

University Core Development Committee

October 9, 2001

Gasson 105, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Minutes

In attendance were Chair Richard Cobb-Stevens, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Paul Gray, Rob Gross, Maggie Kearney, Ourida Mostefai, and Sandra Waddock.

Professor Ned Rosen of the Math Department was our guest to discuss core courses in his department.

Rosen outlined the core offerings in Math, explaining the staffing and aims of each:

I. Calculus courses

- MT 100-101 :
 - *for Econ., Bio, Management majors, with an emphasis on applications
 - *taught by full-time faculty in large lectures of 70 or 80 augmented by two discussion groups taught by first-year T.A.'s
- MT 102-103
 - *for science and math majors, with an emphasis on formulas of calculus
 - *taught by full-time faculty in smaller classes

II. Non-calculus courses

Most students take one semester of these, except for Psychology majors, who must take two math courses.

- MT 004 Finite Probability and Applications
- MT 005 Linear Math and Applications
 - *two-thirds taught by second-year T.F.'s, with a fulltime faculty member supervising course schedule and content to ensure consistency among sections
- MT 007 Ideas in Math
 - *mostly taught by fulltime faculty, so limited number of sections
 - *varies in content
- MT 020 Survey of Calculus
 - *gentle introduction to calculus taught mostly by fulltime adjuncts or emeriti

Rosen noted that these are all "service" courses more than they are truly "core"; that is, they tend not to emphasize historical development or a link to broader ideas. This reflects the fact that the emphasis in most Math Department courses is on how to "do" math.

This led to a general discussion of the difference between a core curriculum and distribution requirements, with one member noting the lack of coherence in the core due

to its multiple foci but arguing nonetheless that the core functions more integrally than a set of distribution requirements. ✓

The Committee made a recommendation that the Math Department undertake a series of conversations, perhaps in regular workshops, about the ways in which math could be taught in a historical context (as noted on some of the current syllabi for calculus courses) or with some attention paid to the relevance of mathematics to the “perennial questions” the core proposes to teach. There was a suggestion that perhaps the Dean’s office might provide some modest funds to support such workshops, likely to be used to purchase refreshments.

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In other business, the English Department had submitted course descriptions for three courses proposed for cultural diversity credit, but the committee will await syllabi before making a decision on them.

Submitted by Clare Dunsford