

Report of the subcommittee on Breadth in the Core

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Our Charge.

As part of the USD Core Planning Committee effort to examine and propose revisions to the USD Undergraduate Core, our subcommittee was charged with considering options for the treatment of Breadth. The feedback from two previous surveys of the faculty (Fall, 2011 and Spring, 2013) indicated clear interest in the possibility of non-discipline-based requirements to guide students through completion of the breadth element of their Core program. Other faculty survey results reveal a consensus that the current Core is too large.

What constitutes *Breadth* in this proposal?

We restrict our proposal to a subset of the classic elements of the liberal arts education, currently placed under *Horizons* in the present Core. This portion of the Core is currently satisfied by seven courses distributed by discipline: History, Literature, Fine Arts, Physical Science, Life Science, and Social Science. This grouping of Breadth requirements excludes the foundational core competencies (= *Indispensable Competencies* in the present Core), which are being examined by a separate committee. Our proposal also excludes the disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Ethics (= *Traditions* in the present Core), which are being addressed separately by the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT) committee. These elements will be combined and reconciled with our Breadth recommendations in the final Core Proposal.

Our Strategy.

We envision a treatment of breadth that is less about discipline and content and more about integration and inquiry. In a world that provides instant gratification for those looking for facts and details, we recognize that our students must become better at generating information, better at integration of disparate knowledge, better at using diverse forms of inquiry. Our investigation of leading liberal arts colleges and universities revealed many programs already employing this philosophy in their curriculum. We have settled on what has been called a "Modes of Inquiry" structure for breadth requirements. This structure recognizes the commonalities among diverse disciplines in the ways information is generated, perceived, and analyzed. Thus, courses are grouped not by discipline, but by the kind of inquiry and perspective they employ. A simple way to make our groups more inclusive and integrative is through the name: by changing nouns to adjectives--for example, Art to Artistic Inquiry--we unlock the gates between traditional categories and allow for the possibility of courses that integrate diverse content but use similar modes of inquiry.

Of the myriad ways colleges and universities have grouped their breadth requirements and the inventive names they have given them, we observed four general loci around which different groups clustered: the Arts, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Natural Sciences. If we start with these natural clusters and open up their definitions to recognize connections with other disciplines not only in content but also in mode of inquiry, the focus of the group changes and it becomes more inclusive. Moreover, we expect that more inclusive, integrative definitions of the course groupings will inspire new courses that will exemplify these connections, and existing courses will be inspired to broaden their perspective.

In recognition of the recommendations generated by the Smaller Core subcommittee of the CPC last year, we also explored reducing the number of required breadth courses to something less than seven.

The Proposed Structure.

We suggest forming four groups of courses with the following names: Historical and Literary Inquiry, Social and Behavioral Inquiry, Artistic Inquiry, and Scientific Inquiry. Students would be required to take at least one course from each group, and only two of the courses can be chosen from the same academic department (see appendix 1). We recommend a requirement of five or six course to fulfill Breadth, with the final number depending on the outcome of integration of Breadth requirements with the requirements of the Competencies, Integrations, and CIT. However, we do expect that a course will be able to simultaneously fulfill both Breadth and Diversity requirements, and there may be similar cross-counting involving Breadth and certain Competency and Integration requirements.

Ultimately, determining the fit of a course with a particular Breadth group will be decided by comparison of learning outcomes. For the present proposal, we have elected to use descriptions/rationales to convey the spirit of each group, and will leave construction of specific learning outcomes for a later stage in this process

Descriptions of the four Breadth groups

Artistic Inquiry

Artistic inquiry reveals the ways that artistic practices at once reflect and shape the society in which they are produced. Through the study of the history, theory and / or practice of one or more of the arts, students come to understand the distinct vocabularies of form and structure that produce meaning. Students deploy critical skills to delve into works of art, architecture, music, and / or theatre within their historical contexts and experiential dimensions, questioning received knowledge and presuppositions. This domain of study elucidates the ways in which the arts operate as modes of reflection

and of action—alert to the past while re-envisioning the future—from the local to the global.

