

Spring 2009 Core Curriculum Impact Survey

Overview

In the Spring 2009 the Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA) conducted a survey of undergraduate students on the impact of the core curriculum and the experiences students had with their core curriculum courses. A critical component of the survey was an open ended question that asked: “Briefly, what changes would you recommend in the Core Curriculum that would enhance your learning opportunities here at USF?” Survey participation was requested of 4,033 undergraduates that had indicated having registered for a core curriculum course in the Fall 2008. Of these, 423 (10.5%) students replied to the request. Further review of the responses showed that 206 (49%) gave a useable response to the open ended question; 145 (34%) skipped the question by checking the option “Don’t know,” and 72 (17%) left the answer blank.

Nine categories were extracted to explain student perspectives and recommendations to the core curriculum. These are described below with corresponding graphs that show the relationships among categories. Each category on the graph is represented by the largest number of students’ responses (largest circle) and shows its relative proportion to each of the other categories. Example student responses are listed to support the findings in each category. The categories created are listed below according to the largest number of responses each of these categories received:

1. *Structure of the Core:* captures all responses of how students perceived the classes they took in the core curriculum and also offer some suggestions for improvement.
2. *Student Interests:* includes all responses of student’s interest in and options desired in the core curriculum.
3. *Helpfulness, provides needed skills:* encompasses all responses where a student met their expectations when taking classes from the core curriculum.
4. *Faculty:* includes opinions (both positive or negative) about faculty teaching effectiveness in the core curriculum
5. *No changes:* captures all responses where students maintained that the core curriculum is appropriate, no changes were needed and reasons why.
6. *Workload:* refers to the amount of work students reported while taking core courses, and how this affected their other commitments at school.
7. *Easy Content:* encompasses all responses where students feel the content of core classes was too easy.
8. *Jesuit Education:* captures all responses that relate the core curriculum to USF’s mission statement and other characteristics of USF.
9. *Difficult Content:* captures all responses where students feel the content of core classes was too difficult and it affected students’ performance in these and other classes.

Overall, students are aware or understand the significance of taking general education courses, even when some courses are not related to their majors. However, there is also a perception that USF is imposing a core curriculum that some students feel they do not need. There are a number of responses complaining about some of the courses as well as recommendations to improve the way the core curriculum is managed.

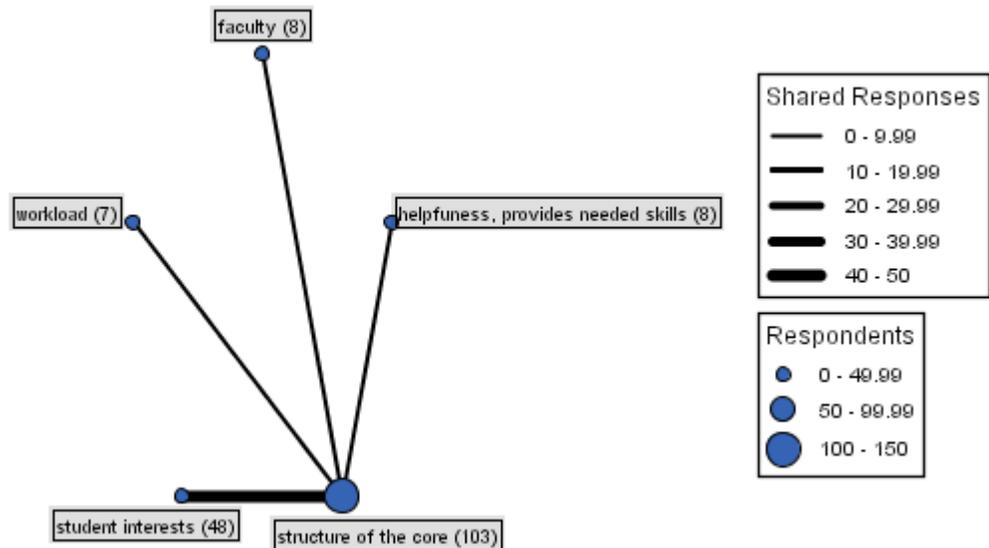
The different categories which reflect students’ points of view of the core curriculum are interrelated as follows:

The *Structure of the Core* was the single largest category with 103 (50%) of the 206 responses; relationships with other categories was considered when seven or more shared responses existed. Shown in the graph below, the largest relationship occurred with *Student Interests*' (47%) and to a lesser extent with the *Helpfulness, Provides needed skills* and *Faculty* (both with 8%) and *Workload* (7%). Responses in this category cited the courses students took, how they took advantage of these courses, how these classes should be addressed, and the learning opportunities they may or wish to have by taking these classes. In general, opinions are positive and students felt they gained from taking these courses. There appears to be a good understanding about the importance of having a general education even if some courses are not related to their majors. However, there are a large number of responses where students affirm that core courses not related to their major should not be enforced since it is felt not to be an efficient use of their time.

