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Walking Different Pathways

Coming to Know Our Own Journey Better—
The “Core Vision” of GC35



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SANTA CLARA’S NEW CORE CURRICULUM, SCHEDULED FOR LAUNCH IN FALL 2009, RESONATES POWERFULLY WITH THE VISION OF GENERAL CONGREGATION THIRTY-FIVE. GC35 represents a call to the Jesuit community and those who share their goals to participate in “Ignatian work” that “engages the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation.”¹ The new Core Curriculum can be seen, in a sense, as an “Ignatian work”: the Core aims to support students in a project similar to that outlined by GC35—engaging the world, through analysis in dialogue with experience, using reflection, action, and evaluation.

GC35, of course, is not directly comparable to the Santa Clara Core Curriculum. GC35 is a statement approved by Jesuit leaders after much negotiation, sketching out a vision for

Jesuit mission and identity in relation to the sufferings of the world. Santa Clara’s Core Curriculum, although it too was approved after much negotiation and many votes, is not a statement or text,² but rather a work in progress taking shape in the teaching of our faculty and the education of our students. There are, nevertheless, many points of connection. In this essay I’ll outline key components of the Core Curriculum that resonate with what I’ll call the “core vision” of GC35.

STARTING POINTS: GOALS, VALUES, IDENTITIES

Both the Santa Clara Core Curriculum and GC35 begin by looking toward the future and asking fundamental questions about goals, values and identities. The faculty team who developed the Core Curriculum asked “Who are our students? What kind of people will our graduates become? How will they live in community with others? How will they engage

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with the world?” This focus on foundational questions about goals, values, and identities is echoed in the words of GC35: the lives of Jesuits “must provoke the questions, who are you, that you do these things, and that you do them in this way?”³ And how do you live relationally, as “persons of collaboration”?⁴

THE PARADOXES OF GLOBALIZATION

GC35 answers the question “Who are you that you do these things?” by emphasizing the engagement of Jesuits with a faith that does justice, with dialogue and discernment, and, in particular, with the paradoxes of the globalizing world. Globalization has “given birth to a world culture affecting all cultures...some have greatly benefited, while others have been marginalized and excluded.”⁵ Mindful of the benefits of globalization, GC35 nevertheless mounts a strong critique, identifying globalization as, too often, “a massive force that excludes and exploits the weak and the poor, which intensifies exclusion on the basis of religion, race, caste, and gender.”⁶ GC35 calls the Jesuit community to analyze the paradoxes of globalization, to listen to the needs of those who suffer from the inequities that come in its wake, and to engage with the world in a way that brings solace, healing, or change.

The Santa Clara Core Curriculum answers the question of what kind of people our students will become similarly, outlining the knowledge, the habits of mind and heart, and the practices of engagement with the world that students will develop. The phenomenon of globalization, the analysis of its structures, and the engagement with its effects are three central elements of the knowledge, habits,

and practices emphasized in the Core. Three courses taken during the first year, and at least one additional course taken later, will provide opportunities for students to develop and master an understanding of globalization and of the intertwined development of global—including western—cultures. These courses include three in “Cultures and Ideas” and one in “Religion, Theology, and Culture.”⁷

KNOWLEDGE, HABITS OF MIND AND HEART, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD

Our students need other kinds of knowledge as well: as citizens of a globalizing world they not only need knowledge of global cultures, but also knowledge of diversity, power and privilege; knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens; and knowledge of humanities, arts, sciences, and technology. And they need skills, or “habits of mind and heart”: critical thinking, religious and ethical reflection, mathematical reasoning, and communication. Several of these “habits” are echoed in the “core vision” of GC35, in its emphasis on dialogue, discernment, analysis, and reflection. Our students also need to develop attitudes and values leading to engagement with the world through justice, civic engagement, collaboration, and through an awareness of the limits of their own perspectives.⁸ GC35 also focuses on engagement with an explicit call to “building a future in solidarity”⁹ for a globalizing world.