One course will be required. We expect courses from the arts will make up the majority of the offerings, but the contribution by any other unit is possible.

Historical and Literary Inquiry

Historical and literary inquiry seeks to understand both the past and present by revealing the ways in which texts (written works, cultural products, artifacts, etc.) render the infinite facets of human experience across historical periods, geographical boundaries, and diverse political and social contexts. As students probe literary theory, the assumptions of periodization, and the interstices among genres, they learn to critically analyze or create original poetry, prose fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, and/or other cultural products. Students come to understand the formal features of a text, deploy techniques in close reading, and interpret primary and secondary sources. Through the in-depth study of history and historiography, students develop the capacity to examine truth claims and think historically as they recognize the reciprocal relationship of social context and individual action.

One course will be required. We expect courses from the humanities will make up the majority of the offerings, but the contribution by any other unit is possible.

Social and Behavioral Inquiry

Social and behavioral inquiry examines how and why individuals and societies develop, evolve, and function. This inquiry probes the mechanisms and dynamic processes that shape who we are and what we can become. Students think systematically about humans, societies, organizations and their interactions. Within the framework of theoretical and methodological perspectives, they evaluate evidence and apply their understanding to the real world.

One course will be required. We expect courses from the social sciences will make up the majority of the offerings, but the contribution by any other unit is possible.

Scientific Inquiry

Scientific inquiry employs science to generate new knowledge about the world and employs engineering and technology to apply this knowledge. The impact of science and engineering on our daily lives is enormous and ever growing, necessitating an informed citizenry. Scientific and technical literacy is gained through guided inquiry that includes hands-on opportunities to formulate hypotheses, conduct experiments, analyze data, and interpret results. Students are expected to develop scientific models, create algorithms, or engineer solutions. These activities will allow them to understand better how science, engineering, and technology are used to identify and solve complex problems that face society in the 21st century.

One course with lab will be required; any additional courses chosen from this group need not include a lab. We expect courses from the sciences, engineering, and computer science will make up the majority of the offerings, but the contribution by any other unit is possible.

Additional advantages of this model.

1. By using groups based on “modes of inquiry,” we simultaneously foster breadth and integration, hopefully causing both students and faculty to spend more time considering commonalities and connections among disciplines.
2. There is an overt incentive to develop interdisciplinary courses, and explore options for team-teaching or co-teaching courses.
3. By requiring fewer courses, more students will be able to consider a minor.
4. By allowing two courses from one department, we encourage students to consider minors.
5. The names of the groups are familiar, not strange, vague, or faddish.

Possible challenges.

1. Uncertainty regarding which group a course belongs (careful writing and scrutiny of the learning outcomes of the groups and the courses will be necessary).
2. Trusting that our colleagues can teach courses not suggested by the department to which they belong.

Appendix 1.

We settled on the recommendation that only two of the five or six courses could be taken from the same academic department after exploring alternatives and their consequences. In the effort to encourage students to broaden their studies, we simultaneously wanted to refrain from prescribing how much overlap the Core would have with a student's major. Majors across the Colleges and Schools currently differ in how many of their requirements can be double-counted as Core, and we did not want to intrude on the curriculum or culture of majors by standardizing this overlap (i.e., it doesn't make sense to penalize the more interdisciplinary majors for being interdisciplinary by mandating that only one of their courses could be double counted as Core). Therefore, we make no mention of the major when distributing the courses required for breadth. Likewise, in adhering to the philosophy of grouping courses by Modes of Inquiry rather than by department or division, we also avoided limiting the number of courses taken from a particular Inquiry group, even if it allowed students more overlap with the major and less distance from the Inquiry group in which much of their major requirements are found. Therefore, a Business major is not dissuaded from pursuing an Anthropology minor simply because most of the Core courses also counting for the major and minor will be taken from the Social Inquiry breadth group.

In the end, we felt that the most important element of the breadth requirement was to require all of the four Inquiry groups to be represented, and to allow some incentive for developing concentrations of coursework outside of a student's major. Any further stipulations simply seemed too prescriptive or did not make sense.