

# CURRICULAR STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATIVE GROWTH AT COLGATE

An Analysis by  
the American Council of Trustees and Alumni

## I. THE CURRICULUM

In April 2004, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni published *The Hollow Core*, a 50-college study of the general education requirements of higher education institutions in the United States. *The Hollow Core* established a straightforward measure of a worthy general education curriculum: how many of seven basic courses—in Foreign Language, Writing/Composition, Literature, American Government/History, Economics, Science and Mathematics—are actually required of students? ACTA recognized that other courses might have been included in this list (e.g., philosophy, art, music, etc.), but concluded that any good general education curriculum would require a substantial number of the seven subjects selected.

ACTA also applied a breadth requirement to the courses themselves. To be acceptable as a general education course—one of the few that a student will have to complete outside the major during his college career—the course should be broad in scope, exposing the student to the rich array of material that exemplifies the subject. So, for example, a literature course should offer a number of great works by several authors, not just the *oeuvre* of a single writer. Likewise, a history course should present the broad sweep of events over a relatively expansive time period, rather than focus on a single occurrence or a narrow era.

Typically, American colleges permit students freely to pick and choose the courses outside of their majors, adhering only to broad (and vague) distribution requirements. If a student could, because of the curriculum design of the college, avoid most or all of the seven fundamental courses identified, ACTA gave the institution a low grade on a “gen ed” report card. If, on the other hand, the curriculum was structured to oblige the students to complete a respectable number of these seven solid general education courses it would then receive a decent grade. So, for example, a college that required six or seven core courses was awarded an “A,” whereas a university that demanded none or only one such course got an “F.”\*

---

\* The full set of letter grades and corresponding core course requirements are:

A = 6 or 7 courses

B = 4 or 5 courses

C = 3 courses

D = 2 courses

F = 0 or 1 course

## Colgate's 2004 Assessment

In 2004, *The Hollow Core* gave Colgate University an “F” for its general education curriculum. The Colgate general education requirements were needlessly confusing, and, more to the point, actually required students to enroll in only *one* of the seven subjects in the *Hollow Core* list: Foreign Language. Students did not, however, have to complete foundational courses in Writing/Composition, Literature, American Government/History, Economics, Science or Mathematics.

This, of course, is not an overview of the university as a whole, nor of the quality of its courses or faculty. It was, however, an accurate and objective measure of the structure of its general education curriculum. The report was sent to the chairman of the Board of Trustees, urging that the board undertake a reexamination of Colgate's curriculum in light of its poor performance in the study. Indeed, ACTA hoped that any college receiving an “F” grade, like Colgate, would undertake a serious and thorough review of what it was teaching its students.

In December 2006, ACTA reexamined Colgate's general education requirements, using the university's official online documentation.

## 2006 Reassessment

Colgate University maintains a complicated structure for course requirements, with separate and confusing Distribution and Liberal Arts Core curriculums, plus freestanding First-Year Seminars and Language requirements. Although it offers a rich array of attractive courses, many of the offerings are very narrowly focused (e.g., “Methods & Issues in Cryptology,” “The Atlantis Debate”), and unsuited for a core curriculum. More significantly, an examination of the current (2006) curriculum reveals that Colgate students still can avoid enrolling in all but one of the seven subjects that served as criteria for *The Hollow Core*. Thus, unfortunately, there is no change in Colgate's *Hollow Core* failing grade.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Required at Colgate? (Yes/No)</u>
Writing/Composition	No
Literature	No
Foreign Language	Yes
American Government/History	No
Economics	No
Mathematics	No
Natural/Physical Science	No

Colgate has a Foreign Language requirement that meets *Hollow Core* criteria. However, it does *not* require Writing/Composition, Literature, American Government/History or Economics of its graduates.

As for science and math, although Colgate's intricate curricular design appears to require these subjects, it actually enables students to avoid courses in one or the other altogether. Here are the details.

Colgate has a six-course Distribution Requirement that mandates enrollment in courses offered by two of the departments in each of three divisions. The three divisions are: Humanities; Natural Sciences & Mathematics; and Social Sciences. The Natural Sciences & Mathematics Division encompasses the standard physical and natural science departments, the mathematics department and the psychology department. Consequently, the requirement of one course in two different departments may be satisfied by a psychology and a science course, thus avoiding math, or a psychology and a math course, thus avoiding science.

## II. GROWTH IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT VS. NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATORS

### Summary of Data

Colgate's student enrollment increased by 55 percent from 1967 to 1992. Thereafter, enrollment has held steady over the years, rising only 3 percent from 1992 to 2006. From 1967 to 2006, enrollment increased 60 percent, from 1,734 to 2,771.

