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FOOTNOTES

## Noted Scholars Ask U. of Chicago to Halt Curricular Reforms; Another Curricular Debate Leads to a Marriage of True Minds

Ten prominent scholars have asked the University of Chicago to halt a plan to revise its core curriculum, labeling the changes "dangerous" and "disturbing."

The group, Scholars for the University of Chicago, is concerned about a reduction of courses in Chicago's famous "Common Core" curriculum that is set to take effect in September.

The scholars offered their views in a letter sent to members of the university's Board of Trustees. The signatories -- including Saul Bellow, Gertrude Himmelfarb, David Riesman, and James Q. Wilson -- have attended or taught at Chicago. Their effort was coordinated by the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni**, an association in Washington that is known as a champion of the Western canon.

Under a change approved by the faculty last year, Chicago will reduce the number of courses in its core from 21 to 18. The reductions will come in courses classified as "humanities, civilizations, and the arts" and "science and mathematics." At the same time, the administration wants to enroll 600 more undergraduates.

"They want to attract not only more students, but less-brainy students who will make more money and give to the university," said Jerry L. Martin, the president of the council. "They want fewer physicists and more businessmen."

But John W. Boyer, dean of Chicago's undergraduate college, said Chicago hopes that by shrinking the core, students will be able to take all of the classes during their first two years. The goal, he said, was to make the curriculum "stronger by making it more intense."

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The chairman of the university's board, Howard Krane, said the trustees would not "meddle" with the curriculum.

\* \* \*

The passion inspired by curricular debates is usually of the intellectual sort. But such a dispute at Brooklyn College has yielded true love for Mr. Martin, the president of the trustees' council, and Abigail L. Rosenthal, a philosophy professor at the City University of New York campus.

Ms. Rosenthal contacted Mr. Martin in the spring of 1997 to seek his help in fighting what she viewed as an effort to water down Brooklyn's core curriculum. Much as he has done at Chicago, Mr. Martin formed the Committee for the Brooklyn Core, a group of **alumni** who protested the planned changes. Ultimately, the administration scaled back its proposal.

In the winter issue of *Inside Academe*, the council's newsletter, Mr. Martin describes how he spoke with Ms. Rosenthal by phone during the controversy at Brooklyn, and "fell for her, sight unseen."

He proposed last June, and the two were married in January. "We often say how grateful we are to Brooklyn College for proposing such a bad idea," he said.

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