A University at Risk: The Susquehanna University Curriculum Change of 1985
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The faculty of the Susquehanna University Curriculum Committee stated in 1986 that “one of the primary means by which an institution of higher learning achieves its stated mission is through its curriculum.” Curriculums became an increasingly important component of higher education during the transitional phase from the 1970s to 1980s in America. Higher education in the United States was very uncertain; the futures of many colleges and universities were in doubt and unclear. If nothing changed, many schools were projected to close by the end of the 1980s. Susquehanna University was one of the many small, liberal arts universities that faced this daunting threat. Small, private, religious affiliated, coeducational colleges during the 1970s, were the most likely to close their doors; unfortunately, Susquehanna met all of those criteria. Furthermore, with student enrollment falling in conjunction with the quality of students applying, Susquehanna’s future looked bleak. After exploring different outlets for a change, the faculty and administration decided that the curriculum would be the vehicle for survival. The national government and the Middle States Accreditation Association both influenced Susquehanna in its pursuit to reform its curriculum. Within the university, however, the faculty became the most important voice for change. Susquehanna University completed this massive task of changing its curriculum in the 1980s keeping the university not only afloat, but in better condition than it had ever been in.

Susquehanna University was not an anomaly in the higher educational community during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many institutions, private and public, were worried that their schools could close by the end of the 1980s. In 1983, the Department of Education even
published “A Nation at Risk,” an open letter to the American people, outlining the mass educational problems in America, noting the national trends of less eighteen to twenty-four year olds applying to college with lower credentials; the future of higher education looked uncertain. During this time period, Frederick Rudolph of the National Commission of Excellence in the Department of Education commented that “higher education was not only negotiating a new lease on academic excellence but it was also becoming national in its outlook.”

By changing its curriculum in the early 1980s, Susquehanna became a specific case study of the small, liberal arts universities that struggled to improve their academics while trying to incorporate national education views. This study argues that the faculty of Susquehanna University had the most influence on the curricular change of 1985 and what regional and federal influences encouraged them to make these changes.

The 1970s: What Went Wrong

The educational atmosphere of the 1970s set the stage for the changes of the 1980s. Historically, the 1970s brought in a “new climate of freedom” to colleges across the country affecting many aspects of college life, including the curriculum. College administrations, along with permitting more social freedom to the students, wanted students to have more freedom in their academic life. This point was particularly important, argued the Vice-President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in Washington D.C., Verne Stadtman, after the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1971 making all eighteen year olds eligible to vote; “98 percent of the national college student body (was) eligible to vote.” Students who were eighteen were now seen as adults because they had a voice on the national level. As adults, they were held responsible for making decisions about their own academic lives.
Susquehanna University tried to implement such ideas with its new curriculum of 1970-1971. The new “Core Program” was intended to give students a better understanding of many broad areas, giving the student the “man’s total experience.” To fulfill the Core, students took introductory level courses in almost every discipline. Each bachelor’s degree program, however, required different courses. Even within those requirements, students had many course options to choose from. The main intent for the Core Program was for the students to pursue individual needs and accept responsibility for planning their own education. With such a system, students were encouraged to take an elective every semester that catered to their “individual, intellectual interests.” With so many options, the students had greater freedom to choose courses that fulfilled their needs.

This innovative system also called for a new calendar. In 1971, Susquehanna simultaneously implemented a trimester calendar with three courses per semester (the “3-3 system”) and made courses the unit of measurement for graduation, not the number of credit hours. Theoretically, under this system, all courses were equal in credit value. The faculty believed that the “hours of class sessions should be commensurate with the demands of different disciplines, the needs of particular courses, and the maturity of students at various levels in their college education.” Besides trying to individualize each course, the 3-3 system’s main objective was to “shake up the curriculum through a series of correlative subjects relating to learning and scheduling.” By having only three courses per semester, the students and professors could focus on their courses on a more in depth level. Professors could also decide how long their classes met per week, allowing more freedom in the learning process. The faculty and administration created this unique system to set Susquehanna University apart from
the other small, liberal arts colleges in the area. They were hoping that being different would not only create a better education for the students, but also increase applicants.\textsuperscript{13}

However, by 1974, only three years after the Core Program made its debut, the Middle States Accreditation Association’s Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) observed problems with this academic arrangement. MSCHE, as the mid-Atlantic regional accreditation agency since 1919, set specific criteria for an “accredited” school, creating universal standards for higher education in the region. Since 1946, MSCHE became more active by performing periodic evaluations of accredited colleges instead of just having the initial accreditation procedures; MSCHE wanted to encourage and aid in the improvement of colleges and universities on all levels.\textsuperscript{14} Susquehanna, accredited by Middle States in 1930, underwent a periodic evaluation in 1974.\textsuperscript{15}