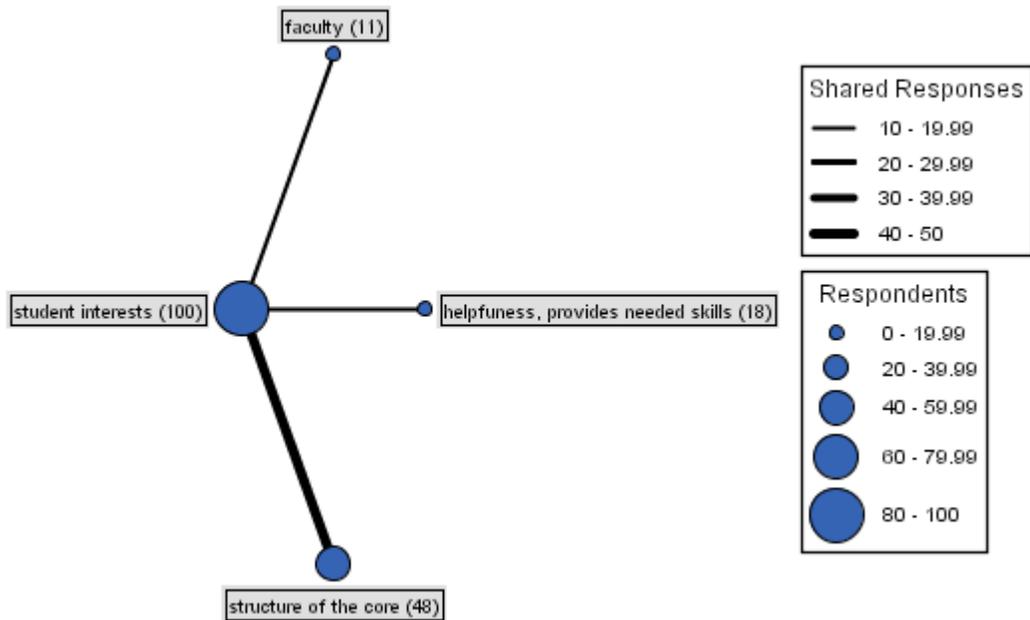
From the 103 responses extracted, 48 (47%) mentioned how classes should be addressed in order to meet the interest of the students. Some of the students felt that they did not have enough options to choose from and found themselves taking classes from which they would gain no benefit. Some responses recommend including upper level classes to count for the core curriculum, add other activities in the current courses that demand more of students, and classes should not be taught in a conventional way so professors need to find ways to engage the interest of students.

When referring to how *Class Workload* affects students, respondents mentioned that classes from the core curriculum represent too much work, which sometimes is unnecessary and interferes with the effort they should put in majors' classes. Another criticism was the *Content* of the core curriculum, different perceptions were given where a group of students (3%) maintained core classes are not challenging; therefore, students lose interest and do not take any advantage of them. On the other hand, 2% of students felt that the classes were too advanced and not well designed for students who had little or no background in the area of study.

Finally, students also made reference to the *Jesuit Education* USF offers, especially to the mission statement. Approximately 5% of the students showed interest in the Mission, 72% of this group would like to see the mission statement enforced in the core curriculum, and were disappointed it is not emphasized enough in the classes they took.



Additionally, 23% of the responses to this question captured what students would like to see in the core curriculum and how they would benefit more from the Core [*Students' Interest*]. Relationships were established when nine or more common responses were present with other categories. Students expressed their interests based on experiences they had by taking core courses as well as their majors' objectives. Throughout the comments in the relationship with *Helpfulness, provide needed skills* category (18%) students indicated their satisfaction with the core classes and they were perceived as courses they would like to keep. Also, students reflected on what could be added to satisfied students' needs. Students' satisfaction was also noticed in responses where no changes were suggested (5%), stating the core curriculum is working as it should. Moreover, students suggested they would like core classes to include more activities related to community and service learning, which would improve their college experience.



Students also expressed their opinion about **Faculty**. Of the 206 valid responses, 29 (14%) were classified in this category where students gave their opinion about instructors who teach core curriculum classes. The largest relationship with **Faculty** was seen in *Students' Interests* (38%) and the *Structure of the Core* (28%). Negative opinions about instructors are slightly higher than positive opinions (names were removed intentionally). Of the 29 responses, 28% of the responses expressed how the instructor makes the experience enjoyable and helps students to take full advantage of the class. On the other hand, 38% of the responses expressed a negative opinion about instructors maintaining engagement with students, do not consider students have different backgrounds, and do not show motivation to teach. Another 38% of the responses offered suggestions how professors could teach in different ways in order to reach students of different specializations as well as the need to adopt a standardized grading system.