Several courses currently under development for the Santa Clara Core exemplify an integration of knowledge of global cultures with the habit of critical thinking and the practice of reflective awareness of the limitations of one’s



own perspective. And some highlight writing, communication, and an appreciation for complexity as well. Among these are “Concepts of Justice and the Just Society,” “Contested Worlds: Slavery and Unfreedom,” “Identity, Community, and (Active) Engagement,” and “Gender and Transnational Identities.” Each is a two-quarter sequence of courses in “Cultures and Ideas” or “Critical Thinking and Writing” that will provide first year students with opportunities to comprehend the complex and rapidly changing world they have inherited and to consider how they might transform it for the better.”¹⁰

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

To foster a disciplined sensibility toward power and privilege, an understanding of the causes of human suffering, and a sense of personal and civic responsibility for cultural change, all students take a Core course involving experiential learning for social justice. Embedded in courses in modern languages, religious studies, and other fields, the experiential learning courses are characterized by sustained face-to-face contact with the marginalized and oppressed. GC35 shares the vision behind this component of the Core, urging experiential and active engagement in educational contexts: “Volunteer work with and for the poor helps young people to live in solidarity with others and find meaning in and direction for their lives.”¹¹

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT; RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL REFLECTION

The new Core emphasizes knowledge, habits, and practices of engagement in other areas as well. Among these are ethical reasoning, religious reflection, civic life, and awareness of complexity. One course in civic engagement, one in ethics, and three in religion, theology, and culture provide the context for some of these learning goals. GC35 also contains these emphases: the document speaks of the need for an examination of ethics and values; for serious and rigorous research in theology;¹² for a “dialogue of religions and cultures”;¹³ for a practice of listening with respect to members of other faith communities and to persons without a religious affiliation;¹⁴ for pedagogies involving active, collaborative experience; and for the pursuit of practical solutions to social problems through research institutes and universities.¹⁵

THE SCIENCES, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

Through other courses in the Core, Santa Clara students will apply the methods of scientific inquiry and mathematical reasoning in the natural and social sciences. And through a course titled “Science, Technology, and Society,” students will develop an understanding of the social impact and ethical consequences of scientific and technological development. A concern over the paradoxes of science and technology is also expressed in GC35: the

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document describes “this new world of instant communication and digital technology” in which “we have better ways of communication but often experience isolation and exclusion” and in which scientific knowledge has reached “the deepest mysteries of life” but remains incapable of solving problems of the natural and social worlds.¹⁶ GC35 also reflects the curricular emphasis on the social impact of technology, recommending that new communication technologies are put at the service of education and of those at the margins. The new technologies, in the vision of GC35, can become “powerful instruments for building and supporting international networks,” in the world of education and beyond.¹⁷

PATHWAYS

Santa Clara students take four thematically linked courses from different disciplines across the University to create a pathway through the Core. Pathways provide students with opportunities for intentional learning and integrative thinking. “Environmental Sustainability,” “Human Rights,” “Applied Ethics,” and “Food, Hunger and Poverty” are among the pathways proposed by faculty. Each of these echoes calls in GC35 to “take responsibility for our home, the earth” which is increasingly “degraded and plundered,”¹⁸ to attend mindfully to the plight of refugees and the phenomenon of forced migration, and to study the problem of poverty.¹⁹ GC35 urges universities and research centers to embrace “an engagement that is long-term...in the education of youth...in intellectual research, or in the service of refugees.”²⁰ This “core vision” is activist and applied: “research results and advocacy [must] have effective practical benefits for society and the environment.”²¹

While the proposed pathways noted above are clearly aligned with the vision of GC35 for research centers and educational institutions, the core vision of GC35 is reflected in other proposed pathways as well. A pathway in “Justice and the Arts” incorporates courses from music, art, literature, theater, the social sciences, and other disciplines. Identifying the “multiple images” of a fragmented culture that compete for our attention, taking control of our feelings without our awareness,²² GC35 calls for a kind of visual literacy informed by ethics and justice. And a proposed pathway in “Vocation” resonates clearly with the historical Ignatian practice, reaffirmed in GC35, of being and doing, mysticism and service, contemplation in action.²³ In a powerful comment relevant to both, GC35 states “there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look. We must communicate this way of looking and provide a pedagogy, inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises*, that carries people—especially the young—into it. Thus will they be able to see the world.”²⁴


DISCERNMENT AND ASSESSMENT: OPENNESS TO EVALUATION

The faculty team that developed the Core Curriculum proposal often stated that the Core represents not only the best practices in Jesuit education and liberal education but also the best practices in assessment. Assessment in the academic context involves supporting student learning through a cycle of articulating clear objectives, asking whether students have achieved those objectives, and making adjustments as needed. A multi-year assessment plan for the Core is currently under development. GC35 encourages this attention

to evaluation and assessment at several points, most notably in the passage with which I began these reflections, in a reference to an “openness, always, to evaluation” embedded in analysis, experience, and reflection.²⁵ This openness to evaluation emerges from the Ignatian tradition of discernment, development of the inner life, and careful self reflection. “Openness to evaluation” and discernment are not far from what we now call assessment.²⁶ They are practices that remind us of our goals; they are practices deeply embedded in both the “core vision” of GC35 and Santa Clara’s Core Curriculum.

