

Report on the Role of the Core Curriculum in Assisting Students Select a Major and in Meeting Core Goals

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Introduction

On Assessment Day in November 2003, questionnaires were administered to 321 seniors taking a major field test in ten different disciplines: biology, business, chemistry, economics, geology, history, mathematics, political science, and psychology. There were 112 transfer students and 209 students who began their college career at USI. The number of students in each discipline is reported in Table 1.

One purpose of the survey was to determine if core curriculum courses play a role in influencing students' decisions to select a particular major. A second goal of the survey was to measure whether or not seniors believe that they have met core curriculum goals.

The Role of Core Curriculum Courses in Students' Selection of a Major

In order to measure whether or not the core curriculum plays a role in students' selection of their majors, seniors were asked whether they had taken a core curriculum course at USI that inspired them to major in a particular discipline. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 2. These data reveal that about one fifth (19%) of the respondents answered in the affirmative.

Students' Perceived Success in Meeting Core Curriculum Goals

A battery of questions measured whether students' perceived that they had met core curriculum goals. Seniors were asked to indicate the degree to which they had met specific core curriculum goals on a scale of 0 to 6 where a 0 indicates that they had no confidence at all and 6 suggests that they were very confident. The results of the analysis are reported in Table 3.

These data in Table 3 suggest that seniors believe they have made some progress in meeting most of the core curriculum goals. There is, however, some variation in seniors' perceived success in meeting particular goals. The ability to make ethical judgments is the only goal earning a mean score above five. An aptitude to interpret works of art is the

single core curriculum goal that yields an average score that fails to exceed the midpoint of the scale. Other core goals have mean scores above the midpoint of the scale, but below five. Additional analysis reveals that there are no substantive differences in the mean scores for any of the goals when one controls for the transfer status of students or the number of core courses completed (results not shown).

Table 1

Study Participants by Major

Discipline	Percentage	Number
Biology	12	37
Business	41	131
Chemistry	2	6
Economics	3	8
English	13	41
Geology	2	7
History	8	27
Mathematics	2	6
Political Science	6	19
Psychology	12	39

Table 2

Percentage Inspired to Select a Major by Core Curriculum

Inspired to Select Major	Percentage	Number of Cases
Inspired	19%	61
Not Inspired	81%	259

Table 3

Confidence in Meeting Core Curriculum Goals

<u>Core Goal</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>n</u>
Ability to make ethical judgments	5.2	5.0	0.8	320
Ability to interpret works of art	3.0	3.0	1.5	320
Ability to write well	4.8	5.0	0.9	320
Ability to speak in front of group	3.9	4.0	1.5	320
Ability to use college-level algebra	4.2	5.0	1.6	320
Ability to interpret literature	3.7	4.0	1.4	319
Ability to adopt a healthy lifestyle	4.7	5.0	1.1	320
Ability to Analyze a contemporary problem from differing perspectives	3.8	4.0	1.2	318
Ability to critically evaluate information	4.8	5.0	0.9	320
Ability to use electronic data bases	4.9	5.0	1.1	320
Ability to conduct scientific experiments	3.6	4.0	1.5	319
Ability to analyze survey data	4.1	4.0	1.3	319
Ability to conduct field research	4.0	4.0	1.3	318
Ability of comprehend arguments	4.5	5.0	1.0	316
Understanding of historical context	4.5	5.0	1.1	314
Understanding social institutions	4.6	5.0	1.0	313
Understanding scientific method	4.5	5.0	1.3	315
Understanding cultural interdependence	4.6	5.0	1.2	316
Understanding western tradition	4.1	4.0	1.2	311