In the Fall of 2001, the College of Arts & Sciences implemented new curricular requirements for the matriculating class of 2005. These requirements were established by the 1999 report of the Bowen Commission on the Undergraduate Curriculum in Arts & Sciences, which undertook the first comprehensive review of the College’s distribution requirements in nearly two decades. This review was informed by recommendations of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education (1994). The centerpiece of the new curriculum, called the "Discovery Curriculum," were, first, a focus on coherence that would both encourage students to seek connections between courses taken for distribution requirements, and, second, a refined emphasis on the development of core skills. At the same time, the Commission affirmed the College’s tradition of student autonomy in selecting distribution classes, such that while types of distributions were required, how students would fulfill those requirements would be driven by their own intellectual curiosity, guided by their four-year academic advisors.

As directed by the Bowen Commission, the Discovery Curriculum’s implementation was reviewed for effectiveness, both in terms of student experience and administrative efficiency, and in April 2009, the New Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC) issued a report of its findings to the Arts & Sciences faculty and administration. As stated in the Introduction to the NCRC’s report:

The Committee’s review has concentrated on three major components of the curriculum: the cluster system, core skill and area requirements, and small group experiences of several kinds.

In making recommendations that follow, we have been guided by the goal of developing a curriculum that engages the natural curiosity and drive of our students, that reflects the growth of knowledge and important changes in the nature of faculty research in the past ten years, and that includes requirements that are well-coordinated and work together interactively. Our aim is to provide students with a solid liberal arts education in the context of a research-oriented university, characterized by depth of knowledge in a major; breadth of understanding of modes of inquiry and the forms of knowledge in several core areas; and a sense of perspective and integration which comes from seeing connections across courses, disciplines, and schools.¹

From both student and administrative perspectives, the difficulties of the Discovery Curriculum involved its hallmark, the so-called "cluster system." Students were required to complete one "cluster" — two related courses — in each of the four distribution areas. To maximize choice, thereby allowing individual students to pursue their unique combination of intellectual interests, clusters multiplied, ultimately totaling more than 250. Students, perplexed by the sheer number of options, understandably began to suffer from the "Paradox of Choice." And further, a cluster might depend upon a particular faculty member’s class; if that faculty member was on sabbatical or left the University, the cluster would no longer be viable. Sometimes something as simple — and common — as a schedule conflict would put the student in the untenable position of having to choose between a course for a major and a course for a distribution.

A concerted effort was therefore made to render clusters manageable and accessible while preserving the pedagogically productive elements of thoughtful selection of distribution courses and encouraging students to see connections between different courses.

A New Curriculum Implementation Committee (NCIC) comprising faculty, administrators, and students was established to translate the NCRC’s recommendations into a more robust, stable, and accessible form. The NCIC, with a keen eye toward preserving broad departmental representation, reviewed the individual clusters, eliminating courses that were no longer offered, were offered irregularly, were habitually over-subscribed, and/or required substantial pre-requisites, and then re-envisioning the remaining courses from a macroscopic perspective instead of the microscopic presentation of "clusters."

The result is a set of 22 stable, robust, and dynamic "Integrated Inquiries" (IQs). Importantly, the IQs have been reframed in an effort to encourage students to see their own intellectual explorations as part of the larger, longstanding tradition of the Liberal Arts. In explaining IQs to students and in Arts & Sciences publications, each IQ is presented as an exploration of "an enduring question that educated, engaged, curious people often ask"; their required interdisciplinarity "provides a more nuanced and textured intellectual experience, one that challenged great minds for decades, centuries, and even millennia."² Sample IQs include examinations of "The Development of U.S. Democracy," "Ethics & Morality," "Forms of Creative Expression," and "Science & Society." A complete list of the IQs, their descriptions and the courses comprising them can be found at: Arts and Sciences - IQ

The IQs' strict interdisciplinary is an important revision. Whereas perhaps only 1/3 of clusters enabled or required students to choose courses from different disciplines, all IQs require students to select courses from different departments. This exciting new element complements the College’s strong and growing tradition of interdisciplinary study and research.

