The Renewal of the Core Curriculum

Revised May 10, 2021
1 Core Curriculum Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundations</th>
<th>Historical Consciousness</th>
<th>The Philosophy of Nature and the Human Person</th>
<th>Faith, Reason, Revelation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Humanities in Western Civilization</td>
<td>Literature: Classical Tradition</td>
<td>Literature: Middle Ages &amp; Renaissance</td>
<td>Literature: Modern World &amp; American Expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Order and Unity of the World</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Metaphysics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life of the mind above reason</td>
<td>Scripture and Salvation History</td>
<td>The Church and our Final End</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** The Proposed Structure of the Core

2 The Core Curriculum

The Core Curriculum is the beating heart of a UST education. Over the course of 45 credit hours (or smaller focused pathways in the case of high credit transfer) the student cultivates the foundations of the life of the mind, according to the best the classical liberal arts tradition has to offer. In their journey through the core, students will come to understand themselves as free and intellectual beings, hone their intellectual skills in reasoning, persuasion, and more, and cultivate the beginnings of wisdom via a holistic perspective on the individual disciplines they study.

The core is presented as four interconnected sequences, each of which emphasizes a particular one of the three core goals: self-knowledge, intellectual skills, and wisdom—without excluding either of the other two. (For a more detailed account of the goals of the renewed core, see

---

1 Note: The structure described here is provisional. At the time of writing, only the first four courses have received preliminary approval from the Curriculum Committee.
section 3.) These sequences, for the most part, are arranged in a recommended, rather than a required, order, but they are expected to have been completed by a particular phase of the student’s education: the first sequence by the end of the first year at UST, the second two sequences by the end of the third year, and the final sequence by the end of the fourth year.

What follows are brief descriptions of the individual course sequences in their currently proposed form. These descriptions, like the grid of courses above, are provisional, and subject to change as the core renewal is implemented. Each of the first four courses receives a more detailed description in its own section later in this document (see section 4).

The expectation is that students will experience symmetries along multiple axes of inquiry and connections arcing across more than one sequence. The two intermediate sequences of the core culminate in courses that reflect respectively on the active and contemplative lives.

2.1 Foundations of Liberal Learning

The student begins with Foundations of Liberal Learning: an introduction to liberal education via the liberal arts of language—grammar, logic and rhetoric. Presuming no prior knowledge of these topics, it imparts to students the skills of logical thinking and persuasion they will need to thrive in their further studies and to develop as persons. Brief selections from authors such as Josef Pieper serve to introduce the classical intellectual tradition—both pre-Christian and Christian.

2.2 Philosophy of Nature and the Human Person

In close concert with the course on liberal learning, students undertake Philosophy of Nature and the Human Person: an exploration of the nature of the human person as a sensate, intelligent, and free being, in order that knowledge of the self and of its capacity for transcendence may provide a foundation for their pursuit of wisdom in the core. At the same time, they are introduced to the insights of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, so foundational for the Catholic intellectual tradition. Readings focus on selections from Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas’ Treatise on Man.
2.3 Historical Consciousness

Integral to students’ formation is a sense of their own and other’s histories, and the development of clear-sighted judgment in the light historical evidence can provide. For the Catholic tradition, the person flourishes in community, and awareness of this truth serves as a source of historical consciousness extending from the present to reflection on the past. Readings of primary sources vary according to the judgment of the professor. Christopher Dawson’s work provides a fundamental inspiration.

2.4 Faith, Reason, and Revelation

Recommended at the end of the foundational sequence of the core, Faith, Reason, and Revelation introduces students to the possibility and reasonableness of theological reflection, the historical veracity of revelation, and the openness of the human person to transcendent reality, in whose light the deepest questions and desires of the human heart begin to find meaningful answers. Readings include Dei Verbum and other seminal works of the modern Magisterium.

2.5 Subsequent Sequences

Following upon the foundational sequence taken by all students (including transfers), students embark upon a sequence in the humanities in order to form their imagination, broaden their moral experience, and hone their skills in reading, interpretation, persuasion, and practical reasoning. They undertake a slightly shorter sequence (which may be reduced for transfer students) on the order and unity in the world, enabling them to develop their skills in mathematical and empirical reasoning and to pursue and wonder at knowledge for its own sake. The final sequence aims for the coherence of the whole in the light of a holistic vision of the order of things and students’ own purpose, as disclosed by divine revelation.
3 Core Goals

1. To form in students an understanding of themselves as human persons endowed with intellectual and imaginative capacities and free will, so that they are empowered to pursue wisdom and to cultivate virtues, in which their humanity is fulfilled.

2. To cultivate intellectual skills that shape the life of the mind across multiple disciplines and enable a person to grow intellectually into the best version of himself or herself. Such skills take many forms. They could, for example, include, without being limited to, the ability to read and interpret, to draw conclusions from principles or data, to formulate accurate definitions, or to persuade others without manipulation or deceit.