MSCHE understood that “flexibility, interdisciplinary, independent, elective…and ‘situational’ approaches” to the courses were the main intentions of the 3-3 system.\textsuperscript{16} But unfortunately, MSCHE noticed that the “(redefined CORE, less structured major) seem(ed) to have been relied on more heavily than (the) redefinition of the teaching-learning process.”\textsuperscript{17} Middle States believed Susquehanna was relying on its innovative 3-3 system instead of reevaluating the role professors played within the system. Professors were thrown into the new system without discussion or guidance on how to educate their students under the 3-3 system. MSCHE noted that the faculty had

“not yet restyled course(s) either in content or in presentation; many… (had) difficulty in adapting to the new system and feel shortened time blocks to threaten quality tremendously; very little by way of interdisciplinary programming or new use of media techniques (had) yet emerged.”\textsuperscript{18}
MSCHE reported that the “new schedule may encourage innovative teaching; (yet) it does not produce it.”

It was not surprising, then, that MSCHE concluded that “the plan is particularly defective and therefore partially imperative.”

The faculty, as stated by the MSCHE evaluation, was also displeased with the 3-3 system. “The 3-3 system was awful” stated biology professor, Jack Holt, “we could not wait for a change.”

Although Dr. Holt came to Susquehanna in 1981, he was more than ready for a curricular change. One of the main complaints by the faculty came from the science professors who stated that every course was not “equal.” Science courses required labs that could have over nine hours per week of classroom time, whereas other humanities courses were no longer than five hours per week. Under the 3-3 system, however, both science and humanity courses counted as one course unit.

The typical work load for a professor was seven courses per year, two to three courses every trimester. Depending on the professor’s subject, however, each of those courses could have drastically different classroom hours.

Although Susquehanna was just one private school in Pennsylvania, similar academic concerns arose on the state and national level in the 1970s. The federal government passed the Higher Education Amendment of 1972 with section 1202 stating that all states in the Union needed a Commission of Higher Education in order to receive federal funding. Prior to 1972, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was in the process of creating “boards responsible for statewide planning and coordination of post-secondary education.” The Pennsylvania Education Department stressed that “the planning and coordination of all post-secondary education is essential to avoid chaos.”

Both the state and the federal governments agreed that post secondary education was not organized. As was seen by Susquehanna’s 3-3 system, colleges employed haphazard educational curriculums that catered strictly to the student and led to a
chaotic and disorganized curriculum. Additionally, with the twenty-four percent decline nationwide of eighteen to twenty year olds enrolling in college and a thirty-one percent decline in the state of Pennsylvania, something had to be done about higher education.  

One way some colleges and universities handled this situation was by implementing the theory of student consumerism into their policies. This theory used the analogy that colleges were like businesses, selling their product of an education to the consumers, or the students. Therefore, colleges had to market their “service” of education solely to the students, or parents, who would then purchase the educational “good.” For example, in 1976, the faculty at Harvard University wanted to revamp their liberal arts education by unifying the core curriculum to give students a similar basis of knowledge, including mandatory courses in specific academic areas. The students, however, opposed the mandatory courses and with the administration focused on student consumerism, the faculty was forced to dilute their original curriculum plans to pacify the students and the administration. The administration used the core program as a marketing tool to gain and maintain students. Enrollments were low so a curricular change that angered students was not what the administration wanted. To increase the low enrollments, the administration used the core program to cater to students’ desire of a more flexible liberal arts curriculum without mandatory courses. Because the students were “consumers” of a Harvard education, the administration and faculty changed the curriculum to ensure that the students were happy with the “product.”

In the Name of the Faculty

Many colleges across the country changed their curriculums based on student consumerism like Harvard did during the 1970s; this was not the exact case, however, at
Susquehanna. The faculty changed the curriculum not only for the students, but also for their own needs. Noted by faculty members, History professor Housley, Business professor Fladmark, and English professor Dotterer, “the faculty had a quiet fear that larger cultural forces, and some of the practices pursued on campus (would) lead to the end of their career.” In the 1970s, the concerns about the national trends of reduced student enrollment resulting in a decrease of funds, pressure to reach new clienteles, decreasing student achievement, and the increasing influence of the state and federal government could have led to the closure of Susquehanna, leaving all of the professors without a job.

