

C O R E

Newsletter of the Association for Core Texts and Courses

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Welcome to Asheville!

This year we hold our first conference outside the Philadelphia area, the venue for the first three conferences. This move happens largely because Peg Downes, Director of the Humanities Program at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, offered two years ago to sponsor one of ACTC's conferences at the business meeting of the second annual conference. With the support of Vice-Chancellor Jim Pitts, and the many UNCA faculty who are attending, presenting, and chairing sessions this year, this important move by ACTC across the continent has happened.

Peg's sponsorship has proved invaluable to ACTC. A number of our new participants have come through her involvement in the Asheville Institute in General Education, as well as other organizations. When the call went out for chairs, her colleagues at Asheville responded enthusiastically. She and UNCA set up our contacts with the Radisson, financed the totes distributed with the programs, and found the local singing entertainment, Laura Boosinger, for Sunday's meal. Her secretary, Brenda Abell, developed the idea of totes, selected the design, and found the discounts for airlines and car rentals. Our thanks to all at UNCA for hosting us.

ACTC Growth Continues Into Fourth Conference

Scott Lee
Associate Director

The Association for Core Texts and Courses is now entering its fourth year. Since 1995, ACTC has grown beyond the expectations of its earliest founders. Then, teachers, scholars and administrators from Canada and the United States joined together in order to advance the use of core texts in required, undergraduate core curricula under, perhaps, the apprehension that such programs were few and dwindling in number.

Perhaps, our first notable accomplishment was to discover that there are far many more institutions and

colleagues which share in ACTC's convictions than might have been thought. In 1995, we had 24 institutions represented by 33 individuals from 14 states and provinces. This year, we expect 88 institutions, represented by 135 individuals from 32 states and provinces. Individual and institutional participation are up by 10% over last year. Where before our participants came exclusively from North America, now we are drawing from two overseas countries, Krygyzstan and Tajikistan, as well. In sum, we are four times larger than when we started just three conferences ago.

The distribution of participation
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ACTC'S Financial Contributors

This year nine new institutions contributed or authorized contributions:

Christendom College
Concordia College
Furman University
Mercer University
St. Mary's College of California
St. Vincent College and Seminary
University of Kings' College
University of Texas at El Paso
Valparaiso University/Christ College

The following 16 institutions continue their support:
Adelphi University
Boston University

Brooklyn College
Bronx Community College
Capitol College
College of New Jersey
Lynchburg College
Providence College
St. John's College, Maryland
St. Mary's University of Minnesota
Shimer College
Southeastern Louisiana University
Temple University
University of Chicago
University of North Carolina at Asheville
University of Notre Dame

We thank both the individuals who sought

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Historiography: A Plurality, not a Unity of Views" and "Beginnings and Endings Among the Two Chief World Systems" argue how Herodotus and Galileo could be used to increase the appreciation and, thereby, the pursuit of different disciplinary methods in young students.

This concentration on students is a standard feature of ACTC conference discussions. We note that in the first, second, and third conferences there were papers on how core texts meet contemporary students, on how to use core texts to recruit students, and on how to instruct pre-professional students with core texts. There have been student papers, as well - one paper by a student on core text websites, and a panel by students who discussed their encounters with core texts.

Not surprisingly, the comparison of ancient and modern authors is a frequent interest of ACTC panelists. Greek authors - Homer and Plato, especially - and Shakespeare have much been favored. Again, the use is sometimes unusual for a professional organization, such as in the

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and/or authorized these contributions and the silent angels in institutions who often authorize without us ever knowing who they are.

An interesting feature of ACTC's support is the kind of institutions the money is coming from: Universities: 12 - 4 public and 8 private, 8 secular and 4 religious; Colleges and Community Colleges: 14 - 3 public and 11 private, 9 secular and 5 religious. Undoubtedly, private secular institutions contribute in greater number, but our largest benefactor is a public institution, while another public institution - the University of North Carolina at Asheville - is the sponsor of this year's conference. And religious institutions comprise fully a third of ACTC's givers. Further, some of the continent's wealthiest institutions contribute, as do some of the continent's smallest. ACTC can truly be proud of such wide representation.

case of two papers last year, as well as a plenary address, that were specifically concerned with how classic core texts could be used to shape character. There is also significant analysis of religious materials in both secular and religious general education curricula - an effect of core text programs actively seeking to include these materials.

One noteworthy feature of the conferences is that they are truly interdisciplinary - crossing not only departmental lines, but whole divisions of knowledge. Core texts studies have their locus classicus in the medieval liberal arts which spanned areas we would think of as the fine arts and the sciences as well as the linguistic arts frequently associated with today's humanities. The conferences have reflected this interdisciplinary heritage with over a dozen panels devoted to science topics as well as panels devoted to performance arts over the last three years.