3. To develop in students a reflective, philosophical habit of mind from the perspective of which the truths of all disciplines, of faith and of reason, can begin to be grasped as an ordered whole unified by underlying principles. This manifests itself in a healthy curiosity and a reverent wonder for truth in all its forms and in a keen interest in the underlying causes of things.

3.1 Commentary on the Goals

The goal of self-knowledge: that is, forming in students an understanding of themselves as endowed with intellectual, imaginative, and volitive capacities, appears first on the list because students need first to be aware that they have a life of the mind to live in order to be able to live it. One needs a sense of one’s own interiority and selfhood in order to set straight at the outset certain misconceptions about everything else one does in cultivating the life of the mind. One such misconception in particular is that we are in the end no different from the animals. More positively, such knowledge lays the foundation for understanding that there are certain distinctive intellectual skills the cultivation of which would perfect the soul. This is a goal about introducing students to their own human interiority. Coming to understand oneself in the way just described occurs in several disciplines, notably Philosophy, Literature, and History, as well as the Foundations of Liberal Learning course.

The goal of cultivating intellectual skills that transcend disciplinary boundaries is at the heart of
the core curriculum. The list given here illustrates the kinds of things that could appear in specific student learning outcomes, but does not mandate any particular one of these skills individually or collectively.

- The skill of reading and interpreting the meaning of a text, an argument, or a discourse across a variety of media
- The skill of analyzing a regular structure as a bearer of meaning and significance in a given medium whether of nature or of art
- The skill of constructing a reasonable argument, whether from data or from principles
- The skill of defining and distinguishing
- The skill of contextualizing and comparing data and texts
- The skill of persuading and leading other minds without manipulation or deceit
- The skill of harmonizing presentation and expression with the dignity or worth of the subject or occasion
- The skill of identifying and applying the procedure by which a problem may be generalized and solved

The third goal, cultivating the beginning of wisdom, is something meant to influence students beyond their experience in core classes, extending to their majors, as well as to their professional vocations and personal lives after graduation. We will look for evidence of in their work particularly as they relate one discipline to another or show that they can reflect on fundamental principles underlying their intellectual seeking.

Taken as a whole, these three goals are inclusive of all disciplines to the extent that such disciplines are studied and taught for their own sake. Moreover, even though each goal might appear more prominently in particular courses within the core, none of them is strictly limited to a particular discipline or course. As Ex Corde Ecclesiae describes it “Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of proclaiming the whole meaning of truth” (§ 4). Faithful to this spirit, the core curriculum seeks to foster a broad range of disciplines principally for the sake of truth itself rather than for the sake of their particular usefulness. It is precisely this common inspiration and awareness of one another that permits the “dialogue . . . for mutual enhancement”
3.2 Serving the UST Mission through Core Goals

The core curriculum serves the goals and fosters the values identified in the Mission Statement of the University of St. Thomas. The Mission Statement expresses our commitment to:

the Catholic intellectual tradition a tradition that (i) understands human persons as rational, imaginative, free creatures capable of fulfillment through wisdom and virtue (Goal 1), (ii) prizes the intellectual skills formed by the liberal arts that have always been foundational in Catholic universities (Goal 2), and (iii) understands all of created reality as intelligible, able to be understood through principles and causes (Goal 3);

the dialogue between faith and reason which depends upon the reflective, philosophical habit of mind our curriculum fosters (Goal 3) the Basilian core values of goodness, discipline, and knowledge, virtues through which our students’ humanity is fulfilled (Goal 1) engagement in a diverse, collaborative community as a comprehensive university, grounded in the liberal arts; the intellectual skills that our core develops (Goal 2) facilitate engagement and conversation among people of diverse backgrounds, and the unifying perspective allowing students to understand the relationship between the different parts of human knowledge (Goal 3) makes possible constructive collaboration across different disciplines; and

the unity of all knowledge insofar as the truths of all disciplines can be grasped as an ordered whole unified by underlying principles (Goal 3) forming our graduates to think critically, communicate effectively (Goal 2), succeed professionally, and lead ethically (Goal 1).
4 Preliminary Descriptions of the Pilot Courses

4.1 Foundations of Liberal Learning

Then that book altered my state of mind . . . and made my wishes and desires into something else entirely: suddenly every empty hope became worthless to me, and instead I began to long for the immortality of wisdom, with unbelievable fervor of heart.

St. Augustine, Confessions 3.4.

4.2 Description

An introduction to the liberal arts of language: grammar, logic, and rhetoric, accompanied by an explanation of liberal learning itself, its nature and importance. The course is interdisciplinary and may be taught from different disciplinary perspectives, depending on the professor.

4.3 What students can expect to get out of this course (explanation for students)

Students will develop facility in reasoning and communicating, with a focus on honing these skills for success in their subsequent studies. Students will be introduced to what a liberal arts education means, how it differs from other educational experiences, and why it is important.

