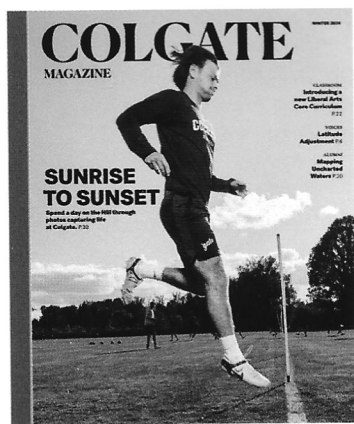


Letters



Core Comments

The winter 2024 issue introduced the revised Core Curriculum that the University implemented in the fall 2023 semester. Readers commented on the revised Core and remembered their own experiences.

I am age 95 and was in the first class that experienced the new Core Curriculum in 1946 through 1950. It was a broadening experience, especially the freshman course titled Philosophy and Religion, taught by Quaker professor Ken Morgan, the Colgate chaplain. This was a novel appointment since Colgate has Baptist roots. Quite a one-year course that challenged all our beliefs and laid the groundwork for our futures.

DAVID N. KLUGE '50

I was particularly interested in the piece on revamping Colgate's Core Curriculum. As I reminisce on my days at Colgate and anticipate attending my 50th Reunion, I thought back to the Core Curriculum when I was at Colgate 1970-74. In retrospect there was only one Core course that I remember and had a long-term impact on my life and my career. That was Philosophy, Religion & Drama taught by Professor Jerry Balmuth.

Professor Balmuth was not an easy grader, and errors in spelling, grammar, and

punctuation were always marked down. In retrospect, the two critical life lessons I took away from his class were the ability to write cogently and the ability to condense a large amount of information into a short critical analysis of the subject material. This has served me incredibly well in my career.

The skills I learned in Professor Balmuth's class are still completely relevant 50-plus years later. A successful career will be based, in large part, on the individual's ability to think, critically assess, and effectively communicate. I continue to believe in the usefulness of the liberal arts education and hope that Colgate never loses sight of the lessons we learned in Professor Balmuth's class. The University will serve its students well by continuing to require them to learn how to think, critically assess, and communicate in written form. I expect this is a significant part of the reason that a large percentage of Colgate graduates become very successful in life after graduation.

BOB CHAMBERLAIN '74

The topic of the Core Curriculum has long been important to me. I have remained delighted that Colgate has continued in its Core approach to education. Colgate has withstood and prospered against the aggressive opposition to the importance and benefits of a liberal arts education. I welcome and support that commitment. The Core Curriculum is fundamental to the Colgate experience.

I graduated from Colgate in 1963. I did well academically and went on to receive my degree in law from Harvard Law School. I was also one of the first nine participants in the initial

London Economics Study group.

I took most of my Core courses in my freshman year. I did not then know my areas of interest, and the Core courses were both a way to avoid decision-making, while also participating in legitimate courses. Core 11 Philosophy and Religion, taught by Jerome Balmuth, was an incredible experience. My art course was thoroughly enjoyable and quite broadening. My writing course, Core 22, had an especially important impact on me in that the professor commented positively on my approach to writing. Those words resonated with me, particularly since they contrasted with some of the less favorable reactions my high school English teachers conveyed. Core 22 made me feel good about myself. Then, as an attorney, I went on to use the written word in ways fundamental to my career and my legal and nonlegal undertakings.

In reading the *Colgate Magazine* story, I found myself being very supportive of the course selections and my sense of their content. I am intrigued by the regular 10-year review. I think a review of those reviews would be intellectually worthwhile. Since my years, six reviews and changes would have been implemented. Most likely those 10-year analyses reflect social and academic trends. Some reflect significance, others the more ephemeral. Both could become learning vehicles. They also become a test of the historic longevity of the Core commitments, commitments that should have impacts long beyond their years experienced by individual Colgate students. I recommend that such an inquiry be conducted. It could well prove instructive and reassuring. In essence, one more proof of the value of the Core Curriculum.

DON BERGMANN '63

For decades, the Core Curriculum has been a distinctive feature of Colgate's educational program. In addition to the usual freshman composition course (Core 15), my class took six or seven Core courses, spread out over our first

three years, with all students in the class taking the same courses at the same time. Prospective science majors were exempt from the two-semester Core 11-12 sequence in physical and biological science; we took the one-semester Core 10 on the history and philosophy of science instead. As a result, we were all studying and discussing the same texts at the same time: the *Book of Job* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in Core 17, *Janson's History of Art* in Core 21, Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*, and Galbraith's *The New Industrial State* in Core 37. In Core 38, we had a choice of courses on such "emerging" countries as China, India, or Kenya; but even there, a student who was reading *Red Star Over China* could have a discussion with his roommate, who might be reading *Facing Mount Kenya*. When the whole student body met in the chapel to consider its response to the 1970 killings at Kent State, the discussion was laced with references to Kant's categorical imperative: Everyone present knew what that was because all four classes had read Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in Core 18.

With the new Core, introduced in 2023, that has mostly disappeared. As far as I can tell, students in the Class of 2027 will have only one course in common — the Conversations course. The rest is, essentially, a garden-variety distribution requirement: one course each in literature, math, natural science,



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Bob Chamberlain '74

social science, etc. I am sure that these courses have been specifically designed or chosen to be interdisciplinary, or to connect to topics of societal concern. But there is no longer a *core* holding the entire class together and connecting it with adjacent classes. This is a great loss — to the University and to its students.