The 3-3 system did not foster the innovative curriculum that the faculty had planned for, and, even worse for the faculty, the system created more work for themselves. Most professors were teaching more classes per year than they had been under a two-semester system. This led to less time for professors to spend on scholarly work which, on a national level, gave professors less credit in the professional field. There were also shorter semesters under this system, giving faculty less time to actually teach the material and prepare for their courses, including grading exams and papers. Students even noticed this and wrote a letter to the Curriculum Committee complaining about late feedback and grades from professors. The faculty believed that the “shortened time blocks (threatened) quality tremendously;” their jobs were damaged by the 3-3 system.

By 1976, the faculty who helped instate the 3-3 system such as Political Science professor James Blessing, History professor Housley, and Philosophy professor Richard Kamber had kept up-to-date on national trends, read the Middle States recommendations, and realized that for their own survival they had to make a change. Fortunately, the faculty had more than enough power within the university to do so. Their roles at Susquehanna were to “govern,
discipline, and control the educational affairs of the institution” and were “responsible for the academic program and guidance of individual students… (including) instruction, (and) curriculum.”34 They also served as the legislative body of the university in “all academic matters.”35 The Susquehanna faculty was very powerful unlike many others colleges across the country where the presidents and the administrators were more powerful, usually instructing the faculty on how to form the curriculum.36 Although the professors at Susquehanna still needed the university board’s approval for their actions, they were the ones who controlled what was actually in the curriculum. In the 1970s, Susquehanna faculty committees made decisions about the curriculum, specifically the Curriculum Committee. They had the “final authority in determining what courses do or do not count as course requirements.”37 This continued into the 1980s, when the same faculty of the 1970s, not the students, president, or the board of directors, decided on the details of the curriculum change. Although some of the same faculty moved to administrative positions, like professor Housley who became the Assistant Dean of Faculty in 1978, they still helped fellow faculty members and contributed to the curricular change.38 By 1976, Middle States noted that the faculty and University Committees were “revitalized and (played) more active and more central roles in policy making… (especially) in Curriculum planning.”39

Curriculum change, however, did not happen instantaneously nor was it solely influenced by the fact that the faculty wanted to keep their jobs. As the faculty noted, the “development (of the curriculum) over time was informed and directed by many interrelated things” with the most important factor being the “interests and aspirations of individuals and small groups of faculty members.”40 Many small changes happened in response to national and state trends as well as to the many different entities within the university, but the faculty remained the most important to
use those influences and make the changes. The faculty made many small changes over time until a whole new curriculum was formed. This idea reflects Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm shift theory.

Although Kuhn’s theory was concerned with the scientific world, his theory can be applied to history. Kuhn, who earned a doctorate degree in physics from Harvard University, taught at Harvard University, Berkeley College, Princeton University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and eventually became a historian and philosopher of science, argued that paradigms, or “ways of thinking,” shift based on numerous agents of change over a period of time. Contradictions arise concerning the original paradigm and small changes are instituted to fix them. These small changes, over time, build upon each other and eventually create a whole new paradigm that replaces the original one. The curriculum change at Susquehanna University started with the initial paradigm of the 3-3 system. Problems began to surface, creating a crisis or “period of professional insecurity,” thus the paradigm underwent a series of changes that were influenced by many different national and regional entities and then implemented by the faculty. The original paradigm was then replaced by a new paradigm, the new Core Curriculum and calendar system in 1985-1986, that differed drastically from the 3-3 system. Kuhn argued members, or the faculty in Susquehanna’s case, “make every effort to salvage (the original paradigm) using ad hoc modifications until the anomalies can be resolved.” It took the faculty approximately ten years to complete a new Core Curriculum because they first tried to modify the 3-3 system and, by 1981, realized that a new program had to be created.

Looking at the Big Picture: The Influence of National Trends
The faculty at Susquehanna kept very up-to-date on external, national trends, taking them into consideration while deciding upon the Core Curriculum modifications. A National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities (NEH) consultant, Dr. Stephens, was hired in 1976 by the University for his advice on the curriculum, demonstrating how serious Susquehanna was about changing to survive the 1970s. Stephen’s advice was unanimously agreed upon by the Curriculum Committee:

“(a distribution requirement) provides breadth of opportunity for a student to sample a number of disciplines to determine what s/he might like to pursue in depth and give him/her an idea of the scope of human knowledge.”