WALKING A DIFFERENT PATHWAY; KNOWING OUR OWN JOURNEY BETTER

The emphasis in the Core Curriculum on the knowledge, habits, and practices of engagement that our students will need to make our world more just, humane, and sustainable is deeply resonant with what I have called the “core vision” of GC35. This “core vision” involves a deep sense of responsibility for the welfare of the world and a commitment to seeking justice, in community, and through collaboration. As GC35 states, “Globalization, technology, and environmental concerns have challenged our traditional boundaries and enhanced our awareness that we bear a common responsibility for the welfare of the world and its development in a sustainable and living-giving way.”²⁷ Discernment, dialogue, and openness to evaluation chart a path to analysis and action in this vision.

Using the metaphor of the pathway, GC35 articulates this “core vision” in a passage that can be applied directly to Santa Clara’s curriculum: “In collaboration with others, in respectful dialogue and shared reflection, in labour alongside those similarly engaged who walk a different pathway, we come to know our own journey better and to follow it with new zeal and understanding.”²⁸ Santa Clara students will walk different “pathways” through the Core Curriculum, coming to know their own educational journeys better, and following them with new zeal and understanding. 

ENDNOTES

- ¹ General Congregation 35, Decree 6, paragraph 9 [hereinafter GC35, 6:9].
- ² The core curriculum can be “read” as a text on the Core2009 web site and in the 2007 Core revision proposal drafted by a faculty committee chaired by Chad Raphael. See www.scu.edu/provost/ugst/core2009/index.cfm. I am grateful to Chad Raphael, Juliana Chang, Michael Zampelli, S.J., Leilani Miller, Paul Crowley, S.J., Alex Zecevic, and Michael Kevane for their visionary work. I’m also grateful to the Core Curriculum Implementation Team, Phyllis Brown, Barbara Molony, Carol Ann Gittens, Bob Senkewicz, Bill Sundstrom, Phil Kesten, and Kathleen Schneider for accompanying me on a journey of interpretation and implementation.
- ³ GC35, 2:10.
- ⁴ GC35, 2:19, “Jesuit identity is relational.” GC32, 6:17. The text refers to “men of collaboration.”
- ⁵ GC35, 3:10-11.
- ⁶ GC35, 3:25.
- ⁷ In the Core, each learning goal is embedded in several core areas: students have multiple opportunities to encounter, practice, and master these skills throughout their Core courses.
- ⁸ This is a partial list. A full list of the learning goals and objectives can be found at www.scu.edu/provost/ugst/core2009/goals.cfm.
- ⁹ GC35, 3:11.
- ¹⁰ Chad Raphael, et al., “Proposal for the Santa Clara University Core Curriculum” (2007), www.scu.edu/provost/ugst/core2009/upload/CoreRevisionProposal-2007.pdf. For the complete list of 2008-09 Pilot courses in “Cultures and Ideas” and “Critical Thinking and Writing,” see the Core web site.
- ¹¹ GC35, 3:23.
- ¹² GC35, 1:7.
- ¹³ GC35, 2:20, 6:10.
- ¹⁴ GC35, 3:22-23, 6:15-18.
- ¹⁵ GC35, 6:9; 3:35.
- ¹⁶ GC35, 3:11.
- ¹⁷ GC35, 3:29.
- ¹⁸ GC35, 3:31; 2:24.
- ¹⁹ GC35, 3:39.
- ²⁰ GC35, 2:13.
- ²¹ GC35, 3:35.
- ²² GC35, 2:26.
- ²³ GC35, 2:9.
- ²⁴ GC35, 2:10.
- ²⁵ GC35, 6:9. See also GC35, 5, which provides guidance to leaders with responsibilities over others, and promises instruments for the evaluation of effectiveness.
- ²⁶ The *Spiritual Exercises* might, in fact, be considered an early precursor of an “assessment” exercise.
- ²⁷ GC35, 2:20.
- ²⁸ GC35, 6:15.