The most significant change overall involves the reconfiguration of the distribution areas, particularly the creation of a new area, Languages & Cultural Diversity (LCD), which, as the NCRC observes, "signals the importance of cultural understanding as an educational goal." Whereas in the Discovery Curriculum students could fulfill the Language & Arts requirement by taking two semesters of a foreign language, and were required to take just one course that focused on "Cultural Diversity" (CD, a Core curricular requirement that mandated at least one course focusing on non-Anglo-American cultures), students may now choose to take three semesters of a foreign language or four CD courses (of which one or more may be a foreign language course, a recognition that it is sometimes not in the student’s best educational interest to persist in a particular language sequence).

In keeping with this increased focus on cultural understanding, the NCIC also expanded the definition of the coherence requirement (coherence options include majors/minors, freshman Focus programs [year-long linked seminars], and clusters/IQs) to include the College’s 12 faculty-led study away programs, which range from language study programs in France or Spain to topical programs on Shakespeare’s Globe or the Village India Program. Doing so has the added benefits of, first, showcasing these excellent programs for Arts & Sciences students and, second, encouraging

students to consider how study abroad fits into their educational experiences during the regular academic year.

The revisions to the Discovery Curriculum were implemented in Fall 2012 for the matriculating class of 2016. Implementation was delayed by one year in order to develop new web applications for students and their advisors to plan and map students’ progress through the curriculum.

Regarding Core Skills, the major change between curricula involves the reduction from five Cores — Writing One, Quantitative Analysis (QA), Writing Intensive, Social Differentiation (SD), and Cultural Diversity — to four, a result of Cultural Diversity's inclusion in the Language & Cultural Diversity area requirement.³

N.B. Effective in Fall 2012, the Writing One program undertook a significant overhaul of this required first-year course, re-centering the course on significant reading, and writing in response to such reading; and requiring students to write more frequently (five essays and three revisions), and in a greater variety of genres (personal essay, visual and rhetorical analyses, argumentative essay, and research paper).

An attendant change to the Core courses involves amending the minimum grade required for successful completion, from a C+ to a C-. While this change appears on the surface to signal a lowering of standards, an investigation by the Writing One office and the Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee found that the C+ minimum was in fact leading to grade inflation, a problem that bringing the full range of C grades to bear has helped to remedy. As a collateral benefit, the C- minimum for the Cores parallels the minimum required for most major courses, thereby simplifying another element of the complex Discovery Curriculum.

Relatedly, the IQ curriculum establishes a numerical symmetry between the four core skills and the four area requirements, again simplifying the structure of the overall requirements. Perhaps more importantly, the reduction in number also effectively increases the profile of the individual skills, which should translate into students' heightened recognition of each core skill's importance to their education.

From an administrative perspective, during the migration of courses from Discovery to IQ attributes, the NCIC encouraged departments to review all their classes to ensure that the core attributes — particularly SD and CD — were properly, consistently applied. While all classes are assigned to an area, only those meeting a particular pedagogical or topical standard are also granted a core attribute, a process that requires an additional request when proposing a new course. This additional bureaucratic layer (compounded by occasional confusion about core skill attribution by new faculty members) resulted in an inconsistent application of attributes — for example, a course on the Civil Rights movement not carrying the SD attribute — and the NCIC, coordinating with the Curriculum Committee, has been keen to correct these inconsistencies. In addition to the review encouraged during the migration, the Curriculum Committee is now more proactively screening new course proposals and asking departments not requesting a core attribute for new courses to do so when appropriate.

Regarding small group experiences for freshmen, a thorough review revealed ample seats in such courses, and all students interested in participating in a Focus program or freshman seminar had one available to them. That said, the College Office is working to diversify freshman programs, which currently skew toward the Humanities. In Fall 2013, for example, there will be a new Focus
program on Missouri's Natural Heritage, offered through the Environmental Biology program, and a new Focus program on the history and archaeology of Russia (specifically Kazakhstan) is being constructed, probably for the Fall of 2014. The NCIC did, however, encourage more "satellite" seminars such as those currently offered by the Psychology department as a complement to the standard Introduction to Psychology lecture course. In contrast to required discussion and/or subsections, these seminars are voluntary, carry an additional unit of credit, and enable students to take a deeper look at particular topics covered in the lecture. The Curriculum Committee is in the process of identifying similar possible courses in other departments. The University's new Active Learning Classroom, currently being used for a small, pilot group of courses, should offer particularly dynamic opportunities for enhanced seminar classes.