This comment, from an NEH consultant, represented what the federal government believed about core requirements. If the Curriculum Committee followed these guidelines, there would be a greater chance that Susquehanna would receive more federal funding from NEH, helping to create more and better courses in the Arts and Humanities and increase student enrollment. Further, if Susquehanna received a grant, it would be recognized as a prestigious college on the national level, giving the university more credibility and making it more attractive to students, increasing the enrollment along with the funds.

In 1977, the faculty also listened to the new president of Susquehanna, Dr. Jonathan Messerli, for guidance. He served as one of the catalysts for changing Susquehanna’s 3-3 system. With numerous teaching experiences at both the high school and college level, a doctorate in American Education from Harvard, and a biography of “Horace Mann: A Biography” behind him, Messerli was well-versed in education. In his inaugural speech on October 14, 1977, Messerli stated that the “chief responsibility of higher education (resided) with the faculty and the administration of this institution.” Messerli commented on the fact that the federal government was becoming too involved in higher education and that institutions should rely on
the resources within their walls: the faculty and the administration. Throughout his presidency, Messerli trusted the faculty to make the best decisions for Susquehanna without micromanaging their every move. For Messerli, change was going to happen at Susquehanna University through the faculty who knew the environment at the university, not the federal government.

After three years of planning and reevaluating, and with the new reinforcement from President Messerli, the faculty was one step closer to a better core curriculum by implementing revisions to the program in 1978. Although the core curriculum and academic schedule remained the same, the Curriculum Committee created, revised, and reorganized specific courses and areas of study. New courses were offered in foreign culture and Communications, while the writing program was created. The Economics department was moved from the Business division to the Social Science division of study. Originally in the division of Language, Communications and Theatre became a part of the Literature and Fine Art division. The study of Religion and Philosophy also moved from its own division into the Humanities academic division. These changes redefined some of the departments; Economics was now considered a study of social science giving it different implications than it originally had when it was under the business division. Communications and Theatre were no longer a practice of Language, but a division of Literature and Fine Arts. The Religion and Philosophy departments were becoming too small, and thus could not have its own department anymore. Although it took three years to implement these small changes, the faculty noted that “elements of the academic program are changed…one at a time.” Changing the curriculum was an extensive process; although small, these changes represented the tedious process of a paradigm shift. They helped form the basis for the definitive shift that took place in the 1980s.
There were changes on the federal level as well in the form of a new president in 1981. The new presidential administration helped usher in a new era of education. Although President Ronald Reagan had planned to terminate the Department of Education, education became one of the most important topics of the 1980s. After “A Nation at Risk” outlined the problems in American education, the department emerged as one of the most controversial and important departments in the federal government. Terrel Bell, the Secretary of Education under Reagan and former U.S. Commissioner of Education in the 1970s, knew that education was lacking in America and believed that the Department of Education could help improve it. Secretary Bell formed the National Commission on Excellence in Education which helped write “A Nation at Risk” stating that the “curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive school choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today.” Like Susquehanna, many secondary and post-secondary schools crafted a curriculum that solely focused on “life skills” and professional training while maintaining low course requirements for graduation. Therefore, students were graduating high school and college with lower academic achievement, bringing admission requirements for college to a new low and increasing the number of unprepared students entering the workforce.

The Calendar Task Force at Susquehanna University recognized these impending, national problems. In their recommendation report to the Curricular Committee in the summer of 1984, they used an excerpt from “A Nation at Risk,” in order to highlight the importance of an academic change at the university. The Calendar Task Force noted that “as high school requirements and standards are being strengthened naturally so should Susquehanna.” This quote illustrated that the faculty was aware of the national trends and was trying to change Susquehanna based on them. In fact, the faculty was ahead of the nation by already having a
Curriculum Committee that had implemented revisions to its curriculum in the 1970s. “A Nation at Risk” gave Susquehanna a national reason to create a core curriculum that included higher standards.

The faculty was also following the national trends in higher education of promoting new disciplines and subjects in order to become more reputable. In the 1970s, curricula, such as Susquehanna’s 3-3 system, intended to “combine a liberal education with serious and thorough career preparation.” Although college administrators and professors wanted to refocus the curriculum on the more academic aspects of a liberal arts education, they realized that students still wanted and focused on pre-professional training. Therefore, colleges like Susquehanna focused on creating and reorganizing courses that catered to both the liberal arts and pre-professional training in hopes of attracting more students, focusing their marketing tactics around student consumerism. This tactic was popular among higher educational institutions at this time, especially for smaller, private institutions.

