

# C O R E

*Newsletter of the Association of Core Texts and Courses*

Volume 1 Issue 1

April 1996

## Finding the Core: The Mission of ACTC

The newsletter in your hands represents the efforts of a new movement within the American academy: the attempt to find and strengthen the center of undergraduate education. Founded one year ago in Philadelphia, the Association of Core Texts and Courses has emerged as a leading advocate of a return to fundamentals in college curricula. ACTC rejects the notion of a cafeteria-style approach to education in favor of courses giving students a broad groundwork in basic skills and important texts traditionally associated with the liberal arts.

The time is ripe for such an effort. A recent survey of college curricula by the National Association of Scholars in Princeton points up disturbing trends that have characterized undergraduate education over the last century--trends which have only intensified since the 1960's. The percentage of credits required from mandatory courses has declined by two-thirds in the last century. Only 12 percent of colleges now require mathe-

tics; four percent require philosophy, while foreign languages --required by 90 percent of the colleges in 1964--were required by only 64 percent of colleges in 1993. [New York Times, March 20, 1996]

But if ACTC rejects the idea of undergraduate education defined only by electives, what is the alternative it endorses? In other words, What is a Core? And what sort of educational commitments characterize a Core Curriculum?

These are the sorts of questions which lie at the center of ACTC's ongoing process of self-definition. Inside you will find contributions to that process: a welcome from ACTC's executive Director (page 3), a draft of the association's mission statement (page 2), a list of participating organizations (page 1-2), as well as an exploration of the ways of keeping in touch and keeping ACTC's agenda before the public eye (page 4). Please let us hear from you, as well.

-The Editors

## ACTC Grows in Size, Scope, Ideas

By SCOTT LEE  
Associate Director

Last year, ACTC was formed in its first annual conference. This year, teachers, scholars, and administrators across the North American continent have joined ACTC's second annual conference to build this new professional organization and to change undergraduate education for the better. We thought that attendees of the 1996 Conference might like an overview of the growth they have contributed to.

By almost any measure, the growth of ACTC has been phenomenal. In 1995 ACTC attracted 24 universities, colleges, and community colleges from 14 states and provinces. These were found in an arc sweeping from Montreal out to Minnesota and down to Virginia. Attending the conference, outside of Temple representatives, were 32 individuals from academic institutions and another three individuals from two educational, but non-academic organizations.

As of the deadline for this newsletter, 53 institutions of higher education have registered for the conference. These include 23 universities, 27 colleges, and 3 community colleges. We are now coast-to-coast and include representatives from 26 states and provinces. Finally, 82 individuals have joined us this year.

The Conference itself has expanded from three to four days. This year, Phillip Sloan of Notre Dame, Julius Sigler of Lynchburg, Constantin Fasolt of University of Chicago, and Mary Ann Freese Witt of North Carolina State University will contribute as keynoters to ACTC's growth and development. Steve Zelnick of Temple University and ACTC's Director, will map out the aims and achievements of ACTC thus far.

An important measure of growth is the number of conference panels offered. In 1995, we had six panels and workshops. Designed to allow everyone a chance to speak - *continued on page 2*

### *Who's Who in ACTC: Members and Contributors*

We are pleased to report that 12 institutions are now contributing members of ACTC. Led by St. John's early contribution last summer, ACTC could count on this support to expand in line with plans developed in the first conference. Temple has continued to contribute support through a grant from the Provost's office of \$2500 and the volunteerism of the Intellectual Heritage Program staff. Boston University has contributed the production and staffing costs for this Newsletter. Finally, individuals have contributed \$45.00 membership fees, a remarkable number when one considers how new ACTC is.

