Update on the UCA Core (Fall 2016)

Over the past year the UCA Core took shape as a foundational program of study for all students at UCA. With a full complement of Lower Division (LD) and Upper Division (UD) courses in place, as well as an assessment process fully underway, the Core can now be seen for what it is, and for what it was designed: a comprehensive, foundational educative experience rooted in core competencies and skills necessary for students to succeed in a diverse and ever changing world. We have come a long way since 2012, and thanks to the hard work of many we are well placed to offer students the best comprehensive educational experience in Arkansas. Below I’ll highlight selected recent accomplishments, and on-going efforts to continually improve the Core program at UCA.

1. Advising and Public Relations
   1. I continue to work with the Advising Center and Registrar’s Office to streamline the process by which transfer and new students are audited for LD and UD core requirements.
   2. In consultation with Dr. Jonathan Glenn and various stakeholders in the Academic Advising Center we revised the LD Core Checksheet, simplifying the language and the visual presentation thereby minimizing student and advisor confusion. The checksheet can be located here: <http://uca.edu/academicbulletins/ld-uca-core/>
   3. In addition, a comprehensive and user friendly list of all UD Core courses is being developed and will be posted on the Core website shortly.
   4. During the late Fall of 2015 and Spring of 2016, I had the benefit of working with a Public Relations intern, Ms. Jennah Denney, from the Department of Communication, and was able to achieve the items directly below (d-f) only because of her efforts.
   5. We have updated the UCA Core website to be more student friendly. I am currently working with CTE to continue to update the website so that it is more informative and easily navigable.
   6. We created two Powerpoint presentations. One presentation focuses on the Core in general, providing an overview of the goals and intention of the core, as well as advice on meeting core requirements. The second presentation is designed to assist students in reading their degreeworks report, with emphasis on the Core.
   7. We designed and have begun to distribute trifold brochures and flyers on the UCA Core. This is an attempt to publicize the Core as a coherent program of study with distinct goals.
2. First-Year Seminars
   1. Along with Drs. Gary Bunn, Julia Winden Fey, and Mr. Thomas Bruick, we have developed and are piloting this Fall, an FYS Sophomore Peer Mentor Program modeled on a similar program at the University of Northern Iowa. This program will pair a sophomore student with a section of an FYS course, wherein they will provide additional support for the instructor and the students. The mentors will do so while enrolled in EDUC 2310, a course designed to teach about mentorship and learning communities.
   2. In consultation with the CTE, FYS training has resumed with both mandatory training sessions being provided to first time FYS instructors and optional roundtable style events being provided for continuing and first time FYS Faculty. An FYS sub-committee of the Core Council, with significant assistance from Carl Olds, produced an FYS manual that provides all FYS instructors with background on FYS courses as well as sample assignments and syllabi to assist them in designing their FYS courses as unique, first-year experiences.
   3. In addition, Mr. Thomas Bruick has developed an assessment procedure utilizing Mapworks to assess FYS courses in terms of non-cognitive benefits.
   4. We continue to monitor FYS enrollments, section numbers, and student needs and address issues as they arise.
3. Core Council
   1. The Core council will be considering this Fall a “White Paper” authored by the Core Director on the criteria under which courses ought to be considered before being allowed into the Core. The Council believes stricter and clearer guidelines are necessary in order to maintain integrity in the program.
   2. In addition, the Core council, in consultation with relevant chairs and departments is moving to rearrange FA and HUM courses in the LD Core to facilitate both greater program coherence as well as to streamline the program.
4. Assessment: Unfortunately, after a successful search in the Fall of 2015 we have lost our Director of Assessment after only two months. A new search is currently underway. Regardless, we have still made progress on assessment of the UCA Core.
   1. The Core council adopted an assessment schedule wherein one area of the Core (Effective Communication, Critical Inquiry, Responsible Living, or Diversity) will be assessed per year, with the resulting data being interpreted the following year and interventions being implemented thereafter. This cycle will allow us to focus on one area at a time without overwhelming faculty with the demands of assessment.
   2. We have collected data on the full LD Core from Fall of 2015, and will be presented with a report from Dr. Kurt Boniecki this Fall. This initial report will provide the Core Council, and the campus at large, the opportunity to discuss the role of assessment with respect to the UCA Core.
   3. Assessment will continue this Fall with all Responsible Living courses being assessed in the Fall and Spring. Multiple training sessions will be provided for faculty teaching a Responsible Living courses this Fall.
   4. A new assessment procedure has been designed to replace the excel spreadsheets. Faculty will now report assessment data through Blackboard. Dr. Boniecki in consultation with the CTE has developed training materials on the new process. They are located here: <http://uca.edu/core/assessment/> In addition, I ran training sessions throughout September on this new process. Thanks to Drs. Boniecki and J.J. Mayo for their assistance with these training sessions, and to Amy Hawkins, Vicki Parish, Jessica Underwood, and the rest of the CTE staff for their help.

Jacob M. Held, PhD

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the UCA Core