

CORE CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY

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&
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The report is in two sections.

Section 1 is primarily concerned with currently-available data; deficiencies in that data; relating our task to NSSE scores which are not limited to “Personal Responsibility; and comments, observations, and recommendations regarding current efforts at implementing this Core Objective.

Section 2 is primarily concerned with the challenges presented with understanding the intent of this Core Objective and translating that intent into course activities that are identifiable, measurable, practical, and on point. It concludes with two recommendations.

SECTION 1

1. In addition to outcome data, I think it would be good to have a list of learning experiences in specific courses (or elsewhere on campus) that have been specifically designed to increase Personal Responsibility
2. The NSSE scores combine Social and Personal Responsibilities into a single measure. Is there a way we can see the sub-scores for each type of responsibility?
3. The data from the Philosophy course is useful, but it only shows change across one semester. It would be useful to have change across a longer time period
4. The NSEE comparison group data is based only on two very vague questions (which frankly, I believe lend themselves to a socially desirable response).
5. The Civic Engagement and Global Learning data is more specific, but I’m not sure it perfectly matches the definition for Personal Responsibility
6. Personal Responsibility is supposed to be covered in Core Areas 1, 4, 6, 8 and 9. But I’m not sure it’s a major focus in most of the courses in these areas.
 - a. Area 1 is English composition—I reviewed one of the syllabi in this area and there was no obvious focus on Personal Responsibility
 - b. Area 4 has several courses with focus on Social responsibility (e.g., world history, World culture and languages and literature), but I would guess only the Contemporary Moral Issues course really makes a conscious focus on Personal Responsibility
 - c. Area 5 is U.S. History. Again likely a strong emphasis on Social Responsibility, but unclear how Personal Responsibility is covered

- d. Area 8, Again most of the courses don't focus on the personal level, with the exception of psychology and interpersonal communications.
- e. Area 9, most of the courses have little to do with Personal Responsibility with the exception of Lifetime Wellness
7. I think too often we are combining Social and Personal Responsibility and assuming that if Social Responsibility is covered, then Personal must be also
8. I would suggest a strategic focus on those courses in the Core that are known for focusing on Personal Responsibility (e.g., philosophy, psychology and health and wellness courses), describe what they are doing and measure it in these courses. If the Business school or Family and Consumer Sciences has a personal finance or consumer education course, I would consider adding it to the Core to increase the focus on personal responsibility.
9. All students should be exposed to a course that include personal and professional ethics.
10. We may also want to capture faculty perceptions of this trait
11. The trait can also be developed in non-academic settings and the wider community should be involved

SECTION 2

From the Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter B, Rule 4.28:

(1) Statement of Purpose. Through the Texas Core Curriculum, students will gain a foundation of knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, **develop principles of personal** and social **responsibility** for living in a diverse world, and advance intellectual and practical skills that are essential for all learning.

(2) Core Objectives. Through the Texas Core Curriculum, students will prepare for contemporary challenges by **developing and demonstrating** the following core objectives:

(E) Personal Responsibility: to include **the ability to connect** choices, actions and consequences to **ethical decision-making**. (THECB definition)

This is a particularly difficult area in which to assess current application and success in relevant core courses and in which to offer guidance for compliance or improvement, because the objective, Personal Responsibility, is not well defined. Regarding Personal Responsibility the TAC statement of purpose says that students will “develop principles,” the Core Objectives says students will be “developing and demonstrating,” and the subset definition (E) of Personal Responsibility defines it as “the ability to connect” behaviors with “ethical decision-making.” Not only is the language imprecise, the language for each relevant statement is not the same. So there is a lack of clarity about what, exactly, is desired, how a course can help to attain it, and how it can be measured. But even with a less focused reading of the particular words, if one tries to step back and understand what exactly this objective is seeking to address, it would seem to be a desire to teach students that there is a such a thing as moral right and moral wrong (ethics), and that behaviors should be guided by principles of what is morally right or wrong (ethical decision making).

If so, this objective could appear to have as a premise that students typically begin their collegiate study without an “ability to connect” their behaviors with “ethical decision-making,” which, of course, would be a faulty premise. Most students have some sense of right and wrong and understand that behaviors should be connected to doing what is right. Like most adults, including their university instructors, they may not agree on what is ethical and what is not—but that is a very different thing. What is ethical decision-making? Ethics are referential. On what are those ethics based? What is the code of ethics that is the standard?

Obviously, many more questions could be asked in this regard. And this ambiguity about the objective presents a challenge to assessment-based inquiries of whether or not this objective is being addressed in the relevant core classes, what counsel can be given to the departments and instructors as ways to implement the attainment of this objective, and how we can measure this objective.

Assuming that the relevant core curriculum courses are not going to set aside separate units for the study of ethics in and of itself; and recognizing the diversity of viewpoints regarding ethical decision-making among faculty members and students—some of it irresolvable, certainly as an integrated objective within a core-curriculum course; but also recognizing the responsibilities we have for compliance, an ability to assess, and an ability to advise where assessment suggest deficiency; I suggest a broad and flexible method of determining minimum compliance, one direct, and one indirect:

Direct:

In each course, through the study of ideas and decision-making in various contexts (e.g. personal, political, international, cultural, religious, etc.), students will have opportunities to learn about, assess, and demonstrate their understandings of how choices, actions and consequences were connected to the ethics of the parties involved; and students may also have opportunities to relate the case-studies to the students’ own ethical systems.

Rationale: This is identifiable as an inclusion in a course; it is a flexible guideline that can be adapted and integrated into the varieties of courses involved; and, without more specific guidelines available, it appears to address the Core Objective.

Indirect:

Each course will provide a statement on Academic Honesty, and each student will be held to the standards and consequences (if necessary) delineated by those rules and guidelines.

Rationale: This is a small item, perhaps, and one we take for granted. But “honesty,” including “academic honesty,” is an ethic, not just a rule. It is a tangible, ethical requirement that applies to the student and it requires the student to demonstrate Personal Responsibility and connect behaviors to ethical decision-making, at least in this regard. This is also identifiable and measurable.

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