One new member institution deserves special mention in this newsletter. The University of North Carolina at Asheville voluntarily offered member-

*-continued on page 2*

## ACTC's Mission Statement: A Working Draft

Below is a draft of the Organizing Statement of ACTC:

The Association for Core Texts and Courses brings together colleges and universities that promote the integrated and common study of world classics and other texts of major cultural significance. Members of ACTC advocate the growth of such programs in order to strengthen undergraduate education in the United States and Canada. ACTC challenges both aimless curricular choice and the current dominance of vocational, professional and specialized curricula. ACTC is committed to the education of free citizens, equipped to conduct their public and private lives informed by the best that has been thought and expressed in western and other traditions.

ACTC advocates core text programs at all undergraduate institutions. ACTC helps initiate such programs and develops networks to support existing programs. ACTC addresses such issues as the status of core text programs within their curriculum, the recognition of and professional conditions for faculty who teach these courses, the development of materials appropriate for liberal education, the establishment of networks to encourage core text faculty to share their expertise, and the representation in the public media of this concern for interdisciplinary education based in foundational texts.

At stake, we believe, is the soul of higher education in a democratic society. An educated person should be equipped to live a disciplined and examined life, rich in the fullest expressions of our humanity and dedicated to civic and social service to others and to the exploration of the mystery and glory of our existence. As citizens of an increasingly interdependent world, our graduates must acquire the ability to exercise critical judgement in order to free themselves from instant truths and local passions. Integrated core text courses and programs introduce students to questions which are at once timeless in their philosophical significance and timely in their relevance for us.

Members and member institutions are invited to participate in annual ACTC conferences, publications, information exchanges, staffing networks, public media presentations, and the organizing and leadership of the association. We welcome your inquiries, suggestions and support.

## ACTC Grows in Size

-from page 1

either through direct presentation or through discussion, our 28 panels and workshops this year have 56 presenters. This growth represents the real interest ACTC's formation has stirred and the potential ACTC has to improve North American undergraduate education.

Another very significant measure of success is the financial backing ACTC has received. ACTC's first annual conference and its administrative costs were underwritten by Temple and by conference fees contributed by attendees.

Attendees of the first conference decided that a membership fee structure would move ACTC toward a self-sustaining organization. It was agreed that both institutional and individual dues were appropriate and, over the summer, the ACTC Board in consultation with the Director and Associate Director determined that Institutional Memberships would be \$1,000 for universities, \$500 for colleges, \$250 for community colleges. To date, we have received \$10,455 in institutional memberships, \$2,295 in individual memberships, and \$4,250 in conference fees for a total of \$17,000.

Last year, the conference cost \$8,875 to produce. This year, the costs of the conference during the four days we meet will at least double. However, this does not cover all conference or ACTC costs. Temple has been underwriting the communications costs - especially telephone and mailing - for contacting potential members. As we move towards the development of a speaker's network, an academic journal, and a larger conference, administrative costs will rise.

ACTC institutional and individual membership will, eventually, independently sustain the growth and final configuration of this new professional organization. But it is important to us that you participate in ACTC both with your intellectual and material resources. We -- that is, current ACTC members and contributors -- have tried to build a democratic, exciting, forward-moving organization and conference. We need your institution's support and we hope you find ACTC to be a professional organization which earns your loyalty, energies, and contributions.

### Who's Who - continued from page 1

ship fees for 1996 because of its commitment to ACTC type programs and education. We hope, of course, that the example of these leading institutions will encourage new institutions this year to support ACTC. Below, recognition of ACTC contributors:

#### Institutional Contributors:

Adelphi University  
Boston University  
Brooklyn College  
Providence College  
Saint Anselm College  
Saint Mary's College  
Saint John's College  
Skidmore College  
Temple University  
Trenton State College  
University of North Carolina at Asheville  
Villanova University

#### Individual Contributors:

Eva Brann, Saint John's College  
Patricia Buske-Zainal, Capitol College  
Carol Daron, Auburn University  
David Evans, Richmond University  
Lowell Johnson, Saint Olaf College  
Paul Logan, Howard University  
Peggy Pittas, Lynchburg College  
Andrew Thorton, Saint Anselm College

