

The faculty and a small number of students meet periodically DURING the semester to discuss the learning environment and how it can be enhanced. The core course coordinator and a representative of Samberg of the Dean’s office can participate in the discussion in some cases.

Any evaluation should be focused more on what the students learned and how they were challenged and less on the “performance” of the faculty.

Have a more qualitative assessment that focuses on the quality of what was learned.

In sum, we believe that we spend too much effort focusing on asking students if they are happy with the core and the faculty without sufficient emphasis on what they learned, and that the outcomes are too noisy to be useful and constructive. So we need to look for mechanisms to both remind students about their responsibility in creating an effective learning environment and we should have some accountability and feedback for them on that front. If we keep the current ratings system, we need to look for a way to have students gauge both their own and their classmates’ contribution to the learning environment. If we drop the rating system, we should look for ways to have the clusters assess how they are doing as a group in creating an effective overall learning environment. At the very least we believe the current questions asked should be changes significantly.

Core Curriculum Teaching

School	Assignment of Teachers To Core	Past Success Required To Teach In Core	New Faculty in Core	Typical New Faculty Assignment	Process For Faculty Improvement	Incentives	Dean's office role
Harvard	Department Chair Decision	Assessed in Selection Process, Many Faculty with Doctoral training at HBS	Typically rookie faculty teaches only one section with guidance from course head, and weekly teaching group meeting.	Core course with reduced teaching load in first year and requirements to work with teaching group.	New faculty – initial orientation. Selection, monitoring, support from Christensen Center for Teaching Excellence & team head, teaching buddy system.	Teaching evaluation by faculty part of promotion process, good teaching is culturally valued	Historically has not intervened, course head is a prestigious position, teaching group meets once for each class, failure in the classroom is frowned upon.
Kellogg	Department Chair, and Dean's office negotiation, student choice among Core course teachers within core requirements.	Demonstrated success outside core typically preferred unless other indication of effective teaching	Inexperienced teachers permitted, but best teachers in core generate elective enrollment and majors, which drives hiring needs.	Teaching load is – 1 winter, 2 spring. Use templates, from other faculty after observing mentor's course in fall.	New faculty -initial orientation with sample lectures, mentor, sit in mentor's class.	Salary increases , elective enrollment=hiring lines Mentors/coordinators– no added incentives, viewed as service required of senior faculty..	Negotiates with department provides oversight and intervention as needed
Stanford	Area coordinators and Dean's office negotiate assignments, tracks of core courses.	As courses are tailored by faculty and there is tracking no explicit prior success is required	Junior faculty allowed to choose based on preference and availability.	First yr. load is 2 courses.	Communications workshops, Ask Jr Fac to sit in on Senior fac classes before teaching first time	Evaluations used in promotion reviews of both content, execution, volume and draw from other schools.	Tries to be "hands off" reserves right to "shame" if required. Usually induces the good equilibrium.
Wharton	Department Chair with Dean's office.	Success in undergraduate courses, or successful previous teaching	New faculty typically teach MBA core only after successful undergraduate teaching.	Undergrad. In exceptional cases where there is clear reason to teach MBA core exceptions can be negotiated	New faculty – initial orientation. Senior mentor for new faculty. Communications assists with problems.	Evaluations based on student's feedback. Course heads & committees = service, viewed as service to school.	Provides oversight and intervention as needed. Lobbies to remove poor teachers from MBA core.
Cornell	Negotiation process. New faculty contracts specify what they will teach.	Demonstrated success in Service courses (outside Johnson) Accelerated MBA, and/or elective required to teach core.	Start with easiest courses and work up (service course is easiest). Typically not teaching core till 3 rd year.	First yr. teach in non-Johnson course. Then may teach the accelerated MBA. If good, 2 nd yr. if successful teach core by 3 rd yr.	New faculty has mentors. Also have a teaching effectiveness center. Communications faculty will tape class and review with teacher.	Teaching reviews after 3 yrs. & at tenure. Teaching part of promotion. Get letters former students on teaching impact.	Oversee process, intervene only if needed, negotiate in background, have potential to shame so typically don't need to use it.
Berkeley	Negotiated between Department Chair and Dean.	Past success is required, as core gets guaranteed enrollment and hence good teaching credit.	Rookies do not get assigned to the core unless clear indication of past success	Teach undergrad or elective (outside mba core), mentorship, until demonstration of success.	Center for teaching excellence, provide mentorships & seminars, and confidential coaching.	Incentives to teach core – course credit based on enrollment and contact time, makes core attractive, but also leads to dysfunctional behavior.	Negotiates, and manages process. Pays particular attention to core as the core is viewed as key for overall success (first impression).
Duke	Department Chair, with Dean's office	Yes, success in the core is priority so only those with demonstrated success teach	Only if proven significant, successful teaching experience.	Require 1 yr. team teaching in core, electives or EMBA. Observation & feedback.	Team teaching found to be most effective. Will provide or pay for coaching for others. Some platform skill development.	Some teaching credit to assist others with platform skills development, as needed.	Dean office has taken poor performing courses into receivership, takes active role in maintain core quality.