Since ACTC asks that a portion of each paper be devoted to one specific author, the wide diversity of the interdisciplinary discussion over the last three years can be gathered by examining authors that have been addressed. Authors, for example, include Aristotle, Augustine, Blake, Kate Chopin, Copernicus, Dante, Darwin, De La Casas, Derrida, Descartes, Nguyen Du, Freud, Gadamer, Kepler, *The Koran*, Jefferson, Locke, Mahfouz, Marx, Mendel, Montaigne, Morrison, Anne Petry, Plato, Proust, Sartre, Swift, *The Torah*, Virgil, Whitman, and Wollenstoncraft. An examination of this year's program reveals similar variation.

What is common to all of this is the conviction by ACTC participants that it matters very much that undergraduates have opportunity to confront their prejudices and parochialism through facing many disciplines, times, and peoples so that, through some of the best thought that can be made available to them, they undergo a carefully considered education guided by teachers who are convinced that better learners, citizens, and persons can be brought into this world.

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in this year's conference indicates that ACTC is becoming the network for core text education that we all have envisioned. The number of panelists in 1998 has risen from 95 to 98. Last year, we actually had a slightly higher number of panel sessions than this year (36/34), but the average number of person per panel grew from 2.6 persons per panel last year to 2.9 this year. Further, this year the number of three- and four-person panels rose to 23 in contrast with 20 last year - an increase of 15%. So, it looks as if ACTC teacher-researchers are coalescing around educational issues of importance to them.

A picture of breadth and wide support emerges from ACTC's financial growth. Contributions from institutions and individuals have grown - in both absolute numbers of contributors and dollar contributions. Before the 1997 conference we received financial support from 19 colleges and universities. In 1998, 25 institutions pledged support. That is, 26% of our institutions feel that ACTC is important enough to North American education that they have contributed institutional "dues" beyond conference fees. Last year, we received \$11,900 in institutional support; this year we expect \$15,300. Personal contributions have been even more startling in the percentages of support offered; we project at the time of writing that 63% of our participants will have taken up individual memberships by the start of the conference. To all, we thank you, for without your good will, your willingness to go to your institutions, and your personal financial commitment none of this would be possible. In a separate story we publish those institutions who have contributed to ACTC. Because of press deadline, an attachment with up to the minute individual contributions appears in your packet.

Executive Director's Letter:

Some Thoughts on Where We Are

Stephen Zelnick
Executive Director

Again, I have the great pleasure to announce yet another year with significant growth. ACTC has increased the number of members and conference participants and schools and financial contributions beyond our original expectations. In addition, our ability to move the conference to a new site and to plan for yet another site for 1999 begins to show our reach. Finally, the newly constituted ACTC Board includes a wonderful group of people who have been willing to give their time and expertise to ACTC.

I like to measure our growth against the original expectations when a few of us first thought to launch this national organization. Some things have been accomplished very well. Others have not been addressed with much success to this point.

One objective was to diversify the leadership so that the ACTC was not dependent essentially upon two people. We have not reached that point. However, there are several good signs that this may be happening. The initiative shown by Peg Downes at UNC - Asheville and by Bainard Cowan at LSU and James Walter at Southeast Louisiana University to hold conferences is a very good sign. A few others, too, like our colleagues at Boston University, have shown a willingness to take on major responsibilities.

To my mind, the health of an organization is measured by the degree to which responsibility can be shared around among its members.

One suggestion for reaching this goal has been to develop several ACTC regional sites, or perhaps divisions where different kinds of schools can be organized within ACTC to articulate issues that are special to them. Large public universities, for example, may share few institutional issues with small liberal arts colleges. It may make sense, for certain tasks, for us to differentiate between the several types of ACTC institutions.

One of the issues that concerns me increasingly is the assault upon the professoriate that may be particular to large public universities. ACTC type programs

may be especially vulnerable because they may seem to be the very kinds of courses taught best by non-specialists, and non-specialists may translate all too easily to adjunct faculty, not-eligible for tenure, or part-time faculty.

Another growing concern of mine is the penetration of academia by corporate interests and state legislators serving a "practical" agenda. This can be helpful, but too often it comes at great cost. University boards and administrations seem all too eager to please, and this can mean a rationalization of education to serve the job market directly.

At my own campus, there is a fight over the establishment of a "School of Hospitality Services and Tourism." Now, I have no objection to assisting this thriving industry. However, I am also becoming aware that the logic of doing so may not serve the best interests of traditional study. The same forces that want such a school want also to undo the core curriculum. It may just be that turning out Bachelors of Hospitality does not fit well with reading Plato, Shakespeare, Locke, and Freud.

