

The Core Curriculum

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The Core Curriculum is the set of common courses required of all undergraduates and considered the necessary general education for students, irrespective of their choice in major. The communal learning--with all students encountering the same texts and issues at the same time--and the critical dialogue experienced in small seminars are the distinctive features of the Core. Begun in the early part of the 20th century, the Core Curriculum is one of the founding experiments in liberal higher education in the United States and it remains vibrant as it enters its tenth decade. Not only academically rigorous but also personally transformative for students, the Core seminar thrives on oral debate of the most difficult questions about human experience. What does it mean, and what has it meant to be an individual? What does it mean, and what has it meant to be part of a community? How is human experience relayed and how is meaning made in music and art? What do we think is, and what have we thought to be worth knowing? By what rules should we be governed? The habits of mind developed in the Core cultivate a critical and creative intellectual capacity that students employ long after college, in the pursuit and the fulfillment of meaningful lives.

It all started quietly enough. On 20 January 1919 the faculty of Columbia College resolved that “the requirement in Philosophy A and History A be replaced by a course in Contemporary Civilization.”

—Oasis of Order,
Timothy P. Cross

History of the Core →

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