Smaller, private institutions had a certain appeal to students including closer, personal relationships with professors, an intimate campus community, and more course flexibility. Although these characteristics helped Susquehanna attract students, it was also a small, private, religious affiliated, coeducational college; the type of college that was most likely to close their doors by the 1980s. With smaller student bodies, colleges such as these were more affected by the national decline of eighteen to twenty-one year olds applying to college than larger public universities. In addition, since private universities depended on tuition and fees to fund the institution rather than public funds, they also suffered a greater monetary decrease as compared to public universities. If Susquehanna wanted to its doors open, it needed to provide more specialized courses and programs like larger, public institutions in order to broaden their appeal
and attract more students. Susquehanna’s new film program reflected the university’s commitment to this idea.

Within the Humanities division, a new program for film was being developed with the help of a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant from the federal government.\textsuperscript{63} The National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent grant-making agency of the United Stated government, was created in 1965 to provide grants for high-quality humanities projects.\textsuperscript{64} In the fall of 1974 the NEH received a proposal from Susquehanna for a technologically innovative, interdisciplinary study of film and the humanities, and approved a two-year grant. By applying for and receiving this grant, the university followed the national agenda of improving the humanities in higher education. By giving grants to universities like Susquehanna, the NEH could subtly control what types of programs were offered at higher education institutions. NEH could be selective about which institutions received grants, so by giving Susquehanna a grant for a humanities focused film program, NEH projected the national support for this small, liberal arts university and its program. Although this was only a two-year grant, the program eventually became a permanent entity as the Susquehanna University Film Institute in 1979.\textsuperscript{65}

The NEH was one of the many instruments the federal government used to further mandate their social goals.\textsuperscript{66} Traditionally, education in America was strictly managed by the states, and concerning higher educational institutions, especially private ones, the state had limited jurisdiction. Once the National Defense Education Act of 1958 passed allowing the federal government to give monetary aid for educational endeavors in America, the federal government’s involvement in education increased. By 1979, the Carter Administration created the Department of Education, signaling to the country that the federal government was going to have a larger role in the educational system, both in grade school and higher education.\textsuperscript{67}
more federal involvement, higher educational institutions, like Susquehanna, had to pay closer attention to and follow the national trends in order to receive funding.

**A Curriculum Emerges: The Faculty at Work**

Within the university, national trends were taking shape in the form of the crediting system. By 1981, the Curriculum Committee subcommittee on variable credit had submitted its final report concerning an alternate to the current course unit system, one of the many entities that contributed to the final curriculum change in 1985.68 This faculty subcommittee was created to evaluate the faulty course unit system. They “unanimously recommended that alternate credit system be based upon the semester hours credit, which is by far the single most widely used academic credit in use today.”69 The subcommittee also stated that the “faculty load is unaffected by the semester hours credit system.”70 The faculty would not be expected to teach more or less courses under the new system. Some professors were concerned that their classes would not carry the same amount of course hours as a full credit course. Credits, however, would solve the inequality of the previous system by making all of the courses based on the hours per course, not the course itself. Most courses would count for three credits. The sciences with labs, though, would then have more credits, along with foreign language classes with language lab practice.71

Although these changes were meant to help the students, the faculty did not want to inconvenience themselves either. Since the faculty held most of the power over the academic realm at Susquehanna, they could make changes that would positively affect them in the long run, while also stating that the decisions were good for students. The faculty also proposed this system because it was the most popular system in the country at the time. Over the past decade, the Department of Education had noted that there had been “an informal consensus on a system of accounting…based in the concept of the credit.”72 Contrary from their original idea, the fact
that Susquehanna used a different crediting system did not attract more applicants. A system that was already acceptable within the country would actually give Susquehanna more creditability in the higher educational community. It would also hopefully attract more applicants because the school’s enrollment had been decreasing since 1979.\textsuperscript{73} This system was already reputable throughout the country and widely used, so the faculty and administration hoped that by adding this to the many imminent changes at the University, more students would apply and enroll.

Other areas of the university were also changing and making a positive impact on Susquehanna. In 1983, the Academic Vice President, Joel Cunningham, played a large role in the creation of the three academic schools at Susquehanna: the Sigmund Weis School of Business, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the School of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{74} Cunningham’s contribution, five years after his initial appointment in 1979, illustrated his commitment to the faculty’s vision of change at Susquehanna. Not only did the creation of three academic schools help organize the university, it also presented the vision formed by the Marketing Task Force of the 1980s: Susquehanna as a “Small University.”\textsuperscript{75} Instead of strictly being a small liberal arts college with a variety of studies, the image of a “Small University” projected a unified school with an intimate, community-oriented campus that offered the same things as a large, public university. This new image complemented the curriculum changes underway and reflected the faculty’s effort to make the school more reputable.

