

# Magis Core Curriculum Assessment Plan

## *New Questions, New Answers (2022-2032)*

### **New Questions**

Meaningful assessment practices should ask consequential questions about student learning, provide faculty with assessment results, and offer faculty the tools to develop their pedagogical practices based on assessment findings. Since the adoption of the Magis Core, Creighton University faculty and staff have devoted significant intellect and labor to core assessment practices. In 2014, we conducted pilot assessment to test core rubrics. From 2015 to 2019, we conducted baseline assessment that evaluated every objective across the core. This process culminated in developing a revised core plan that implements findings from the previous four years. For the last two years, we have conducted different models of focused assessment—a phase of core assessment engaged in ongoing exploration of student learning. This document outlines our assessment work for the next decade of the Magis Core.

### **Magis Core Day & Our Culture of Assessment**

In meeting with this year’s Assessment Subcommittee, the Magis Core leadership team noted reports of resistance from faculty to “just another assessment day”—a day where we picked a component and scored using a rubric, or a day where we revised rubrics. Instead, faculty desired an assessment that would 1) meaningfully influence their pedagogy, course offerings, and curriculum design 2) create quality data and afford time for discussing the meaning of that data with other instructors. Though our practices in the past have provided important insights and findings about student learning in the core, the format and practices feel monotonous to many.

At the same time, in meetings with Dr. Gail Jensen, and Dr. Marie Baehr, assessment consultant with the Higher Learning Commission, we consistently heard the challenge to make assessment “meaningful” in the sense that it would impact student learning. Dr. Baehr challenged us to ask, “What will we get meaning from?” and subsequently, “What would we get from assessment data that would help us?” According to Dr. Baehr, a “defensible” assessment plan for the HLC:

- Builds on faculty sentiments about learning that are typically relegated to break rooms and office hallways
- Transforms these sentiments into assessment questions that pay attention to potential weaknesses of our core
- “Shores up” our resources into the areas of greatest need

In light of a transition to new Magis Core leadership (Drs. McHendry and Kurtyka), we find ourselves at an opportune moment to develop new and different assessment practices to ask new questions and develop new answers.

## The Assessment Cycle

Starting with Academic Year 2022/2023, we will begin a ten-year focused assessment cycle. This cycle works in phases to study student learning in particular parts of the core. The activities in each phase include:

- Step 1: Engage Faculty
  - Engage with faculty to identify problems, tensions, or needs in student learning related to the area of the core being assessed at that year's Magis Core Day.
- Step 2: Develop Assessment Research Questions and Practices
  - Develop specific research questions based on the problems faculty identified that can be studied through the collection and analysis of artifacts of student learning.
  - Collect artifacts.
  - Hold online and/or in-person training to norm rubrics, prepare faculty to assess artifacts, and ensure interrater reliability.
- Step 3: Assess Artifacts and Form Cohorts
  - Prior to Magis Core Day, faculty work remotely to assess artifacts and report quantitative and qualitative data via Blueline.
  - On Magis Core Day, members of the core leadership team and the Assessment Subcommittee report initial results from the work-at-home assessment. Teams of Assessment Leaders lead discussion of the data and opportunities for pedagogical approaches that may improve student learning.
  - Form a small cohort of faculty tasked with meeting over the next year to identify response to assessment findings that can improve student learning.
- Step 4: Cohort Initiatives
  - During the year, the cohort will develop plans to communicate findings to the wider university, identify best pedagogical practices to improve student learning, and make suggestions (if needed) for potential improvements to the core plan.
  - The cohort shares the results of their work at the next Magis Core Day.
- Step 5: Cohort Impact
  - The cohort develops and proposes a plan to examine the extent to which their activities have been effective
  - Two or three years after the cohort forms, they enact their plan and report to the Assessment Subcommittee on their findings.

The final phase of this assessment cycle will begin during the 2029/2030 academic year. During the following year, Magis Core Day (May 2031) will be used to hold a core summit. At this summit, we will reflect on the ways we have used assessment to drive pedagogical practices that improve student learning. Further, the summit will hold discussions on the current state of the core and consider if the Magis Core can sustain another decade of service

to our students and the University. We will devote AY2031/2032 to implementing actions developed by cohorts formed at the core summit.

### Example Phase: Written Communication

The first Magis Core Day in this assessment cycle will study elements of written communication in the core. Discussions with the Assessment Subcommittee surfaced concerns around the difficulty of teaching writing in the core, for example:

- High course caps in the explorations-level courses (30+) make assigning and responding to writing challenging
- The sense that one does not need to “teach” writing to meet the core objectives (aside from those for Contemporary Composition and Designated Written Communication)
- Limited opportunities for students to practice written communication outside of those specific core components
- A general lack of training and resources for teaching writing
- Concerns about the degree to which we are preparing student to write in a digital age

In November 2022, the Assessment Subcommittee consulted with faculty peers about challenges related to student writing and the core. Members reported that faculty had experienced a consistent concern with students’ abilities to use evidence effectively. This concern aligns with learning objectives in both Contemporary Composition (4.R.2 “Students will find, evaluate, and use evidence to write effectively”) and Designated Written Communication (4.P. 2 “Students will effectively use ... written ... language appropriate to the audience, occasion, and context” wherein students are using written evidence that is appropriate to their audience and discipline).<sup>1</sup> The subcommittee also noted that examining how students use evidence, effectively or not, would dovetail nicely into faculty development. As such, the first cohort would have the opportunity to create impactful resources for any course, department, or program where the use of evidence in writing is important.

