



Cornell College

WHITE PAPER SERIES

From President Jonathan Brand and
Dean of the College Joe Dieker

September 2019

“This new curriculum, representing perhaps the largest change in teaching and learning at Cornell College since the adoption of the block plan in 1978, is an innovative and integrated foundation for student learning.”

Introducing *Ingenuity*

Of all the topics that we feel compelled to share with you, not one of them could ever be more important than those that touch *directly* on our students’ educational experiences. This white paper focuses on one such topic—our core curriculum—the heart of our academic program in its totality.

Over the last couple of years, our faculty engaged in a deep, open, and data-driven process of considering how our curriculum should change to meet the current and future needs of our students (still on our One Course calendar, and still very much focused on the pillars of a broad and deep education). And, as a result of this process, they significantly redesigned our entire curriculum.

In fall 2020, Cornell College will launch *Ingenuity: Cornell College’s Core Curriculum* for all entering new students. This new curriculum, representing perhaps the largest change in teaching and learning at Cornell College since the adoption of the block plan in 1978, is an innovative and integrated foundation for student learning designed to prepare Cornell graduates for success in the 21st century.

The project to redesign the core curriculum began in December 2016, when Dean Joe Dieker asked the Cornell College faculty to begin work toward a rejuvenation of the college’s core curriculum. This work was in alignment with Cornell’s Strategic Plan for Growth of 2013, which called upon the campus to “reimagine the liberal arts experience.” As a part of that strategic plan, the faculty had studied the major offerings of the college and made recommendations for new academic programs that were then implemented and launched from 2015 to 2017. These programs included majors in engineering, neuroscience, business, and management. In addition, we added dance to the curriculum, and launched a new degree in musical theatre. All of these programs were designed to augment the offerings of the college with programs that would be of interest to incoming students. Then, Dean Dieker made the case to the faculty that it was time to move the focus of curricular reform from individual academic programs to the core curriculum of the college.

As a point of definition, a core curriculum is the set of common courses and experiences required of all undergraduates and considered the necessary general education for students, irrespective of their choice in major.

Curriculum adapts over time

A brief history¹: Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, led the transformation of American higher education to meet the needs of the emerging industrialized society. When Eliot started at Harvard, the curriculum, which had been in place since the founding of the institution in 1636, required students to take courses that resulted in a mastery of Latin, Greek, mathematics, and a bit of natural science. This curriculum was designed to prepare ministers trained in the classics, or to prepare students for apprenticeships in the professions (e.g., law and medicine). At the time, this form of education was not meeting the needs of an emerging industrial society. As a result, President Eliot led the effort, with the support of the major industrialists and business leaders of the day, to create the modern university in America, which was solidly in place by about 1925. This resulted in the creation of distributional requirements—a form of general education that meant that students would have to take courses across the entire academic program, and major in at least one of them. Almost all institutions large and small in this country adapted his ideas—including Cornell College in the early 1900s—and many are still wedded to that educational model designed to train workers for business and industry.

Today, as is commonly reported in the news, many educational leaders, business leaders, and prospective students and parents in our country are asking if this system of higher education that has been in place for decades and centuries is working for American students. U.S. post-secondary graduation rates rank 10th out of 44 developed countries studied by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development². American families are questioning the value of higher education and its cost, and are also resisting going into debt to finance that education. As reported in last January's white paper, the students whom we will be serving in the future will be increasingly students of color—especially Hispanic—and of modest means. There will likely be fewer students, and those who do go to college will increasingly come from the South and the West.

Is a 20th century educational model what they are seeking and what they need to be successful in their lives?

Technology makes an impact on education

Starting in about 1993 with the introduction of Mosaic, the first web browser, our world changed. Information became digitized and available very quickly on demand. Of course, the internet also brought rapid change with such innovations as supply chain economics, resulting in organizations such as Amazon and widely-used portable smart devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, and has also led to the new gig economy. Thomas Friedman describes this time in our history as the age of accelerations. We are in the midst of change as large, if not larger than, 19th century industrialization—and certainly coming at us at a much faster rate. This rapid change has been a disruptive force in all aspects of society, including higher education.

Cornell College, like most other colleges and universities, had a conventional general education model since the early 1900s (i.e., students take a required number of courses in arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences along with some basic skills courses in writing, math, and foreign language). To be fair, our faculty has always worked hard to make appropriate changes and improvements to the general education over many years. However, Dean Dieker made a case to our faculty to consider a major rejuvenation of the core curriculum in light of our changing external environment, the expectations as we understand them of current and future students, the needs of 21st century students, and best practices in liberal education.

Over a two-year period a task force of Cornell faculty, staff, and students worked together to design *Ingenuity*. This effort involved many discussions across the institution. In January 2018 a Core Curriculum Summit was held on

¹ Historical information from: *The New Education*. Davidson, Cathy N., Basic Books, 2017.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2019*, Fig. A1.3, page 42.

campus that included trustees, faculty, staff, and students in discussion led by Amy Jessen-Marshall, Vice President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (the leading organization promoting liberal arts education in America). Proposals for the new curriculum were developed and then revised based on constituent feedback. Proposed components of the new curriculum were piloted in 2018-19, and these pilots are continuing in the current academic year. Funding for the planning of the curriculum was provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through generous grants totaling \$250,000.

