



Louisiana State University

and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Department of Mathematics

August 6, 2001

To Professor Dan Fogel, Executive Vice-Chancellor and Provost

From the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate

Via the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

Report on the Review of Courses in Philosophy and Religious Studies

The Committee unanimously recommends the following actions. The forms for these actions are herewith submitted for your approval. We take the view that the courses recommended for renewal need not be reviewed again until after the current ten-year cycle of the all-courses review is complete. We are notifying the Department by means of a copy of this memorandum.

(1) The University should renew and confirm the listing of the following two courses in the Analytical Reasoning Area of General Education:

Philosophy 1021: Introduction to Philosophy: Elementary Logic

Philosophy 2010: Introduction to Symbolic Logic

(2) The University should renew and confirm the listing of the following fifteen courses¹ in the Humanities Area of General Education:

¹Philosophy 2028 and Religious Studies 2028 are two names for the same course.

Philosophy 1000: Introduction to Philosophy
Philosophy 2020: Ethics
Philosophy 2023: Philosophy of Art
Philosophy 2024: Philosophy in Literature
Philosophy 2028: Philosophy of Religion
Philosophy 2033: History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy²
Philosophy 2035: History of Modern Philosophy
Religious Studies 1003: Introduction to Religion
Religious Studies 1004: Old Testament
Religious Studies 1005: New Testament
Religious Studies 1006: Honors: New Testament
Religious Studies 1015: Honors: Introduction to Religion
Religious Studies 2001: Faith and Doubt
Religious Studies 2027: Eastern Religions
Religious Studies 2028: Philosophy of Religion
Religious Studies 2029: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

(3) The University should list the following two courses in the Humanities Area, effective immediately (these will be new listings in General Education):

Philosophy 1001: Honors: Introduction to Philosophy
Religious Studies 1007: Honors: Old Testament

We offer the following remarks.

²Philosophy 2034 and 2036 are Honors tutorials which may be taken concurrently with 2033 and 2035, respectively. 2033 and 2035 are listed in General Education, but 2034 and 2036 are not. Since 2034 and 2036 are one-hour courses, there would be no utility in listing them, and they have not been proposed for listing. Since a one-hour course cannot by itself contribute to meeting the Area requirement, it might even be confusing if such a course were marked in the catalog with the Gen Ed star.

The Chair and the faculty show a high level of effort and concern for the good cause of active student engagement with subject matter, and student writing in particular. Therefore, resources spent to keep these classes as small as they are, or to make them somewhat smaller, would be well spent.

The Department hires a certain number of temporary personnel to teach some of the elementary courses. Consistent quality would be easier to achieve in those ranks if budgetary commitments were made in timely fashion, well before the fall semester begins. Renewable instructorships, funded early and advertised nationally, would bring better results and fewer problems. We realize that such concerns are widespread, and that it's a matter of achieving better control and predictability of enrollment numbers.

We find grading standards in the courses to be appropriate. Attached is a table showing the grade distributions over a two-year period.

Faculty, in their discussions with us, brought up the possible need, in due course, to delete, rename, re-describe, or modify some of the courses. We are content to leave those matters in their capable hands.

The Committee is grateful to the Chair and other faculty of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies for their cooperation in the review, their responsiveness to our questions, and for the initiatives they took in studying enrollment patterns, grade distributions, and other data pertaining to the performance of the courses. We found them thoughtful, conscientious, passionate, and articulate about their role in General Education.

In the attachments to the forms for the nineteen courses, we found many independent voices, of teachers who care deeply about their work, with interesting things to say. They addressed practical problems of teaching and expressed convictions about the value of subject matter. Notable, for example, are the words of Professor Sutherland, attached to the form for Religious Studies 2027. We liked her comments in item (9) about the catalog preamble to the General Education Requirements. The Committee

has recommended the removal of that "verbiage." And No, it was not authored by mathematicians.

We are grateful especially to all the representatives of the Department who talked with us at our meetings.

At our meeting of March 19, 2001, we met with Professors John R. Baker, Edward H. Henderson, Rodger M. Payne, Mary J. Sirridge, and Husain Sarkar for a wide-ranging discussion of problems and issues. We touched on criteria whereby some courses offered by the Department are listed in the General Education Program and others are not, as well as broader questions about the design of the Program.

At our meeting of July 10, 2001, we were joined by Professors Delbert Burkett, Edward H. Henderson, Stuart A. Irvine, and Rodger M. Payne for a discussion focussed on the New Testament and Old Testament courses--their detailed content, and their appropriateness for General Education.

As we make our way through these reviews, we try to formulate general statements to clarify what we do and why. Two of those are attached to this memo.

Yours sincerely,

Carruth McGehee, for the Committee

Copies to the other members of the Committee; to Professor Edward H. Henderson and other faculty mentioned above; and to Dean M. Jane Collins.

Enclosures, for the Provost only: The nineteen forms.

Reports on the surveys of students taking these courses in Fall 2000, tables of data, and other pertinent material, are on file with the Committee.

**Table of Grade Distributions in the Courses in
Philosophy and Religious Studies
Overall for Fall 98, Spring 99, Fall 99, and Spring 00**

These data are taken from a study produced by Ms. Sandra Walker,
Office of Budget and Planning,
September 6, 2000.

