

Colloquium Secundum

Introduction

The Colloquium Secundum (CS) is a way for residents of Hillcrest to come together and do meaningful work both intellectually and socially outside of the "typical" classroom setting. The Colloquium Secundum will provide opportunities for students to exercise leadership, stretch themselves across a variety of pursuits, and make a difference in both the Virginia Tech and Honors communities at large. These Colloquium courses will be required for all members living within Hillcrest. Substitutions must be handled on an individual basis by the Honors staff. These Colloquia will only exist inasmuch as students take initiative and responsibility in creating and directing them semester by semester.

Issues to be Addressed

In creating the guidelines for the Colloquium Secundum, we, as senior members of the Hillcrest Community, have taken into consideration several problems and issues observed during our participation in the Hillcrest Colloquium Magnum (CM). These issues include underutilization of the book list, disagreements on how the book list should be chosen, differences in opinion on how to run a Colloquium section, differences between Colloquium sections in the quality of engagement and discussion, scheduling problems (including Colloquium sections with too few members), and widely varying visions of what Colloquium should be in general, both among the students and between the students and the Honors staff. Some have wanted Colloquium to focus on the book list, some have wanted to use the book list only part of the time, and yet others have not wanted to discuss the books at all. Some have wanted Colloquium to be a literature discussion based closely on the readings, while others have preferred to use the readings as jumping off points to discuss broader themes and ideas. Some Colloquium sections have incorporated speakers, field trips, and discussions of current events, while others have not. There often has not been a clear idea among students of how the Colloquium will be graded. In the past, there have been specific requirements for each section such as a certain number of meetings and a certain number of speakers, but grades currently seem to be based solely on attendance and on turning in a final paper. While some sections of Colloquium Magnum in the past few years have been very successful at cultivating good discussions, enough of them have been inconsistently successful to raise concern about the purpose and structure Colloquium Magnum.

CS Structure: Two Options

As previously mentioned, one of the major issues with Colloquium Magnum has been the widely varying visions of what Colloquium should be. However, the two most dominant, yet conflicting, visions have been keeping the "traditional" approach of discussing a broad range of issues versus having each section choose a topic of interest to its members to cover throughout the semester. "Traditionalists" have remarked that one goal of Colloquium is to improve the conversational skills of community members on far-reaching topics that they may not know much about yet and may not be interested in. Advocates of selecting topics have argued that good discussions are best had when everyone in the group is interested in the topic. The

usual method of joining a Colloquium Magnum section in the past has been to select a time to fit one's schedule. However, a few sections have been formed based on particular interests, in an attempt to avoid the previously mentioned issues. These have included a few debate-based sections, a section for the 10K project, and this Hillcrest Senior section. These sections have been successful at cultivating quality discussions, but creating them has been an exception, not a usual part of the Colloquium Magnum model.

Colloquium Secundum attempts to accommodate both of the above views and build on the success of the few topic-based sections by offering two options. One option will be the general or "traditional" option of discussing a variety of topics over the course of the semester; another option will be to form sections based on particular topics. These options are discussed below.

Topical Colloquium

Topics will be proposed by Honors students (individually or as groups) to the Honors staff and Community one month before the first day of the final exams of the semester prior to the term in which the CS will be taught. (Example: Bob wants to lead a course on Drug Culture in the New River Valley. He proposes this in May 2008 to be put into action in the fall of 2008). These courses will be dynamic in nature: community service (non-profits, local government), inspection of specific university topics (imagining a better core curriculum, diversity), and in-depth study of issues from a variety of perspectives will constitute the best forms of this course. (Although the idea of choosing a topic is somewhat similar to the Honors Reading Groups, CS is a 2-credit class and a community effort, and as such will carry higher expectations than the one-credit reading groups.) In a sense, these topical colloquiums will mimic the specific, topical colloquium sections already in place and led by professors (example: Men's Issues with Dr. Art Buikema), but instead will maintain the student leadership and structural design of the traditional colloquium magnum.

Joining a Topic

After proposal of colloquium topics, the proposing students will meet briefly with Honors staff in order to "flesh out" their interests. This meeting will take place in the semester prior to the institution of the course. The courses will then be distributed by ListServ e-mail and added to the Honors section of the Timetable of Classes. Students will sign up with the student leader(s) of the various colloquiums via e-mail in order to register for the course. By the last day of final exams, student leader(s) will turn in a list of students who have signed up for their colloquium to the Honors staff.

Choosing a Meeting Time/Creating a Syllabus

In the **first week** of the semester (a change which will need to be noted as most students assume colloquia do not meet during the first week), the colloquium groups will meet to establish what time the group will meet over the course of the semester. This early meeting is essential to smooth out scheduling issues, allowing students to find other colloquiums if need be. Second, students will begin to develop a "syllabus" during this time. This syllabus will hew to the following criteria:

- 1: A minimum of 5 "events," three of which must be talks with professors/visiting guests.

2: Each student in the group will be required to design/"lead" at least one meeting per course.

3: The students must include specific reading for the semester, such as books from the book list, articles, or other sources. This list is not meant to be an absolute, but will provide groundwork to have each student searching news sources, journals, and other literature for topics to discuss during class.

4: This "syllabus" must be turned in within 2 weeks of the beginning of the semester.

5: The class must meet a minimum of 14 times during the semester.

General Colloquium

During the colloquium proposal phase, students may wish to lead "traditional"-type colloquiums, where students read a variety of books and hold general intellectual conversation. These courses will still need to establish a syllabus under the rules set out above. While the topical groups will meet in the first week based on their chosen topics, the general groups should meet based on what time in their schedules will work best for the most students.

Evaluation and General Administration for Both Options

This will be a student-driven program (with special reliance on upperclassmen). However, in order to institutionalize the program, the CS will need strong enforcement from the Honors staff. Students who do not participate should be subjected to grade penalties. Participation may be monitored by attendance, participation in discussions and trips, individual semester summaries, and individual student assessments. If students feel that a colloquium member is not adequately participating, it is the responsibility of that particular colloquium section to first discuss options with the student in question, and then approach the Honors staff or Community Preceptor about holding the student accountable. It bears emphasizing that in agreement with the autonomy and self-government desired by the students of the Hillcrest Honors Community, we suggest that the requirements and structure of Colloquium Secundum should always be decided by the students and enforced by the Honors staff or the Hillcrest Community Faculty Preceptor.

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