William Walker, Philadelphia College of  
Pharmacy and Science

Hugh West, Richmond University  
Phillip Freeman, Boston University  
Henry Ahner, Adelphi University  
Eric Lund, Saint Olaf College  
Steven White, Mount St. Mary's College  
and Seminary

Larry Goodwin, Saint Scholastica College  
Jean Cameron, College of Saint Catherine  
David Deal, Whitman College  
Robert Anderson, Trenton State College  
Paula Berggren, Bernard Baruch College  
Neville Morgan, Kentucky State  
University

Ellen Belton, Brooklyn College  
Keith Francis, Pacific Union College  
Brian Barbour, Providence College  
John Holt, Centenary College  
Barbara Stone, Shimer College  
Eli Velder, Goucher College  
Jane Rodeheffer, Saint Mary's College  
Scott Lee, Temple University  
Steven Zelnick, Temple University  
Allen Speight, Boston University  
Brian Jorgensen, Boston University  
David Presjnar, Community College of  
Philadelphia

William E. Clarkson, University of the  
South

Joseph A. Favazza, Rhodes College  
Elona K. Lucas, St. Anselm College  
Joe Stanco, Richland College  
Joyce Jesionowski, Adelphi University  
James Kuehl, Fairleigh Dickinson

*Letter from the Executive Director*

# Setting the Agenda for ACTC: What Lies Ahead

By **STEPHEN ZELNICK**  
Executive Director

In the beginning it is easy to know what you are about. However, as the daily details pile up, you can lose track of original purpose. Some days it seems ACTC is about signing up new schools and ensuring that this year's conference really does happen and the bills get paid.

So recently, and without referring to ACTC's mission statement, I attempted to recall for myself our original agenda, when Scott Lee and I set out to see whether there were others who shared our sense of urgency about core courses and general education.

At Temple University, as elsewhere, we found a struggle between three views of core curriculum: (1) open choice from a wide array of courses (reflecting the interests of faculty); (2) a core with required selections from long menus of courses (representing the interests of departments in dividing the spoils); and (3) curricula featuring required core courses (aimed at some notions of the essential need of the students).

Core courses and programs often arrange an honorable meeting of the uneducated with the best and most fundamental texts. The outcome of this encounter has potentially a profound effect upon our democracy, from acquainting students with the roots of their values and institutions to developing a capacity for critical judgement without which no democracy can flourish.

Core courses, we found, were various in description. From the beginning we had to think about how broad and open ACTC was to be. The larger tent of ACTC, it quickly became apparent, would have to include not only courses and programs based in the classics but many other conceptualizations, usually focused on contemporary works and themes. We believe this inclusiveness will prove to be the source of ACTC growth and influence.

We discovered, too, that this movement toward core courses was growing, as many people, inside and outside of academia, became frustrated with the aimlessness of undergraduate education. Our first interest was to construct an organization where people sustaining well established core courses and programs, those in the midst of building them, and those contemplating new ones could support one another.

One deep concern was for the unhappy situation of many

teaching faculty with interests in undergraduate instruction and in laying the groundwork for student learning and personal growth. In too many cases, the careers of such people are precarious. Broadly educated and devoted teachers often find themselves with little hope of career stability. Something, we felt, could be done to improve the professional prospects of these faculty.

From the beginning our commitment was to an action agenda. We settled on several objectives:

- Build an organization, hold yearly conferences, reach a wider public, support programs that exist, encourage fledgeling programs, initiate thinking towards establishing new programs at every level, from the leading research institutions to the most modest colleges and community colleges.

- Start a journal and develop a new kind of scholarship based upon the pedagogical challenge of bringing the best to unready but eager students, and with a strong premise that making ourselves intelligible to this new audience will yield deepening insight into its significance (teaching Plato, for example, to a class of non-specialists educates the educator and returns us to the original questions).

- Find jobs for instructors who specialize in being generalists and are concerned primarily with the growth of their students and not of their own bibliographies and career capital.