Along with Susquehanna’s new image, other recommendations made by the Marketing Task Force in the early 1980s were also implemented by 1985. After assessing the needs of Susquehanna in the late 1970s, the Marketing Task Force determined that Susquehanna would benefit from “Academic Marketing;” another term for student consumerism.\textsuperscript{76} This business perspective complimented Messerli’s ideas stated in his 1977 inaugural speech to the faculty; “a
student is a client, is a client, is a client.”" Both Messerli and the Marketing Task Force believed that the only way to increase student enrollment at Susquehanna was to be “concerned with the potential student,” and follow the trend of student consumerism. The university should meet the needs of prospective students; “not that the student’s needs as (the university) perceive(s) it, but as (the student) perceive(s) it.” Messerli stated that the university needed to “recognize the legitimate desire of our students to enroll in intellectually demanding pre-professional and career programs.” Thus, the Marketing Task Force saw the need for more minors, associate degrees, and new majors to meet students’ interests.

Although the faculty did not advocate student consumerism as Messerli or the Marketing Task Force did, they still had to encounter these views at the university. Even though the faculty had the main control over the curriculum changes, they could not completely disregard the president’s or the Marketing Task Force’s views. The faculty, however, was already in the process of expanding the academics with the addition of more minors, associate degrees, and majors on the basis of making Susquehanna more reputable which would in turn keep the school open. Thus, the faculty had already complied with the ideas of Messerli and the Marketing Task Force. Although the reasons for these additional minors, degrees, and majors differed among the faculty and the president and the Marketing Task Force, both rationales led to the same conclusion: more minors, associate degrees, and majors. Therefore, the faculty did not have to succumb to student consumerism while the president and the Marketing Task Force were pleased with the academic additions.81

The faculty was open to new ideas and listened to anyone on campus, including the administration and students who proposed new courses or programs to the Curriculum Committee. The person or academic department had to submit seven pieces of information,
including a description and the relationship of the proposed course or program to the institute’s goals. All proposals went before the Curriculum Committee. With an emphasis on creating minors, the department of Classical Languages proposed minors for a Greek, Latin, and the Classics. The Economics, International Studies, Art, Communications and Theatre departments all submitted proposals for minors as well. Singular classes were also suggested, like Drugs Society and Behavior by the Psychology department and Human Geography by the History department. The Curriculum Committee approved all of these programs and courses using a simple one person, one vote system.\textsuperscript{82} Almost every week there was a Curriculum Committee meeting with new programs and courses to review; it was a very time consuming process. These meetings illustrated how active and dedicated the faculty was in creating a new academic atmosphere at Susquehanna. By taking the time to review, approve, and implement new courses and programs at Susquehanna, the faculty was making small contributions to the larger, overall academic change at the university.

By the fall of 1984, Susquehanna made another important modification regarding the academic calendar. The three-semester academic school year was changed to a two-semester one with fourteen weeks in each semester.\textsuperscript{83} Although the university’s 3-3 schedule was experimental and innovative, it did not produce increased student enrollment or better faculty instruction. The shift back to a two-semester system was a return to the more tradition calendar found across the country; following regional and national trends was better for the school than being completely different. Regionally, Susquehanna’s 3-3 system was unique, but it could not be compared to any other school; students did not know where their education ranked on a larger scale. With a two-semester system, Susquehanna could now be compared with and compete against the regional colleges of Bucknell and Franklin and Marshall.\textsuperscript{84}
The faculty also had to consider the imminent threat of the Federal and State governments’ new focus on public universities rather than private colleges. Because so many private colleges were closing, the federal government and the state were hesitant to grant them money. Larger, public universities received more federal and state funding because they had a stable admission pool. Additionally, with more money, public universities could offer more courses, increasing competition with the small, private universities; private institutions were in jeopardy. Susquehanna needed to change its lenient academic atmosphere and conform to the successful, larger university models in order to survive. A two-semester academic calendar, creating a more traditional setting, was another factor that contributed to the “paradigm shift” of a new curriculum. It complemented the curriculum change process by giving the new curriculum a more widely accepted structure to fit into.

