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The University of Dayton

News Release

Aug. 12, 1993

Contact: Teri Rizvi

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON REVAMPS CURRICULUM, ADOPTS NEW HUMANITIES REQUIREMENTS FOR FRESHMEN

DAYTON, Ohio -- Christine Lee is reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* in between selling tickets at a Rochester, N.Y., amusement park this summer.

"I see it as a head start," said Lee, who plans to major in photography at the University of Dayton. The 18-year-old is one of hundreds of University of Dayton freshmen who ordered the reading list early for the Catholic university's new, ambitious humanities-based general education curriculum that's on the forefront of a growing national general education movement that has picked up momentum in the last decade.

The premise behind what UD administrators call the "Dayton Plan" is simple: College students need more than technical skills to succeed in a highly complex, ever-changing world. They need to graduate with the ability to make connections, to cross over departmental lines, to "overcome that fragmentation that is an inevitable part of the modern world," according to Lawrence Ulrich, philosophy professor and proponent of the general education movement.

Beginning this fall, all first-year students will be assigned common required texts in a group of mandatory courses in history, philosophy, religious studies and English. Of the remaining seven required general education courses, at least three will be linked thematically, focusing on such themes as "social justice" or "values, technology and society."

A group of faculty piloted the humanities base last fall with 300 first-year students. When fall classes start Aug. 25, more than 1,500 students and a corps of 60 faculty, armed with a several-hundred-page teaching manual, will participate together in the new curriculum, much of it to be taught in the newly opened Jesse Philips Humanities Center.

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The humanities base will challenge students to question what it means to be human. Whether it's a freshman writing seminar or the history of Western civilization, students using common readings will examine issues of autonomy and responsibility, person and community, faith and reason, the individual and his or her culture and other cultures. The texts include: Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Natalie Vernon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre*, Plato's *The Apology* and several religion readings, including *Genesis* and *The Gospel of St. Mark* from the Bible, a selection from the Koran and the Buddha's *Sermon at Benares*.

It's the first major revision of the University's curriculum since 1985. At that time, students opted for 10 courses from 200 offerings to satisfy general education requirements.

"For a number of years the University of Dayton has been a center of thoughtful experimentation in general education," said Joseph C. Johnston Jr., vice president for programs of the Association of American Colleges, an association promoting the value of liberal learning. "Now, in extending this curriculum to all students, it is confirming its claim to be among institutions on the forefront. The new program exemplifies much of the best thinking about general education nationally. Dayton's faculty and administrators should be applauded for their skill and committed hard work in making their ideas reality."

Paula P. Brownlee, president of AAC, applauds the University of Dayton's efforts in advancing curricular reform. "Our experience with institutions undertaking curricular review shows that many never get beyond a vigorous debate over reform," she said. "When the discussion turns to specific departments, courses and teaching loads, the forces of compromise can take over. It takes real leadership and commitment on the part of both faculty and administrators to make true reform a reality. That Dayton has gone so far in its reform efforts is both commendable and exciting."

In an age of specialization when colleges are adopting market-driven academic programs, why is the University of Dayton so concerned about ensuring that all students, even business and engineering majors, receive an education solidly grounded in the humanities?

"This general education curriculum, with its integrated humanities base and thematic clusters, will prepare our graduates to make a difference in their careers and in their civic lives," said Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., president. "When corporations identify the skills of their star performers, they find that no matter what their backgrounds, these people seem to have a rich perspective on the human situation as well as the ability to integrate information

from a variety of sources and present it in an exciting and convincing manner. UD's general education program will help our graduates develop these 'star performer' skills."

Business leaders say the University of Dayton's approach to education is a sound one.

"It strikes me as extremely unfortunate, if not a catastrophe in the making, that many of our highly respected institutions of higher learning turn out students who are extremely well educated technically, but devoid of the humanities wisdom of the ages," said Donald E. Michel, general manager of EG&G Mound Applied Technologies' Washington, D.C., office. "As a nation, I fear, we have become too focused on the pursuit of technical and business excellence, at the expense of understanding and concern for other human beings. Far too many students acquire an education in management, or finance, or science, and begin a career with no framework to guide the decision-making process they must use each day."

Joseph W. Deering, president of PMI Food Equipment in Troy, Ohio, calls UD's humanities-based curriculum innovative, productive and responsive to the needs of business. "Those of us in the business world do need broadly educated people who understand the lessons of the past and who have developed critical and analytical thinking skills," he said.

Parents of incoming students understand "this is a bold adventure," said Patrick Palermo, associate provost for undergraduate education and author of the plan. "One father called me last summer and said, 'My son is going to the University of Dayton instead of another school known for engineering because while that school would produce a cracker-jack engineer, UD would produce an excellent engineer, someone who could do other things and be very flexible.'"

The Rev. James L. Heft, provost, said the faculty are committed and excited about the new approach to teaching undergraduates. "In an age when higher education has been rightly criticized for allowing faculty to be too devoted to their disciplines, UD's faculty are shedding the narrow perspective rooted in specialization and embracing a broad perspective that has been judged to be essential to the education of undergraduates."

Eugene August, English professor and newly appointed alumni chair in the humanities, anticipates more lively discussions in classrooms this fall when students hear a work such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* being brought up in more than just freshman English.

"I am sure we have all had the experience in the classroom of alluding to a famous

person or fictional character, an important philosophical idea or religious concept, or a significant historical event only to draw a blank because this information is not part of the students' cultural literacy," he said. "The instructor then has to go back to square one and explain who this person, idea or event is. Having common texts in the humanities base program will reduce the number of times these blank stares occur in the classroom."

The University of Dayton is Ohio's largest private university and ranks among the 10 largest Catholic universities nationally.

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For media interviews, contact **Father Jim Heft** or **Patrick Palermo** at (513) 229-2245 or **Joseph S. Johnston Jr.**, of the Association of American Colleges, at (202) 387-3760. For assistance in scheduling interviews with students or faculty, contact **Teri Rizvi** at (513) 229-3241.