University Core Development Committee
November 28, 2000
Gasson 105, 1:30 p.m.

Members attending included Richard Cobb-Stevens, Chair, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Maggie Galvin, John Heineman, Kathleen Mahoney, Ourida Mostefai, and Dennis Sardella. Stephen Pope, Chair of the Theology Department, was our guest as we reviewed the core offerings in Theology.

The theology core can be filled through several different course sequences: Perspectives, PULSE, Honors Program, or the four two-course sequences, each of which Pope noted has a distinctive student constituency:

- Introduction to Catholicism
- Introduction to Christian Theology—Often Catholics take it to learn about the broader Christian tradition.
- Biblical Heritage—Sometimes Catholics take it because they feel they don't know the Bible, and also Protestants who "trust" the Theology Dept. the most in this area.
- Religious Quest—Comparing Christianity and a non-Christian world religion, this is the most popular offering other than PULSE and has the best feedback from students, who often take follow-up courses in this area.

The Theology Department has about 100 majors and 20 minors. Majors must take two core classes: one year of Biblical Heritage or Religious Quest plus one other core course. Freshmen dominate in the core courses, but there are also a number of sophomores. To receive core credit, students must take both parts of the same sequence.

John Heineman noted that at least nine of the syllabi for the core courses did not require student writing, and a few courses did not require a final exam.

Asked about the faculty teaching the core, Pope stated that it was taught mostly by tenured faculty; almost all fulltime faculty teach one core course per year. Regarding class size, Pope said that some but not all large core classes have discussion sections. Kathleen Mahoney asked if the core courses serve the department well, and Pope answered that the diversity of courses is attractive to students. He noted, however, that the Introduction to Catholicism is the most difficult to teach because the students are bored and it seems to recruit the least number of majors. Religious Quest generates the most majors, with PULSE and Christian Theology recruiting a fair number as well.

Clare Dunsford observed that the bulk of the syllabi were very well constructed, and others seconded that sentiment. Pope noted that the department has a curriculum committee which systematically reviews core courses; for instance, this year they are reviewing Perspectives and Introduction to Catholicism.

There was some general discussion about how to improve teaching in the core, especially among post-tenure faculty members.

Submitted by Clare Dunsford