Although the Curriculum Committee had been making smaller changes to the curriculum, in the early 1980s, the Committee had to decide the specific structure of the new Core Curriculum. The Committee, “prior to its many long and burdensome meetings…reviewed the core curricula of Albright, Bucknell, Dickenson, F and M (Franklin and Marshall), Gettysburg, Harvard, MIT (Massachusetts Institute for Technology), Swarthmore, Ursinus, and those of several other colleges.” The Susquehanna faculty not only cared about what other colleges were doing around them (Gettysburg and Franklin and Marshall), but they were also concerned with other prestigious colleges within the country (Harvard and MIT). By looking at regional colleges, the faculty wanted to make sure that their core curriculum would be just as good as or better than theirs to increase their competitiveness with those schools. The faculty also researched colleges and universities that were not regional to learn why their core curricula were
successful. By studying other schools, the faculty could implement the best parts of each into their own curriculum.

The Calendar Task Force, which evaluated the old 3-3 system and created the new two-semester calendar, directly stated that changing the academic calendar gave the university a “special opportunity to evaluate, revise, and develop curricular programs to reflect the needs of the students in the 1980s and 1990s.” The Curriculum Committee evaluated the core curriculum under the 3-3 system, but after this report a push was made to create a program that was “common…for all three schools (Business, Arts and Sciences, Fine Arts).” This report was sent to the faculty and the Student Government Association (SGA). This change was a transparent one; the Calendar Task Force and the Curriculum Committee wanted the whole school to be involved in this process. They welcomed comments and concerns from anyone who had them. Most of the academic departments sent back concerns about a change in the workload or how their courses would fit into this new Core Curriculum. SGA also sent the committee a letter stating the “overall product of the Calendar Task Force was very good,” but that they had some concerns about the “unrealistic requirements that may result in scheduling conflicts for the students senior year,” as well as minor issues with the new fall break.

The new calendar and credit system were implemented on specific dates, but the Core Curriculum was introduced over a three-year consolidation period. One of the intended purposes of the new Core Curriculum was to have it “evolve constantly: individual courses (would) change, and the core as a whole (would) change every year.” The Curriculum Committee wanted the new curriculum to be “dynamic” with its “content and specific details reevaluated and modified annually.” From 1984 to 1988, the Committee passed new programs
and courses and revised the core program to ensure that the students received an up to date liberal arts education.

With a new calendar and new ideas, the faculty contacted NEH again for monetary support for the new curriculum. The language requirement, Critical Writing and Thinking courses, the second level Writing Humanity courses, and the brand new “Alternate Futures” courses all needed monetary aid. The faculty was trying to create an innovative curriculum, but it still needed help from the federal government. After “A Nation at Risk,” the Curriculum Committee hoped that the NEH would be impressed with its efforts to improve its institution, thus applying for another grant. Although this grant would not be for a specific program like the film one a few years earlier, the university hoped that because of their positive, innovative attitude the NEH would supply money to their cause. This represented the indirect role the government played on Susquehanna; the university had received grants from NEH before and knew the qualifications. The humanities struggling in an age where math and science were stressed, some colleges did not emphasize their humanities. The Curriculum Committee revamped their program hoping the NEH would applaud their effort to help promote the humanities.

The New Paradigm

The new Core Curriculum took many years of planning and preparation, and was still a work in progress once Susquehanna instated it in the fall of 1985. There were three sections of the Core Curriculum that all students had to complete, allowing every student to fulfill a unified, liberal arts education. The first was Intellectual Skills, which included four semester hours of English Comprehension, Critical Thinking and Writing, and Mathematics or Logic, two semester
hours of Using Computers, and four to eight semester hours of a foreign language. The courses in this section were intended for students to learn the basic skills needed for a solid foundation of a college education. Compared to the 3-3 curriculum, this area of basic knowledge was much more rigorous. Students were now required to take a Calculus I or an equivalent to Calculus I mathematics course and up to two foreign language courses. Housley, now the Dean of the Arts and Sciences school, was a little wary when these high standards were required, but was pleasantly surprised when the students were able to complete the courses. When the expectations were raised, the students rose with them.  

The second section was Perspectives of the World, which was made up of Heritage (four semester hours of a History, Fine Arts, and Literature course), Contemporary World (four semester hours of Society and the Individual and Science and Technology), and Futures (two semester hours of Alternate Futures) and Values (2 semester hours of Religion or Philosophy). These courses were intended to give the students the bulk of their liberal arts education. These courses would help students connect to the world on numerous levels and learn how disciplines connect and interact with each other and the world.