The project came to a successful culmination in February 2019 when the faculty, by a very strong margin, approved *Ingenuity*.

What is *Ingenuity*?

Ingenuity has five educational components that all students at Cornell will complete.

- Foundations: All-College Seminars
 - All students will begin their study in Block 1 in a First-Year Seminar, *Diving In*, designed to get them off to a great start and prepare them for their continuing courses at Cornell.
 - Later in the first year, they will take a First-Year Writing Seminar to ensure their writing skills are up to the level expected in college courses.
 - In Block 1 of their second year, students will take *Citizenship in Practice* seminars which are topically based courses focusing on informed, creative problem-solving of real-world issues through disciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches. These courses may include community engagement and/or hands-on experiences such as field trips, off-campus study, service learning, simulations, performances, installations, exhibits, or lab work.
- Exploration
 - All students will explore a wide range of courses across the disciplines that will result in a knowledge and breadth in their education. In so doing, students will gain the critical foundational skills and abilities so that they can succeed in jobs yet to even be contemplated.
- Building Essential Abilities
 - Students will develop skills in writing, quantitative reasoning, intercultural literacy, and foreign language by choosing appropriate courses both in their major and in a variety of disciplines.
- *Ingenuity in Action*
 - Students will be required to complete at least two experiential learning experiences chosen within the following six categories: Civic Engagement, Creative Expression, Global Connections, Leadership, Professional Exploration, and Research. Examples of options in *Ingenuity in Action* are international study, internships, research projects, participation in major theatrical productions, performance of solo musical recitals, leadership of clubs or organizations, or work in community service.
- *Ingenuity Portfolio: Creating My Story*
 - Students will document and reflect on their Cornell education through the creation of an individual *Ingenuity Portfolio*. This electronic portfolio will be the foundation for students to create and be ready to “tell their story” to prospective employers, graduate schools, or others as they move into life after Cornell.

It should be noted that the *Ingenuity* requirements are overlapping, many counting for more than one category, and flexible to allow students to chart their own path.

Advantages of *Ingenuity*

What are the primary advantages of *Ingenuity* for our students? They are numerous. *Ingenuity* will:

- Build students’ success beginning with the common First-Year Seminar in Block 1 of the first year, the First-Year Writing Seminar, and in an exciting Second-Year Seminar focused on hands-on learning and problem solving.
- Create opportunities for students to explore the wide range of disciplines offered by Cornell.

-
- Help students to gain important essential skills in communication, quantitative reasoning, intercultural literacy, and foreign language.
 - Involve students in the application of knowledge in real-world settings through internships, travel study, research, leadership, civic engagement, and creative projects.
 - Prepare students to “create their story” by documenting and reflecting upon their four years of study at Cornell in the *Ingenuity Portfolio*.
 - Help students to develop their own path as a result of *Ingenuity’s* flexibility and also offer them adequate time to complete their chosen major(s) and minor(s).

There are also significant advantages to Cornell College as an institution, thanks to *Ingenuity*. Our new core curriculum will:

- Put Cornell at the very front of the pack by joining a small and highly select group of the most prestigious colleges and universities that make significant funds available to all students for their out-of-the-classroom experiences.
- Differentiate Cornell College among our competitors, thanks in large part to our One Course calendar, which maximizes the benefits of *Ingenuity*. For example, Cornell students will be able to go off-campus multiple times (thanks to our One Course calendar) over the course of their four years—something that is very difficult on a semester system.
- Make the most of our One Course calendar by creating a curriculum distinctive to Cornell College and one that has components that are compelling to prospective students and their parents.
- Place the college in an enviable position as a national leader in innovative education for 21st century students.
- Ensure that all students are getting the best possible education for the 21st century, consistent with what students expect and need.
- Prepare all students for life beyond their studies at Cornell by ensuring that students have multiple opportunities to apply what they are learning in contexts and settings outside the classroom.
- Strengthen student success and retention.
- Provide wonderful opportunities for our faculty to develop new courses in collaboration with their colleagues across the campus.

In sum, *Ingenuity* brings a transformative curriculum to Cornell College and opens new experiences, ideas, and futures to our students today and into the future.

When we think about the major successes that we have enjoyed at Cornell over the last 10 years—from new academic majors, to *Ingenuity*, a deeper investment in preparing students to thrive personally and professionally once they are graduated, to our increased focus on student success and well-being—all conjoined with an ever beautiful and functional campus, we are enthused about what lies ahead. As always, any progress will require your participation and support.



Jonathan Brand
PRESIDENT

*This presidential white paper is part of a series on matters of importance to Cornellians.
I welcome any comments or observations you might have on this white paper topic.
You can always reach me at 319.895.4324 or jbrand@cornellcollege.edu*