Part of what I observe happening is a new boldness in the challenge to the academy. The mysterious aura of what we are and do seems to have disappeared. Many of our colleagues have insisted for two decades or more that everything is politics and nothing is privileged, and the public seems to have heard what they are saying. Others seem to want to justify higher education as a resource for training the new workforce. So, between the "practicalities" of a deformed Left and Right, it becomes increasingly difficult to uphold our strongest tradition as educators and producers of knowledge.

How do we keep track of the developments and organize some support for programs caught in the winds of these strange changes? ACTC is not alone as an organization that stands for true education. However, we are verging on the sort of size and commitment of energy that could make us a strong voice in the national discussion. The special focus of ACTC is also an advantage. One of our strengths is that we are not ideologically exclusive. Instead, I think we are finding a way to

stand together for the best things about undergraduate education.

How do we strengthen ACTC? At the very least, we need to be using the ACTC listserv more than we do. We need a newsletter, perhaps an electronic newsletter, to keep us aware of where and how ACTC programs are being challenged and also where and how they are flourishing. And, I continue to envision a journal, and again it could be electronic, where we share best practices and experiences and developments. And for that we need some volunteers who can imagine the usefulness and the fun of such a publication.

A recent case of this was the request by a group at the University of Chicago for consultation concerning their Core program. This wider collegiality is very important and as far as I know not available anywhere but ACTC.

And it is especially important where the very purposes of higher education are undergoing radical revision. I think we will find the need to put our heads together more than ever in the near future. The survival of what we hold dear is no sure thing and will require the effective advocacy that ACTC is positioning itself to

ACTC on the Internet

We invite you to take a look at the ACTC website at

<http://acad.smumn.edu/ACTC/actc.html>

The site is housed at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. You are also invited to join the ACTC listserv. The listserv is an easy way to receive information about ACTC activities, to disseminate information to other members, or to engage members in informal discussion. To join the listserv, send an email to:

ACTC@dlists.smumn.edu

with *subscribe* in the subject. You will then receive a confirmation notice. Do not send any messages until you are officially enrolled. If you have any questions about the listserv, you can contact Steve Pattee at spattee@smumn.edu.

THE ONGOING CONVERSATION

ACTC Panel Topics Over the Years

Scott Lee

When ACTC was formed, the earliest members had in mind improving North American undergraduate education through the required use of "world classics or other texts of major cultural significance" (ACTC Organization Statement) taught in thoughtful baccalaureate programs which directed students to the wider world preceding and surrounding them. Members argued this would make for better young scholars, better citizens, and a better future. They thought such programs should be defended, well-maintained, and expanded across North America.

So, where is ACTC now? In what sense has North American education advanced because of ACTC?

One way to answer these questions is through the issues which have occupied members and participants since that first organizing meeting. Last year, Roger Shattuck remarked in his plenary session that "two days of attending panel discussions at this conference have convinced me that the ACTC stands for a much needed readjustment of our double commitment as professors to teaching and research. Most professional associations encourage specialized research far removed from the activity of teaching at the undergraduate level. Here, in contrast,

every session I visited engaged in probing, high-level discussion of core authors, discussions addressed... to the application of advanced knowledge to the practicalities of curriculum, course design, and teaching in subjects vital to liberal education."

A review of ACTC panel topics over the last few years confirms Shattuck's assessment. There are five basic concerns that have reappeared in panels over the last three years. In order of frequency, they are: (1) canon, core text, and great book selections; (2) interdisciplinary studies or relations of the disciplines; (3) teaching and pedagogy; (4) "other," cross-, and multicultural programs, texts and analyses; and (5) faculty / departmental participation in or defense, maintenance or expansion of core programs. Perhaps the titles from a plenary address and a paper drawn from previous conferences helps to sum this up: "The Very Idea of a Core Text Program: Current and Future Challenges," a Kantian inspired analysis of what we are engaged in, and "Teaching Whose Traditions? Teaching Whose Conflicts? Entering the Great Books Through the Ancient Mediterranean," a paper presenting an analysis used in the classroom of *The Gilgamesh*.

Just as clearly, the panels listed above can all be thought of as either concerned with the construction of curricula or the implementation of them. Since the

construction of those curricula rarely have the aims or look of a departmental major, the papers which appear at ACTC frequently treat the authors they examine quite differently than might be the case at other professional societies. Instead of detailed historical documentation, a typical ACTC paper often aims at explaining how an historical text can be used to open minds: thus, last year, "Herodotus and

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CORE

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