The last section, Personal Development, involved “Orientation to the Academe” courses entailing two seven-week non-credit courses on library research and career planning and four physical education courses. These courses covered “life” courses that would develop the “intellectual and physical well-being” of the students. With a reduction of “life” courses since the 1970s curriculum, it was clear that the focus was now on the academic aspects of a liberal arts education. By creating higher standards, Susquehanna was yet another college to increase its expectations of students. During the 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared that “American education at all levels, the aspiration of students, and the expectations of
the society are set by what the highest level of the educational system does and expects.”97 The faculty wanted to ensure that its new curriculum was just as rigorous as and any other creditable college in the country in order to maintain and increase its status in the realm of higher education.

Although Susquehanna University was just one school in the nation that succeeded and improved its curriculum when given the task to adapt to the national trends and changes within society, its story was unique. In the 1970s, only twenty-five percent of the entire student body of higher education was enrolled in a private institution, fifty percent lower than it was two decades earlier. With such a decrease in enrollment, many small, private, religious affiliated colleges either closed their doors or merged with other colleges to stay open.98 These institutions could not compete with larger public ones and were forced to close due to decreases in enrollment and funds. Susquehanna, however, remained open. This small, private, liberal arts school survived intact by relying on its faculty, who in turn looked to the Middle States Accreditation Association and the nation for guidance. By the fall of 1986, one year after the new Core Curriculum was instated, 1504 students enrolled, a five hundred student increase from 1979. Even the SAT scores increased since the 1970s; in 1979 the average SAT score was 947 while by 1989, the scores rose to an average of 1002.99 The University’s reliance on the faculty, instead of solely relying on its administration as other colleges did, helped Susquehanna increase its student enrollment as well as the quality of the students applying; both factors kept the school open and improved the level of student achievement.

This case study of Susquehanna illustrates the importance of how society, regionally and nationally, can affect the economics, politics, and institutional variables of one curriculum change at one university. Susquehanna demonstrated a unique, successful case which is
uncommon in the literature on higher education which only discusses the failures. The success stories should be highlighted. Although one can learn from mistakes, one also needs a successful model for guidance. Susquehanna shows what schools did to improve their academics while increasing student enrollment. Educational institutions should study curricula and how they change to ensure that their courses fulfill their goals as a school. In the 1980s this was very important because there was “A Nation at Risk;” almost thirty years later there is still an educational crisis in America. Susquehanna changed its Core Curriculum again in 2009 to meet the new societal demands as all institutions must do to cater to current regional and national needs.

Susquehanna University illustrates the trend of higher educational institutions overall during the 1970s and 1980s. A change had to be made in order for a school to survive into the 1980s and beyond. This change usually took the form of a revised liberal arts education. The experimental culture of the 1970s brought divergent curricula into higher education but by the end of the decade these unique curricula were ineffective. Students needed an educational structure that would lead to educational and professional success. Students were no longer taking college courses for self-fulfillment and satisfaction as they were in the 1970s. By the end of the decade, prospective students and their parents were less concerned about a well-rounded education and more worried about that education leading to a successful job. With private universities losing enrollments like Susquehanna, some tried to change the image of their liberal arts education to one that educated and prepared students for the work force.

In the 1980s, if colleges and universities wanted to survive, they adopted this new liberal arts education that was sensitive to students’ needs of professionalism. By implementing a guiding course structure, students could complete more focused yet diverse courses to help them
achieve academically and professionally. At Susquehanna, an education became “both liberal and professional;” a liberal arts education at Susquehanna was now a compilation of “studies of value to students (for) whatever professions they may choose.” Susquehanna, as well as other private universities, hoped that this new strategy of coupling professional and liberal arts courses would increase the enrollments, improve credibility, and save their school.

This educational paradigm shift reflected the change in American society from the 1970s to the 1980s. The 1960s spawned the experimental society of the 1970s, demonstrated in its divergent higher education curricula. These “experiments,” however, were ineffective and more structured practices were reinstituted into society as a whole. With the Watergate scandal leading to President Richard Nixon’s resignation in 1974 and an economic depression in the mid-1970s, the American people’s faith in the government fell to a new low. The people of America sought a change, like the students, administration, and faculty in higher education, shifting to a new conservative paradigm in 1980. By electing Ronald Reagan, a new conservative coalition came to fruition in America, setting the country on a new path and initiating a new “paradigm” in American history. By the 1980s, almost every aspect of the country had changed; higher education was just one small part of the larger change that occurred in the country.
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