

# Why Take Core Courses Early in One's College Career?

Ken Petress

The core is universal; that is, all students are required to enroll for the same institutionally required courses; there are a few options allowed, but far fewer than in the past. The overarching rationale for this change was that all students would benefit from certain content/skill courses and that common shared academic experiences would add positive meaning to an UMPI degree.

One suggested change to the new core policy that was not adopted by the University Senate that I believe is important is: requiring students to finish all core courses early on in their university matriculation. It is recognized that students' full-time/part-time status, daily and hourly schedule needs, specific major program requirements, course scheduling idiosyncrasies, and students' personal proclivities prevent any single rigid process for scheduling core classes; however, there are benefits to taking core courses as early as one can do to promote students' having greater options later in their academic careers when skill and knowledge refinements seem appropriate and when such specialized course offerings come only once.

There are tangible benefits to students, faculty, and the institution derived from students taking their core requirements early in their matriculation. Students would benefit by having skills developed or sharpened as early as possible. Computing, writing, speaking, and other skills are commonly required in

future major, minor, and elective courses; in internships and practica; as well as later in vocational/professional careers. Courses aimed at developing or sharpening such skills are diluted in their purpose if they are taken after much of their pedagogical need has passed. Not only are skills needed in a utilitarian sense, they can be best understood and appreciated when practically applied, which is impossible when such skill courses are taken after courses offering such application and reflection.

Knowledge gained in core courses help students comprehend rationales, cause-effects, and implications of material learned in courses from all fields. Taking core courses early in one's college career aids students in their major/minor areas of study.

Faculty members are also aided when students enroll early for core courses. All too often, students who delay basic core course enrollment resent having to sit through basic material; these students sometimes intimidate younger students who do not possess the academic skills, backgrounds, and sophistication gained by many of their more experienced peers. Some upper level students taking basic courses take a less than serious view of such courses manifested by poor attendance, lackadaisical performance, and less than stellar and valid class/teacher evaluations.

The institution benefits when students take core courses early in their studies as the enrollment predictability is more stable resulting in less likelihood of inappropriate sections of courses being offered. When numbers of students delay their core

course registrations, their needs skew course offerings to the detriment of younger students who face unexpected and unplanned filled classes.

Students, potential internship placement centers, and the school benefit when students pursue internships having all the basics completed. It is devastating to have an internship site manager assume students know certain material or have specific basic skills only to discover some students do not have them. Both the student and the university lose in that scenario.

Students, faculty, and the university benefit in tangible ways by having students take their core courses as early as practicable. The core was chosen based upon what the faculty determined were the building blocks that all students ought to possess **before** embarking on their majors and minors.