I understand that curricula must evolve and that students don't like requirements. I am also painfully aware that, in these days of increasing specialization, it is difficult to get faculty to teach introductory courses even in their own fields — much less to step outside their comfort zones to teach something that is truly interdisciplinary. Then again, the University has an identity too, and that identity is expressed in its curriculum. Colgate should continue to honor a commitment to the kind of Core Curriculum that makes Colgate *Colgate*, and that distinguishes its students from those of other liberal arts colleges.

JOHN F. KIHLMSTROM '70,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-
BERKELEY, DISTINGUISHED
PROFESSOR EMERITUS

The magazine invited Professor Christian DuComb, Core Revision Committee member, to respond to John Kihlstrom's feedback:
I am moved by Professor Kihlstrom's vivid recollection of the Core courses he took as a member of the Class of 1970. There is no doubt that the new Core includes fewer common elements than the Core of 50 years ago, but the Core remains a fundamental, unifying, and intellectually rigorous aspect of a Colgate education. Professor Kihlstrom's letter inspired me to review a copy of the 1960–70 Course catalog, in which I discovered a surprising continuity in the Core Curriculum over time. For example, the Core Sciences component in the new Core Curriculum addresses the history and philosophy of science, much

like Core 10; and the Core Communities component offers multidisciplinary courses on regions and nation states across the globe, much like Core 38.

It could be argued that today's Core courses take a more topical approach than in the past, with fewer shared texts and more instructor discretion over course content and pedagogy. But Colgate today is a different institution than it was in 1970. Members of Professor Kihlstrom's class could select from among 28 majors (or concentrations, as they were called then). Today, Colgate offers twice this number of majors, in disciplines such as Chinese, computer science, creative writing, and environmental studies — subjects that were barely taught at this institution 50 years ago, but that are essential to a 21st-century liberal arts curriculum. Today's students also have the option to double major, to declare a minor (or even two!), and to choose from a much wider array of off-campus study options. These changes reflect the needs of a student body that is 50% larger than in 1970 and significantly more diverse, especially given that Colgate did not begin to admit women until just after Professor Kihlstrom and his class celebrated their commencement. (The first female student matriculated at Colgate in the fall of 1970.) Although some members of the Colgate faculty lament the recent changes to the Core Curriculum, overall faculty participation in the Core is more robust than it has been in years. For me and many of my colleagues, the new Core has reinvigorated our enthusiasm for interdisciplinary teaching by providing a framework that balances flexibility and commonality, and that opens the Core to perspectives that have long been marginalized or excluded from academic discourse. The Core Curriculum has evolved with the institution and with society at large, but it reflects Colgate's ongoing

commitment to a common intellectual enterprise, shared by faculty and students, as the foundation of a liberal arts education.

CHRISTIAN DUCOMB,
COLGATE'S ASSOCIATE DEAN
OF THE FACULTY FOR FACULTY
RECRUITMENT
AND DEVELOPMENT

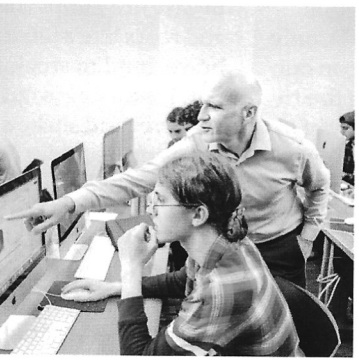
Weekend Reading

I decided to start 2024 with "Screenless Saturdays." After barely resisting my 5-year-old's entreaties — "Daddy! I am so bored! I need electronics!" — I sat down to enjoy the autumn 2023 issue while my daughters prepared plastic salads in their living room restaurant.

In particular I could empathize with Jean Gordon '87 Kocienda's "The Kindness of Strangers" (p. 10). I volunteered to teach ESL adults for a few years, and they are remarkable people. Many of my students rose before the sun, worked three low-paying jobs, and before returning home to dinner and their families, took my class with more energy and positivity than most people I know, including myself.

For those of you who don't have young children and do have the time, I can't recommend [Screenless Saturdays] more.

JACOB SYDNEY '93



Don't Be Afraid of the Dark

I enjoyed reading the winter 2024 article about Associate Professor Jeff Bary's work concerning light pollution and its effects on humans ("The Bright Side of the Dark," p. 15). How wonderful that Colgate is fostering research in this arena. Unmentioned in the article but

also of concern is the potential effect light pollution has on other animals and insects. This is another burden that humankind is placing upon a fragile ecosystem, and the question is not *if* it will cause problems, but how serious will those problems be for those organisms and for humankind.

ROBERT ROSEN P'10,'17



On the Radio

I always look forward to receiving and reading the *Colgate Magazine*. I was especially pleased to find in the winter 2024 issue a photo of the general manager of WRCU radio on p. 39. I learned everything I possibly could about being on the radio at Colgate and have continued my love of broadcasting ever since. For many years, I was a talk show host in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Most recently, I cohost two medical-related shows in San Antonio, Texas. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't think fondly of my days "spinning the wax" at WRCU.

RON AARON EISENBERG '64

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