Colgate's average enrollment for the 1990s to 2006 (where data were available) was 2,811. The peak enrollment, in the fall of 1997, was 2,901. The lowest figure was 2,691, in the fall of 1992.

The number of administrators at Colgate University has increased at a much greater rate than student enrollment. From 1967 to 2006, while enrollment increased 60 percent, the number of administrative employees went from 54 to 216, a 400 percent increase. From 1989 to 2006, when enrollment rose an estimated 3 percent,<sup>\*</sup> the administrator headcount grew from 117 to 216, a jump of 85 percent.

Focusing on particular administrative units, it is clear that the greatest increases have been in Academic Affairs, which rose from three employees in 1967 to 71 in 2006, Student Affairs, which went from 11 in 1967 to 37 in 2006, and Development/Alumni/Public Relations, which employed 13 in 1967, and now (with separate departments of Public Relations/Communications, Alumni Affairs and Institutional Advancement) engages 43 people.

The Academic Affairs unit has grown in complexity as well as size. It now includes the Dean of the Faculty, the academic divisions of the University (humanities, natural sciences/mathematics, physical education, social sciences and university studies),

---

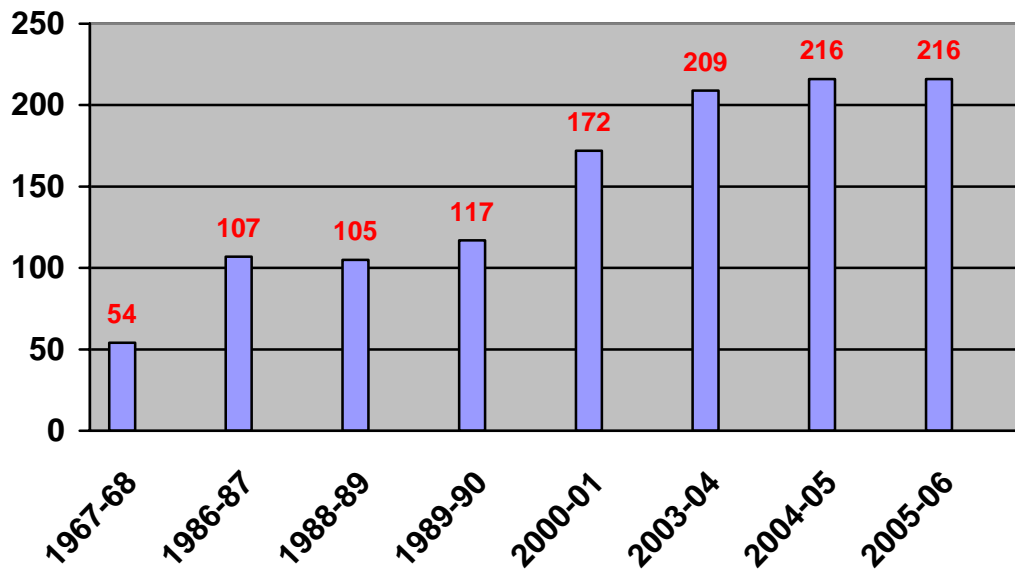
<sup>\*</sup> This is an estimate based on enrollment data for 1992, not 1989. Enrollment data for 1989 were not available. The data summary is based on information in Colgate University catalogues for the years 1967-68, 1986-87, 1988-89, 1989-90, 2000-01, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06.

Information Technology, Residential Life, Student Involvement, Campus Safety, Career Services, Counseling, the Cultural Center, and Student Health.

Data

The chart below depicts the overall trend in administrative employment at Colgate. It is followed by a detailed unit-by-unit accounting of administrative personnel for each of the available catalogue years.

**Administrative Employees,  
Colgate University, 1967-2006**



[Source: Colgate University Catalogues]

**Catalogue Years: 1967-1968**

Office of the President: 3  
Academic Affairs: 3  
Development, Alumni, Public Relations: 13  
Student Affairs: 11  
Admissions: 4  
Business: 11  
Religious Life: 3  
Athletics: 1  
Health: 6  
TOTAL: 54

**Catalogue Years: 1986-1987**

Office of the President: 4  
Business & Finance: 9  
Academic Affairs: 33  
Religious Life: 4  
Student Affairs: 19  
Public Affairs: 28  
Administrative Services: 9  
Security: 1  
TOTAL: 107