- Engage in the national debate on education, a debate too often focused upon peripheral issues and special interests.

Into our second year, ACTC is on schedule to meet these goals. The growth of membership and institutional participation is impressive. In our second year, we have gone from a regional network to a continental organization. The ACTC newsletter exists. We will have a home page on the internet shortly to assist the sharing of ACTC information, program and pedagogical discussion, job discussion, job location, and so on. Other organizations are finding out about ACTC and offering encouragement and support. We are planning the 1997 conference.

ACTC has had a provisional Governing Board, reflecting our limited form in the first year. It is time to put together a Governing Board to lead ACTC into its full realization during the next several years. Out ahead of us lies the prospects of influencing the debate on higher education in a critical phase of its history and building a network of educators who share a belief in basic things and in improving our students and our nation.

## Profile of ACTC Schools

As of our deadline, 53 institutions were scheduled to send representatives to the second annual conference. What type of schools are attending ACTC? Using the 1996 Higher Education Directory we have developed a profile of ACTC institutions.

### Highest Degree Offered:

Research and Doctoral Institutions- 14  
Master's Colleges and Universities- 18  
Baccalaureate Colleges- 16

Associate of Arts Colleges- 3  
Other- 2

### Student Enrollment:

Total of all Institutions- 443,000  
Institutional Mean- 8,375  
Institutional Median- 5,500  
Smallest- 112  
Largest- 29,072

### Affiliation:

State/Local- 18  
Independent Non-Profit- 17  
Religious- 18

The number of states represented

by our institutions is 26, with the largest number in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic region, followed closely by the South. This year's conference schools serve about 55,375 students in core text programs per semester/quarter. Thus, within a year we have instructed almost half a million students-- a considerable base of public acquaintance with the works we teach and the kinds of programs we advance. In a very concrete sense, the education offered by ACTC type schools is a nationwide phenomenon and model.

# Keeping in Touch with ACTC: from Newsletter to Cyberspace, Communications Key to Core Agenda

As part of ACTC's mission to bring to public attention efforts at founding and supporting core curricula in American universities, a number of new ventures--including this newsletter--are underway. To keep its members up on the latest in Core communication, we offer the following summary:

## ACTC on the WEB

Heather Hamilton, a senior at St. Mary's University of Minnesota, has been working on the creation of a Web site for ACTC. She is entering program descriptions for each of the institutions included in the guide prepared by Scott Lee for the 1995 conference. These should be online by the time the newsletter is published. Additional program descriptions will be added as institutions continue to become part of ACTC. Heather is also developing a logo for ACTC, which will appear against the background of each Web page. Heather will give a complete demonstration of the Web site and how to log onto it at the April meeting of ACTC in Philadelphia.

To get to the ACTC WEB SITE from a network computer:

1. Click Netscape and wait for it to open.

2. Click open

3. Type:

<http://www.smumn.edu/ACTC/ACTC.htm/>

## Journal of Core Studies

From the start, ACTC members expressed a desire for the development of a new forum for scholars associated with Core programs. This year's conference will feature a workshop (Saturday morning, April 27 at 10:15 a.m.) devoted to the question of publications, particularly to the formation of a peer-reviewed Journal of Core Studies. An initial discussion of the possibilities of such a journal at last year's conference produced a number of suggestions that ACTC hopes can be followed up on in this session and in the coming year: selecting an editorial board, choosing a format that will attract attention and give the journal a professional profile, making contacts with scholars who can make contributions to the publication.

## CORE: the ACTC Newsletter

This is the first of what we hope will be an ongoing and collaborative effort to compile news about ACTC and the programs it represents. Given initial funding by and edited at Boston University, the newsletter aims to keep ACTC members--as well as a wider audience of those interested in core

programs--aware of events and new efforts being made on behalf of core curricula. To that end, contributions from all all sides are most welcome: please send us suggestions, articles and ideas!

You can keep in touch with us at CORE at the following address:

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Boston, MA 02215

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