

College of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision



I. Preamble

“Undergraduate education has traditionally been and remains central to the identity and purpose of Baylor University.”¹ Since the 1960s, however, there have been frequent calls for a reexamination of the shape and role of the core curriculum.² In 1995, attention was focused specifically on the Arts & Sciences Core by the Undergraduate Experience Taskforce of the Sesquicentennial Council of 150. In response, the Undergraduate Program Committee recommended that “The College of Arts and Sciences

¹ *ASPIRE: College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Plan*, p. 11.

² Martens, “Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision Taskforce: An Initial Report to Council of Chairs,” November 2015, pp. 5-8.

should initiate a serious and thorough review of the core curriculum.”³ In 2014, following the subsequent directive in *ASPIRE: College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Plan*,⁴ Dean Lee Nordt formed a taskforce to create a guiding and unifying document for what general education should be in the College of Arts and Sciences.⁵

The College of Arts & Sciences core curriculum is the foundation for a degree from Baylor University; it serves to educate men and women to become informed and productive citizens of a democracy and servant leaders of faith communities.⁶ For this reason, the College of Arts & Sciences maintains a robust core curriculum across diverse academic disciplines such as the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. Students graduating from the College of Arts & Sciences will be characterized by independent intellectual perspectives informed and supported by the depth and breadth of the liberal arts tradition. Further, the Arts and Sciences core curriculum supports and builds upon the General Education Outcomes—clear communication, critical thinking, civic responsibility, and Christian perspective—expected of all graduates of Baylor University and it embraces the principles and goals of *Pro Futuris* and *ASPIRE* respectively.

II. Vision Statement for the Core Curriculum

Functionally, the Arts and Sciences core curriculum, taught within a community of Christian scholars, enables men and women to acquire the knowledge, skills, and virtues needed to uncover and recognize truth, to deepen their faith, to live virtuously, to strengthen their communities, and to affect the world in transformative ways. To that end, the core curriculum will:

- 1) provide a shared foundation of knowledge drawn from the rich and diverse liberal arts tradition;**
- 2) develop various skills necessary for the completion of an academic degree, but also essential for personal and professional life beyond Baylor;**
- 3) inspire moral, intellectual, and spiritual virtues.**

A mutually-supportive, interdisciplinary harmony among these three tasks of the Arts and Sciences core curriculum is necessary for addressing the interconnected experiences, capacities, and responsibilities of living a fulfilled life. Specifically, the core will address the various ways in which we engage the world and experience our humanity:



³ Undergraduate Program Committee, *Report to the Undergraduate Experience Taskforce*, January 1995, p. 11.

⁴ *ASPIRE*, p. 14.

⁵ Nordt, “Task Force to write A Unifying Vision for the Core Curriculum in the 21st Century,” March 2015.

⁶ See *ASPIRE*, p. 7.

A. As inhabitants of a physical world, students require knowledge of the natural sciences, which in turn requires familiarity with the **scientific method**, standards of evidence, and the other tools necessary for interpreting data in the context of a hypothesis. Students will learn to observe, analyze, and quantify factors such as physiological, environmental, mechanical, and psychological phenomena. Knowledge of their participation in natural systems will provide students with a rich awareness of the interdependence of all physical systems while the skills acquired in their examination will enable students to cultivate responsible habits in the pursuit of a healthy life.



B. As rational beings, students require the intellectual rigor, integrity, and acumen necessary for the pursuit of truth. **Critical reasoning** stands at the core of the liberal arts tradition and is common to all disciplines. Students will learn how great thinkers have struggled with—and continue to struggle with—challenging and sometimes divisive philosophical and scientific problems in the pursuit of wisdom. Students will develop the skill of critical reasoning in many ways, including problem-solving, composing essays, and writing lab reports. In doing so, the core curriculum will encourage students to cultivate patience and intellectual humility in the search for truth.

C. As citizens of local, national, and global communities, students must be equipped for informed and constructive **civic engagement**. Students will become familiar with the US Constitution and understand the broad trajectories of national and world history alongside the development of contemporary world systems. The core curriculum will empower students to engage with current social and political issues intelligently. In addition, it will teach students to communicate effectively through various means such as open and mutually-respectful debate, discussion-based classes, essay writing, foreign language acquisition, and study abroad. These fundamental and transferable skills will require students to reevaluate their own assumptions. They will also gain a deeper understanding of and empathy for people from other societies, races, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses. In this way, students will be able to articulate and practice compassion and justice in the pursuit of peace



D. As creative beings, students have the potential to generate original artistic and literary work that will shape the world around them even as they themselves are being formed and influenced by the artistic work of others. Students require knowledge of the various ways the values of a society—whether historical or contemporary, local or international, personal or parochial—are reflected in the arts. Students will develop critical language for discussing art and literature, as well as skills for articulating their informed response to such works. The core curriculum will provide meaningful experiences with art and literature, such as the opportunity to appreciate, perform, or create works of art, theatre, music, and literature. In doing so, students will be encouraged to exercise imagination and **creativity** across all disciplines in the pursuit of beauty.