Magis Core Day is tentatively set for May 16, 2023. The Magis Core leadership team and the Assessment Subcommittee will continue to implement the first phase of this assessment cycle during the remainder of this academic year. Our current priorities include:

- Alerting instructors in Contemporary Composition and Designated Written Communication to keep artifacts of student learning as defined in their core course application
- Develop and complete a process for creating research questions related to written communication in the core
- Make logistical preparations for Magis Core Day (room reservations, catering, invitations for participants and leaders, etc)
- Construct a Blueline site for work-from-home assessment

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<sup>1</sup> Similar concerns were also raised about building an argument effectively in oral communication. There is obvious horizontal alignment between the Written Communication, Oral Communication, Designated Written Communication, and Designated Oral Communication components in the core. Given this, we plan to devote Phase 2 (AY 2023/2024) to oral communication in the core.

## Phases in the Assessment Cycle

Below is our tentative schedule for the areas of the core that will be assessed in each phase. In designing this plan, we want assessment to be useful and responsive to faculty, student, and university needs. As such, this schedule is subject to change.

Phase 1	Written Communication (AY2022/2023)
Phase 2	Oral Communication & Foreign Language (AY2023/2024)
Phase 3	Ethical Deliberation (AY2024/2025)
Phase 4	Humanistic Knowledge (AY2025/2026)
Phase 5	Natural Scientific Knowledge (AY2026/2027)
Phase 6	Social Scientific Knowledge (AY2027/2028)
Phase 7	Service & Justice in the Ignatian Tradition (AY2028/2029)
Phase 8	Philosophy & Theology in the Ignatian Tradition (AY2029/2030)
Phase 9	Magis Core Summit (AY 2030/2031)
Phase 10	Discernment and Summit Implementation (AY 2031/2032)

For a more detailed outline of this assessment cycle including themes, general research questions, core components, and timeline see Appendix 1.

## Closing the Loop

Assessment efforts cannot reach their full potential unless findings have an impact on practices in the classroom that can improve student learning. Throughout this assessment cycle we are placing increased emphasis on connecting with faculty teaching in the core. Core assessment will now include three initiatives to close the loop with faculty.

## The New Magis Core Day

Beginning in May 2023, our regular assessment day will be replaced with Magis Core Day. We have designed the day to allow time for more /holistic conversations about the core and student learning—albeit still deeply informed by assessment. Magis Core Day is a space for faculty to see assessment results, discuss the core, reflect on their own pedagogical practices, and discern ways to implement changes to better serve our students. The work of faculty assessors who rate artifacts based on the core rubrics will be done online via Blueline before Magis Core Day.

Moving the rating of artifacts online has several key benefits. First, it centers conversation about the larger conclusions we can draw from the data as the primary purpose of the day, rather than something that occurs after spending hours earlier in the day rating artifacts. Second, because of variations in how fast people read or differing needs for

productive work environments, we see this change as having the potential to make assessment work more inclusive. Third, we want to open conversations about assessment on this day to a wider range of faculty, including those who are unable to commit to assessing individual artifacts. In short, Magis Core Day allows us to engage with the meaning of assessment more broadly and work towards answers for the new questions we are asking.

## Magis Cohorts

During AY 2021/2022 Fr. Simonds and the Assessment Subcommittee began using a cohort model where a working group formed at assessment day spent the next year meeting to test out potential ways to improve their classroom pedagogy. We see this approach as an essential means for faculty to reflect and respond to assessment results.

Each year a cohort will be formed at Magis Core Day and be charged with three primary tasks.

1. Cohorts will explore pedagogical practices, revisions to assignments, and course content that could help faculty improve student learning in the core.
2. Cohorts will develop a set of resources that clearly communicate assessment results and offer tips and suggestions that faculty can seamlessly integrate into their courses. These resources will be shared with faculty in a variety of ways (emails, workshops, and as resources on Creighton's website).
3. Two or three years after their formation, cohorts will develop and help implement a plan that examines the impact of the cohort work.

## Course Renewal

The Magis Core Plan requires core courses to undergo a renewal process every five years. In essence, this allows for the Course Review and Approval Subcommittee to ensure that classes still meet core outcomes. For a variety of reasons, including logistical issues, COVID-19, and revisions to the core plan, course renewal has never been fully implemented. A truncated version has been used since 2020 to ensure classes are updated to reflect the revised core. During the Spring 2023 semester, the Course Review and Approval Subcommittee will revisit the procedures outlined in the core plan and develop updated guidance for course renewal. Part of this updated procedure will require faculty to reflect on how their own pedagogical practices have been informed by their engagement with core assessment and Magis Core Day. We see this as a way to further ingrain existing expectations that faculty play a role in assessment activities. The subcommittee will develop a variety of ways for faculty to meet this requirement.