4.3.1 Learning Outcomes

1. Students will understand the nature of a liberal education as the Catholic intellectual tradition understands it.
2. Students will reflect on the intellectual virtues and their place in the life of the mind, including the practices that help cultivate such virtues.
3. Students will be able to apply specific intellectual skills as they begin themselves to live the intellectual life:

- close analytical reading
- logical thinking
- persuasive writing and/or speaking.

4.3.2 Readings and Topics

The proposed textbooks for the course are Houser’s *Logic as a Liberal Art* and Crider’s *The Office of Assertion*. Students might also expect to read texts like the following:

1. Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*
3. Basil, “Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature”
4. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* Bk. 3, chapter 112

Students can expect such topics as the following:

1. liberal learning as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake
2. the intellectual virtues
3. logic, rhetoric, and grammar (primarily in exercise form)

The initial syllabus was developed by Christopher Wolfe, PhD. The course is planned for asynchronous and in-person instruction modes.
4.4 Historical Consciousness

Human history obviously unfolds in a horizontal dimension within space and time. Yet it also has a vertical dimension. It is not only we who write our history: God writes it with us.


4.5 Description

A historical perspective on European culture, society, and politics. This course aims to foster both historical consciousness and the stability and circumspection that results from an awareness of the richness and diversity of the past.

4.6 What students can expect to get out of this course (explanation for students)

Students will develop a sense of historical awareness via the study of European history and culture, brought into conversation with other cultural traditions. In so doing they will better understand themselves and come to grasp the importance of historical consciousness as an essential endowment of a free person.

4.6.1 Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of their interiority in the context of the history of the conception of human selfhood.
2. Students will discuss their own self-development in relation to their community over time.
3. Students will discuss the interplay of human free will, imagination and human agency and structural causation in key historical events.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and evaluate conflicting historical narratives, using professional standards of historical inquiry.
4.6.2 Readings and Topics

Readings depend on the discretion and expertise of the professor, but will include select primary sources from classical antiquity though the middle ages up to late modernity. Christopher Dawson’s vision provides a fundamental inspiration.

4.7 Philosophy of Nature and the Human Person

[We speak of] each man in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart. Man who in his reality has, because he is a “person”, a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own.

– St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* §14

4.8 Description

A study of many aspects of human nature: sensation, emotion, thought, will, habits, soul, and body.

4.9 What students can expect to get out of this course (explanation for students)

Students will be introduced to what makes them distinctive in comparison to irrational animals, and the reasons why this distinctiveness is important. Thus, they will come to understand themselves as persons endowed with innate dignity, freedom of choice, and the capacity for rational reflection. Self-knowledge thus serves as the foundation of the philosophical habit of mind and heart that animates their journey through their liberal education.
4.9.1 Learning Outcomes

1. Students will learn or review the basics of deductive reasoning.
2. Students will learn the doctrines of hylomorphism and nature in the Aristotelian tradition.
3. Students will learn the essence of the human person and the incorruptibility of the human soul in the Aristotelian tradition, as well as contrast the Aristotelian view of the human person with competing views, especially materialism and dualism.
4. Students will learn the powers of the human person, including the exterior and interior senses, the intellectual powers, and the appetitive powers, with an eye to the freedom of the will in the perfection of the human person.
5. Students will lay the ontological groundwork for the further study of ethics by investigating happiness and its relationship to virtue as understood in the Aristotelian tradition.

4.9.2 Readings and Topics

Selections are taken from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Treatise on Man*. The course has already been built and taught in both asynchronous online, and in-person instruction modes. Its principal developer is David Squires, PhD.

4.10 Faith, Reason, and Revelation

At the origin of our life of faith there is an encounter, unique in kind, which discloses a mystery hidden for long ages (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; Rom 16:25-26) but which is now revealed: “In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9), by which, through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature”.

St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §7
4.11 Description

An introductory course in fundamental Catholic theology, presenting the basic openness of the human person to divine revelation, the historical veracity of that revelation, and selected major theological themes in the Catholic worldview, with an eye to their coherence with one another and with the human person.

4.12 What students can expect to get out of this course (explanation for students)

Students will be introduced to what Catholic theology is, what its distinctive features and principles are, and why Catholic belief is reasonable. In so doing they will deepen their understanding of themselves as rational, free, beings, capable of affirming what is true and of freely embracing the purpose of their existence.

4.12.1 Learning Outcomes

1. Students will explain the presuppositions of rationality in the Christian world view.
2. Students will be able to define central Christian principles of nature, grace, creation, and sin.
3. Students will articulate the notion of Christian revelation, as well as modern objections.

4.12.2 Readings and Topics

Syllabus currently in development by Jon Kirwan, D.Phil. This course is planned for in-person, and online asynchronous instruction modes. Readings include seminal works of the modern magisterium.