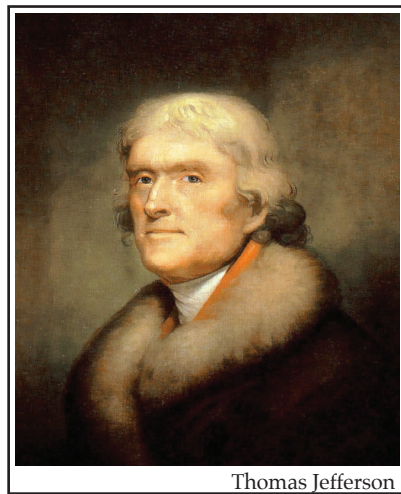


Core Texts and Ideas

Spring 2009

Center Status Granted

The study of the great books at the University of Texas at Austin took a large step forward on February 13, when Provost Steven Leslie approved the establishment of the Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas. The new center will continue and expand the course offerings and other activities begun by the Program in Western Civilization



Thomas Jefferson

and American Institutions. The upgraded Center is awaiting approval from the University Board of Regents to add Thomas Jefferson to its name, thereby honoring our third president for his vision of educating leaders for a new democracy by exposing them to the greatest books of the Western heritage and beyond. Jefferson, who founded the University of Virginia and whose extraordinary library became the kernel of the Library of Congress, was convinced that a serious study of seminal texts in philosophy, religion, politics, science, history, literature, and the arts was the best preparation for the lives of unprecedented liberty that his countrymen would lead. We seek to bring his vision into the 21st century by including modern classics, including the social sciences that have developed since his time, and works from non-western cultures.

UT Holds Focus Groups

On March 10th and 12th, the University Office of Public Affairs hosted focus groups for students interested in the program. These sessions provided information on what kind of courses and events students would like to see, helping us to plan the future direction of the center. Marketing Researcher Kerri Ungemah, who conducted the groups, reported that “overall, participants were enthusiastic about the

Thomas Jefferson Center and many were eager to become students of the program.” Participants also had good ideas for publicizing the program and many offered to help by writing articles and publicizing the center’s programs electronically. Participants reported that they were especially attracted by the opportunity to read texts closely and in depth with professors in small classes.

Six New Courses Approved By Undergraduate Studies Advisory Council

In their last meeting in March, the Undergraduate Studies Advisory Council approved all six of the courses the Jefferson Center has proposed to meet UT core requirements through the study of great books and other primary sources. They go next to the Faculty Council and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for final approval. The courses include two in American Government, two interdisciplinary courses in the social sciences, and two that would meet the University's fine arts requirement. The American Government courses will both be based on seminal texts of American democracy, including the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist-Antifederalist debate, and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. One will focus on the Founding and the other on the challenge of equality, with readings from African-American thinkers and primary documents relating to slavery, segregation, and civil rights.

The social science courses will each explore fundamental debates about human nature and human society as they were first engaged in the history of political philosophy and subsequently developed into the modern disciplines of psychology, economics, and sociology, and political science. The fine arts courses will be: "Masterworks of World Drama," with readings from great tragedies, comedies, and history plays both ancient and Modern; and "The Idea of the Beautiful," combining philosophical readings with the study of selected works of art, architecture, or drama. Most of these new courses already have enthusiastic faculty who have volunteered to teach them. Their approval by UGSAC marks another significant step forward in our plan of offering a rigorous, coherent program in the great books to all UT undergraduates, including those with little or no room in their schedules for electives.

New Offices Under Renovation

Accompanying our promotion to center status has been the acquisition of a new office for our staff in Mezes Hall and a suite of offices for our post-doctoral fellows in Waggener Hall. The recently-renovated room in Mezes is on the third floor, directly adjacent to the office of our director, Tom Pangle. The space on the fourth floor of Waggener consists of one separate office and an adjacent suite of five small rooms, all of which will be renovated to provide common space and studies for the center's



Mezes Hall

four post-doctoral fellows and one or more visiting scholars. Renovations will include demolition of two walls and a new treatment for the floors and existing walls. Work is expected to be completed this summer.

New Academic Programs Include Great Books Major

In addition to the current 6-course concentration in Western Civilization, we are developing a more structured Certificate Program in Core Texts and Ideas, for which college approval is pending. The most exciting curricular development for students this spring has been the launching of a new interdisciplinary major in the great books, under the auspices of the Liberal Arts Honors Pro-

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gram. As one strand or “contract” within the Humanities Major, the new program will allow honors students to work with an advisor to pursue an independently designed, interdisciplinary course of study in the great books, organized around a theme, idea or question of their own choosing. The Humanities major has in the past proved a successful incubator of interdisciplinary majors that have ultimately become or are becoming independent programs, including the majors in International Studies, Women’s Studies, and Religious Studies. Liberal Arts Honors Director Larry Carver will be providing guidance to students interested in pursuing this major.

Recent and Upcoming Events

In addition to all of the major changes to the program, the center has also planned several events for the coming months. A screening of the movie *The Counterfeit Traitor* was held on March 26. Our interested students gathered to view this exciting thriller which also explores deeper moral issues. The film is an excellent example of the themes that the center hopes to bring to the forefront through its course of study. On April 14, the center hosted a book discussion group for interested students on the Jane Austen classic, *Sense and Sensibility* led by Emma Picker-

ing, a senior government major who is writing her honors thesis on Aristotle and Jane Austen. April 17 will be busy, with a meeting of the advisory council for the College of Liberal Arts in the morning followed by a 3 o’clock meeting of our visitor’s committee and other local donors. Later, at 6 in the evening, Thomas Hibbs will join us to present our third lecture of the semester. Hibbs is Dean of the Honors College at Baylor University and will be speaking on “How to Begin Studying Thomas Aquinas.”

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The Center for the Study of

Core Texts and Ideas

A Message from the Dean

I warmly congratulate Interim Director Thomas Pangle, Interim Associate Director Lorraine Pangle, the Steering Committee members, and the staff on the publication of the inaugural newsletter of the Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas. Since my late adolescent years, I have considered study of the great books of the Western tradition to be an essential part of my own education. Building on the earlier Program in Western Civilization and American Institutions and with strong support of the College of Liberal Arts, the Center provides an important venue for the serious discussion of core texts and ideas by students, post-doctoral fellows, and faculty members. The Center will certainly be a model for other institutions to aspire to emulate.

With best wishes,

Randy L. Diehl
Dean, College of Liberal Arts
David Bruton, Jr. Regents Chair in Liberal Arts.



Dean Randy Diehl

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