**Catalogue Years: 1988-1989**

Office of the President: 4  
Academic Affairs: 36  
Admission: 3  
Religious Life: 3  
Business & Finance: 11  
Student Affairs: 14  
Public Affairs: 23  
Administrative Services: 10  
Security: 1  
TOTAL: 105

**Catalogue Years: 1989-1990**

Office of the President: 5  
Academic Affairs: 36  
Admission: 8  
Religious Life: 3  
Business & Finance: 14  
Student Affairs: 19  
Public Affairs: 19  
Administrative Services: 12  
Security: 1  
TOTAL: 117

**Catalogue Years: 2000-2001**

Office of the President: 4  
Academic Affairs: 62  
Admission: 10  
Religious Life: 3  
Business & Finance: 14  
Student Affairs: 33  
University Relations: 25  
Administrative Services: 21  
TOTAL: 172

**Catalogue Years: 2003-2004**

Office of the President: 6  
Academic Affairs: 66  
Admission: 13  
Religious Life: 3  
Communications: 10  
Business & Finance: 17  
Student Affairs: 39  
University Relations: 28  
Administrative Services: 27  
TOTAL: 209

**Catalogue Years: 2004-2005**

Office of the President: 5  
Academic Affairs: 72  
Admission: 13  
Religious Life: 2  
Communications & Public Relations: 13  
Business & Finance: 17  
Student Affairs: 36  
University Relations: 33  
Administrative Services: 25  
TOTAL: 216

**Catalogue Years: 2005-2006**

Office of the President: 5  
Academic Affairs: 71  
Admission: 12  
Religious Life: 3  
Public Relations & Communications: 12  
Business & Finance: 17  
Student Affairs: 37  
Alumni Affairs: 6  
Institutional Advancement: 25  
Administrative Services: 28  
TOTAL: 216

### III. CONCLUSIONS

On its website, Colgate University boasts that its core curriculum is “a model for liberal arts education in the 21st century.” ACTA respectfully disagrees. Attractive as many of its courses are, Colgate falls into the same trap as so many American institutions of higher learning: It sets out a smorgasbord when it should be limiting its students to a prix fixe of its finest fare.

A strong core curriculum should, to the extent possible, ensure that students finely hone their basic skills and learn the most important aspects of our heritage, culture, and our world. However, despite having what it calls a “Core,” Colgate essentially has no requirements in broad subject areas such as English, math, science and history. Students can literally wander for four years at Colgate and never be exposed to general areas of knowledge—the very hallmark of a liberal education! A student can graduate from Colgate without ever taking a course in American history, without ever studying economics, without ever being exposed, in the words of Matthew Arnold to “the best that has been known and said.”

Colgate alumni could appropriately encourage the university to strengthen the general education area of its curriculum. After all, the general education—or core—program is a vital component of a higher education institution’s central function. As fiduciaries of the institution, trustees are responsible for the academic and financial well-being of the university. The board—in consultation with the faculty and administrators—surely has an obligation to ensure that general education is being done right.

Here are just a few of the questions trustees might raise:

- Is the core program providing a common foundation of knowledge for students to share?
- Is the core program giving students exposure to the most important ideas, readings, and events?
- Is the core program providing the foundation of knowledge necessary for thoughtful and productive lives after college?

In doing so, Colgate’s trustees would join those at a growing group of universities including the State University of New York System (which adopted a new core curriculum in 1999), George Mason University (which enacted a new core curriculum in 2000), Columbia University (where a strong core curriculum still exists), and Harvard University (where a task force has called for requiring students to take courses in American history and civics, science, writing, foreign language, and analytical reasoning).

The substantial growth in numbers in Colgate’s administration is also worthy of note. Of course, some growth is natural; but it is remarkable that over the last decade and a half,

Colgate's administration has grown about 25 times more quickly than has the student body. Perhaps there are good reasons for this growth, but it would be more than understandable for Colgate alumni, whose donations do so much to make a Colgate education possible, to ask what those reasons are.

Colgate's actions since 1990 show that it is not shy about hiring large numbers of people, but that it has chosen to direct university resources to administrators. Colgate alumni might ask whether these resources could be better directed toward instructional priorities that ensure a strong general education for Colgate graduates—education that will prepare them to be informed citizens, effective workers and life-long learners.

\*\*\*

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and nonpartisan organization dedicated to the advancement of academic freedom, excellence, and accountability in higher education. Founded in 1995 as the National Alumni Forum, ACTA's mission transcends ideological boundaries. Its National Council includes Jacques Barzun, William J. Bennett, Hans Mark, and Martin Peretz.