

Recommendations to the Core Planning Committee

Breadth Small Group

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The charge to our group stems from the general principle stated in the Core Proposal document:

Breadth through distribution: A liberal arts curriculum asks students to pursue a full array of studies. The new Core should include as its foundation a distribution requirement. The exact size is to be determined, but it should include courses across all four divisions: Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. And it should include: Ethics, second language, abstract reasoning and problem solving. Distribution should also be consistent with the Undergraduate Learning Goals and Outcomes.

Currently, the USD undergraduate Core program follows a traditional distributive model, a broad sampling of the curriculum that targets the knowledge content of the various disciplines. Increasingly, liberal arts colleges, including many in the USD peer group, are constructing more intentional approaches to the Core experience, directed by learning goals and outcomes, and emphasizing multidisciplinary integration and skill acquisition rather than discipline-centered content.

Our working group, tasked with exploring options for the treatment of breadth in the Core, examined approaches taken by a broad spectrum of colleges and universities across the nation, reviewed the results of the USD Core Survey administered in Fall, 2011, and conducted an open forum (Oct. 16, 2012) to solicit current feedback from the university community. At the open forum we posed the questions: "What is/should be the goal of Breadth in the Core?" and "Considering our Undergraduate Learning Goals and Outcomes, as well as your answer above (the previous question), how would you organize the curriculum to achieve Breadth?" The Core structures of three different institutions were provided at the open forum to stimulate the discussion (Appendix 1). After deliberating on the results of our research and the open forum discussions, the breadth group has generated the following observations and recommendations.

1. There seems to be consensus among faculty that the breadth of the Core should promote exposure of the student to a diversity of ideas, and to encourage them to take courses they wouldn't have chosen otherwise.

Breadth should encourage development of “habits of mind” in a liberal arts context.

2. The faculty members who have participated in the Open Forum, or who have otherwise weighed in on the matter, seem comfortable with a structure of breadth requirements that is not discipline-based.

What would then guide the organization of breadth requirements in the Core?

3. In developing a core curriculum that seeks to meet specific learning goals and outcomes, it makes sense to organize and group courses with these goals and outcomes in mind. This approach takes the spotlight from divisions, disciplines, and content and puts it on the skills and capacities we hope students will develop. By meeting the USD Undergraduate Learning Goals and Outcomes (G&Os), we will be achieving the breadth we envision.
 - a. Organizing the curriculum into goal-based groups can lead to innovative, but not unexpected groups. Different institutions have found distinctive ways to group courses and achieve breadth. We include a comparison of three programs (presented in our open forum), ranging from a rather traditional, distributive Core (Holy Cross) to a non-discipline-based, smaller Core (Stanford University) in Appendix 1.
 - b. Each category or group of courses that is created can itself have a set of G&Os. Courses from any discipline can be included in this group if they meet this set of G&Os. Refer to Appendix 2 for an example of one such group from Stanford University, including its learning outcomes and examples of the disciplines from which its courses might be drawn.
 - c. By their nature, learning goals and outcomes are written with specific language, allowing easier measurements of success. This will facilitate future assessment of the Core, which has been designated as an essential feature of any new Core by WASC.
4. One may argue that we are just shuffling courses into new combinations that will ultimately produce the same experience for students. Why not keep our categories of Fine Arts, Social Sciences, History, etc., and simply produce sets of learning outcomes for each of these groups?
 - a. By giving a group of courses a name like “Exploring Differences,” “Creative Expression,” or “Religious Perspectives,” we are promising that concepts and skills will take precedence over content. The group and its name will create the expectation that these courses will

remove disciplines from their intellectual silos, explore connections among disciplines--ensuring that issues, traditions, or concepts are examined in a broader or novel context.

- b. Further, in creating groups of courses that are multidisciplinary across divisions, we are better embracing the liberal arts approach and encouraging integration of knowledge and perspectives. This practice is good not only for the students, but also for faculty and the university community as a whole.
5. By acknowledging that a single course can fulfill more than one G&O, and allowing double-counting in fulfilling core requirements, more breadth goals can be achieved with fewer courses. The creation of a smaller Core is considered by a majority of the faculty to be a desirable goal.
 - a. However, to avoid excessive specialization or minimization of the total core experience, there should be limits to the practice of allowing one course to count for multiple requirements.
 - b. These limits could be employed to create slightly different core requirements among departments or divisions.
6. Multidisciplinary clusters could be employed to enhance breadth because, regardless of content, they provide opportunities for creative thinking or critical thinking as well as synthesis of divergent viewpoints (Outcomes 3, 4, 12, and likely others).
7. It is likely that, in order to preserve the traditions of the USD educational experience, the Core may need to include a special group that focuses on ethics in addition to religious traditions and perspectives.
8. Likewise, basic competencies in writing, second language, and problem-solving may need to be guaranteed in the Core.

Appendix 1. Some distributive approaches used to foster breadth in the Core*

Holy Cross	Stanford**	Santa Clara**
Freshman seminar (1 yr)	Aesthetic and interpretive inquiry (2)	Critical thinking and writing (2)
Arts (1)	Social inquiry (2)	Culture and ideas (3)
Literature (1)	Scientific analysis (2)	Religion, Theology and Culture (3)
Studies in Religion (1)	Formal and quantitative reasoning (2)	Second language (3)
Philosophical studies (1)	Engaging difference (1)	Mathematics (1)
Historical studies (1)	Moral and ethical reasoning (1)	Ethics (1)
Cross-cultural studies (1)	Creative expression (1)	Civic engagement (1)
Language studies (2)		Diversity (1)
Social Science (2)		Arts (1)
Natural and Mathematical Science (2)		Natural Science (1)
		Social Science (1)
		Science, Technology, and Society (1)

*Numbers of courses in parentheses

**Quarter system

Appendix 2. Example of a non-discipline-based Core requirement, with associated learning outcomes and disciplines that could provide appropriate courses (excerpts from pp. 37-38: *The Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford University*, Jan. 2012 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University).

Social Inquiry (Integration of the Humanities and Social Sciences)

Rationale (abridged): Human beings create societies, and those societies, in turn, create them. To exercise responsible citizenship, students need to be able to think critically about societies, their own as well as others, and to recognize and analyze their distinctive forms of social economic organization, political institutions and ideologies, patterns of social differentiation and stratification, linguistic practices, and characteristic mentalities. At a still deeper level, they need tools for understanding the behaviors and propensities at the root of human sociality, as well as the complex ways in which those behaviors and propensities vary and change across space, time, and individual circumstance.

Learning outcomes: Students should:

- be able to apply the methods of research and inquiry from at least one social science discipline to the study of human experience.
- understand what makes a question about human behavior empirically tractable and significant.
- exhibit a capacity to think historically, recognizing the reciprocal relationship of social context and individual action and the reality of change over time.
- possess the capacity to critically evaluate primary and secondary source materials, and to use both to fashion explanations for social and historical phenomena.

How students might fulfill this requirement: Departments and programs such as Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, History, International Relations, and Religious Studies all offer a multitude of appropriate courses. Many, though perhaps not all, courses in departments such as Psychology and Linguistics would also be appropriate for fulfilling this requirement.