Course	Enrollment	A	B	C	D	F	W	ABC
PHIL 1021	884	23%	19%	18%	8%	9%	24%	59%
2010	119	31%	18%	13%	3%	6%	29%	62%
1000	1545	28%	17%	13%	3%	6%	22%	68%
2020	316	21%	22%	17%	6%	9%	25%	60%
2023	37	30%	43%	0%	0%	3%	24%	73%
2024	---							
2028	99	16%	34%	19%	3%	4%	22%	70%
2033	84	25%	14%	13%	7%	8%	32%	52%
2035	60	38%	37%	7%	3%	0%	15%	82%
REL 1003	506	38%	28%	12%	5%	3%	14%	78%
1004	219	27%	34%	16%	9%	2%	12%	77%
1005	161	28%	35%	17%	6%	2%	12%	80%
1006	---							
1015	---							
2001	59	27%	41%	5%	2%	3%	22%	73%
2027	263	22%	29%	17%	5%	8%	19%	68%
2028	82	20%	29%	21%	6%	6%	18%	70%
2029	293	31%	34%	14%	5%	4%	11%	80%
PHIL 1001	43	33%	30%	12%	2%	5%	19%	74%
REL 1007	11	27%	36%	9%	0%	9%	18%	73%

Remarks on the Humanities Area by the Faculty Senate Committee on General Education

In the Humanities Area, each LSU graduate must take three of the listed courses, for at least nine hours' credit. The Area consists of the subject matter and disciplines of literature, history, philosophy, classical studies, religious studies, language skills, and foreign languages beyond the basic level.

For a course to be listed in the Humanities Area of General Education, it should be taught at a true university level, with appropriate expectations and grading standards. The assignment of grades should achieve effective incentives, sound and useful credentialing, and preparation for the rigorous expectations that students will encounter in their future academic work as well as in the job market. Furthermore, the course should represent a high-priority educational goal in the humanities. On those grounds, there may be a good case to be made for many courses. That being true, courses must compete for listings, and the better cases prevail. Overall, the listings should be chosen so as to result in the best possible basic education in the Humanities Area for all our students.

It is fundamental to the General Education Program that these nine hours are reserved for the claims of the humanities disciplines *per se* to be part of everyone's education. For a course to be listed in the Humanities Area, it is not absolutely necessary that it be taught by a department specializing in one of those disciplines. However, it is important that the design of the course not be substantially driven or constrained by the needs of particular majors or professions, or substantially occupied with their conventions, terminology, and problems. For example, Philosophy 2018 (Professional Ethics) is designed and offered in response to the needs of certain departments, and required by those departments of their majors. Philosophy 2020 (Ethics) is designed by the philosophy faculty to treat the subject of ethics in generality, and with greater philosophical and historical depth. Philosophy 2020 is a General Education course, and 2018 is not.

Those examples do not represent a conceptual bright line between courses that should be listed and those that should not. The applications of the doctrine expressed here remain open to discussion. We recognize that reasonable people may disagree about the issues. We undertake to make a decision only after considerable discussion and consultation, and only with a consensus within the Committee.

**The Core Curriculum Versus the Well-Selected List:
Remarks by the Faculty Senate Committee on General Education**

The preparation of proposals for a general education program at LSU began in 1983 with a group called the Committee on a Core Curriculum. The early discussions made frequent reference to a pure, one might say extreme, concept of a "Core" as a small set of courses, required of all students and thus forming a common academic experience. Professor Peter A. Soderbergh, Chair of the CCC, prepared an extensive report on the Brooklyn College Core Studies Program, which was both extreme and pure in that sense, and which required everyone to take a certain set of courses, 34 credit hours' worth.

Such a Small Core concept did not catch on at LSU, but it served as a point of reference and point of departure. LSU adopted a set of distribution requirements that was limited in size. Courses were to be admitted carefully and thoughtfully to the list in each of the six Areas.

There are now over 280 listed courses. That is not so many as it seems, since many a course is accompanied by a lab or an Honors variant. In the year 2000, after two years of preparation, the Committee on General Education began to reconsider systematically, on a ten-year cycle, all the courses listed in General Education. This process entails not merely a review of how individual courses are functioning, but also a study of broad issues that arise, and an effort to formulate and to express the general principles by which courses are chosen to be listed.

Some courses will be de-listed. Others will continue to be admitted to the lists upon being proposed by Departments. Sometimes a course proposal will have been actively encouraged by the Committee, when it sees a need.

The Committee does not consider that 280 is necessarily too many. In fact, we wish to confirm our preference for the concept of the Well-Selected List over the idea of a Small Core. Whereas the latter might call (for example) for there to be only one course in philosophy, we have recommended the continued listing in the Humanities Area of all eight of the philosophy courses that we reviewed during 2000-2001.

A department advocating that a course be listed in an Area of General Education must make a strong case as to why the course's subject matter is central and significant; why its learning objectives are important and useful; and why it should

be part of every LSU graduate's education. The course must compete for listing, by the strength of the case made. The course must be part of the Canon for the Area, and must not be too narrow. But the Committee also, finally, is comfortable with the listing of more than a small number of courses. For one thing, an Area may be well represented, and a student provided an ample foundation for future learning, by a deep and focused study of any one of several subjects. For another thing, we are apt to have more intense engagement by more faculty (and students as well) by courses with particular, delimited foci; and we are more likely to have classes of reasonable size when more faculty are engaged, thus intensely, in General Education.

At LSU, then, we seek a Well-Selected List, not a Small Core. We welcome arguments that there is a Canon. But at a University, we cannot escape the awareness that it is large and evolving.