Course Content:

School	Determination of content	Content Development	Consistency Required/Deviation Allowed	Coordination across sections	Integration	Cohort Development
Harvard	Course head - tenured faculty assigned for 3 years- develop syllabus, curriculum, determines teaching plan for each case, with team.	Course heads select roster for cases for each class. New cases are written by faculty as part of promotion process. Periodic course review.	Teaching styles differ, teaching plan allows flexibility but learning is standardized. (ie same board plan for all classes, etc.)	Regular teaching group meeting to discuss each case and class, one case per class typically with very few exceptions.	Capstone-like course between 1 st & 2 nd semester. New business plan based curriculum being developed.	Cohort sections with student officer, emphasis on inclusiveness, diversity, norms, smart preparation. Cohort stays together for entire first year.
Kellogg	Senior Coordinator, core – templates set by department, mix lecture and case, discourage modifications	Encouraged to keep fresh with recent & international cases, but no explicit requirement.	Don't encourage deviation, but no explicit guidelines, suggested to use same exam.	Senior coordinator develops templates material and assignments.	Some in marketing courses and possibly organization behavior. Have considered capstone. But mostly ad hoc currently.	Two courses in first quarter required by section. Some track courses also lead to cohort formation.
Stanford	Complete academic freedom. Area coordinators may talk with a teacher.	Faculty thought to be the best judges of content. Recognize need to create knowledge base for electives.	Typically most courses have only 1 teacher, occasionally there are 2, but this is not common. .	Teachers expected to coordinate when there is more than one, but not explicitly required	Dean's office initiates an e-mail exchange with faculty teaching different courses in each term to share content and ideas.	Small graduating class, that gets to know classmates, but fall quarter has required courses for smaller group formation.
Wharton	Course head and team. Periodic course reviews by committee set up by dean's office	Up to each individual department and teacher.	Teaching styles & materials differ, methods not prescribed. Homework & exams consistent	No requirements	Failed attempts in the past.	Lock-step core in the fall. Move to a more flexible curriculum will challenge this. Redesigning curriculum now.
Cornell	Core faculty meet annually to plan next year. Course owned by the faculty. Often only 1 teacher for a class, possibly 2.	Faculty own course. If more than one, best to get agreement. Weekly feedback sessions with students to collect lessons learned to make changes.	If one teacher for all sections not a problem. If 2 teachers teach differently considered not acceptable, so coordination is encouraged.	If 2 teachers they coordinate together. Weekly teachers meetings.	Requested to do so, but rare. Weekly meetings of teachers to share curriculum.	Two week orientation at beginning including leadership skills. Spring immersions by industry. Explicitly mixes class of 270 to form one cohesive group.
Berkeley	Department and faculty, course established by committee review.	Guideline keep courses with 85% consistency year over year, but 15% can be used to develop and intro. new content.	Twice monthly meetings of faculty to share curriculum.	85% guideline and twice monthly meeting, but no other explicit requirement	Implemented the BILD program to focus on integration.	
Duke	Faculty designated as leader. Failed attempt to include ethics. Have requested more global content.	Each area keeps eye on curriculum. Extent of oversight varies in department..	Consistency explicitly required in core. Common exams & quizzes.	Teachers coordinate & teach same lesson on same day	70% of 1 st yr. is required. It has been difficult to carry integration themes thru core courses.	Core is taken as a cohort. 2 week program on team building and international understanding instead of (party based) orientation.

Performance Evaluation:

School	Course Evaluation Method	Overall Student Satisfaction	Grading	Exemptions		
Harvard	End of term survey, assess teacher & course. Separate Faculty observation.	Satisfied	50% on participation, relative curve 20 – 70 - 10	None, more experienced students expected to help out, simulates real life		
Kellogg	End of course survey – overall teaching, content and degree of challenge.	Generally satisfied, choice among core courses helps with, complaints about weaker teachers	Recommended curve 35% As, 10% Cs – generally follow. Some emphasis on participation,	Departments determine policy. Exams, previous academic work. No dept uses work experience to grant exemption.		
Stanford	End of course evaluations assess instructor and course. Also look at, class size, student draw from other parts of university.	Mixed in core, depends on teacher. Some new teachers are problematic, but overall students happy/.	Recommended mean for classes, deviation does not require approval but dean sends e-mail summarizing all grade distributions.	None. Students can enroll in more advanced classes.		
Wharton	End of course evaluation by students.	Substantial dissatisfaction in teaching, open letter, currently responding with curriculum change.	Use A-F system. Classes of 20+ students required mean of 33.33. If less than 20, mean goes up.			
Cornell	Midterm evaluations for all courses & kept by teacher. Weekly feedback sessions from students, end of course evaluations	Overall students quite pleased, get to know each other and faculty. Ithaca is a small place.	Required mean, core = 3.35 & electives = 3.5. Need approval from Assoc. Dean to go above these.	Departments determine policy. Exemptions by exam. CPAs automatically exempt from accounting.		
Berkeley	End our course evaluation, ad-hoc course observation.	Satisfaction has improved substantially in last 3 years with improvements in the core.	Historically no enforced distribution. Considering starting one.			
Duke	End of course eval used. More emphasis now on teaching , culturally teaching is now valued and understood as the revenue source.	Substantial improvement in satisfaction since response to past complaints.	Grade distributions for core & electives. No deviation in core. Electives allowed higher grades.	No exemptions for mini-courses at beginning. Exemption policies determined by departments based on exams, certification, experience.		