E. As spiritual beings, students are created with the ability and freedom to know God. God's nature is made known through both revealed and discovered truth. Within a community of Christian scholars, students will learn the Scriptures, history, and central beliefs and practices of the living **Christian tradition**. The core curriculum will illuminate how Christianity is an intellectually informed faith. Through this theologically informed education, students will be enabled to pursue and cultivate faith, hope, and love.



Structurally, therefore, the College of Arts and Sciences will have a unified core curriculum across all degrees. Specifically,

- 1) **The core curriculum will be implemented throughout the four-year experience of Arts and Sciences students. Students will be increasingly challenged as they mature.**
- 2) **The core will not be burdensome. Students will be able to build various four year degree plans successfully around the core curriculum.**
- 3) **There will be flexibility within the core curriculum to allow students multiple ways of satisfying core requirements where appropriate. In this way, instructors and departments will have the freedom to use their talents, skills, and creativity in designing courses that fulfill requirements. Where appropriate, interdisciplinary and inter-department courses will be created to address the complex ways humans engage each other and the world.**

In short, to become a mature and integrated human being, as described above, is a daunting and complex challenge. It is a life-long process; it requires immense courage, commitment, and vulnerability. As indicated above, the Arts and Sciences core curriculum not only invites women and men into this task, it provides manifold resources—the knowledge, skills, and virtues—necessary to its fulfillment. No one course, department, or discipline can sufficiently equip students to begin this journey. Together, the entire College of Arts & Sciences shares the gifts and responsibilities of this task.

III. Institutional Affirmations of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision

This vision of a core curriculum outlined above is ambitious, and commitments from instructors and administrators are required in order to achieve it.

The instructors engaged in teaching the Arts and Sciences core curriculum will be committed to teaching undergraduates as a central aspect of their vocation. The core curriculum will be taught by instructors across all ranks, and it is imperative that they be given adequate support and instruction in teaching these courses. This section outlines the responsibilities and duties envisioned for core curriculum instructors and the administrators to support this important work.

A. Instructor Responsibilities

1. *Expertise*: Core courses will be taught by instructors who have expertise in their respective fields and are trained in the modes of analysis and problem solving unique to their specific discipline.
2. *Engaging with and inspiring students*: Core courses will be taught by instructors with a passion for their subject and a joy for teaching. They will seek to engage with students from all majors and demonstrate the importance and relevance of their course content to perennial human concerns.

3. *Depth and breadth of perspective:* Core courses will be taught by instructors who have a knowledge of the intricacies of their own field and also how it interrelates with other fields. They will be able to convey the significance of their course in light of the core curriculum as a whole.
4. *Commitment to the vision for the core curriculum:* Instructors teaching core courses will recognize which objectives of the vision their specific course is addressing, and they will strive to fulfill them.

B. Administrative Responsibilities

1. *Guidance:* The College will create a Core Curriculum Advisory Committee that maintains the integrity of the core curriculum and serves as a resource for instructors. The committee may consider existing university-wide, college-wide and departmental assessments.
2. *Faculty development:* The College will have methods for evaluation of instructors teaching core courses that address the instructor's responsibilities as outlined above. Drawing also upon other resources with the university, the College will offer robust support for instructors at all levels to convey the specific objectives of the vision and ensure that these objectives are pursued in the classroom or laboratory. The College will foster a broad interdisciplinary conversation between instructors to explore the various aspects of the vision and how each instructor's course fits in the context of the entire vision.
3. *Support:* The Dean, Divisional Deans, Department Chairs, and Undergraduate Program Directors will support and encourage excellent teaching for all ranks of instructors. Administrators will recognize, develop, and reward engaging teachers who impact undergraduates through teaching core courses.

C. Review Procedures

The core curriculum for all degrees offered by the College of Arts and Sciences will be evaluated when appropriate, at least once every ten to fifteen years by a committee of Arts and Sciences faculty members appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This review will evaluate the size and content of the core curriculum in light of this vision statement. Following this review, the committee will make recommendations for revisions of the core curriculum to the Arts and Sciences Council of Chairs.

Approved
Council of Chairs, College of Arts and Sciences
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