

A Vision for the Concordia University Core Curriculum

**PREPARED BY THE ARTS AND
SCIENCES CORE TASK FORCE
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INTRODUCTION

The School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) established a Core Task Force to evaluate Concordia’s Core Curriculum, building on the deliberations arising from two independent entities: Concordia’s Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) and a SAS faculty-initiated exploration of the liberal arts as taught from a Christian perspective. While the faculty-initiative had suggested some weaknesses in Concordia’s Core, the University Liberal Arts Outcomes (ULAOs) proposed by the CCC clarified three major flaws in the current configuration, which pose serious obstacles to both effectiveness and assessability:

1. Core requirements are overly-distributive and lacking in integrative logic.
2. Students often obviate common courses through a variety of means (AP, CLEP, transfer credit, etc.).
3. The original intended structure and sequencing of courses are simply impractical for many students.

Thus, we decided that before we were ready to examine the ULAOs as a workable assessment tool, we needed to radically re-envision the structure of the Core itself. Building on the Arts and Sciences faculty initiative already underway to examine our understanding and application of the Liberal Arts, the committee engaged in a series of steps to sketch, in broad strokes, what a new Core Curriculum should look like (see “Committee Action Report” document, Appendix A).

In developing a vision of the University Core Curriculum to provide context to the ULAOs as developed by the University Core Curriculum Committee, the Core Task Force therefore utilized the following materials as guiding documents. These define Concordia’s mission, the institutional vision, and the requirements for outside accreditation as a university.

University Mission Statement

Concordia University is a Lutheran institution of higher education committed to developing students in mind, body, and spirit for service to Christ in the church and in the world.

The mission statement, by definition, articulates the university’s vision of its purpose, to which all programs adhere and contribute. The Core Curriculum, as a common program, bears particular responsibility for addressing this goal and providing a consistent and unifying influence across the entirety of the student population.

Mission Vision Themes

As part of the cyclical Strategic Planning process, Administration has developed a document called “The University Mission Themes,” that defines the university’s goals as well as the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure progress toward meeting them at the institutional level. As a governing document for university planning and development, any new or revised Core must meet the standards it defines and consciously be constructed to fulfill the curricular goals it outlines. (see Appendix D and E)

Core Values

Prior to the newly-developed Mission Vision Themes, the Core Values functioned as the primary set of guiding principles for the university. They defined the essence of a Concordia education as one that is Christ-Centered, focused on Truth & Integrity, academically Excellent, and grounded in Service. While these Core Values have been expanded in (and in some ways superseded by) the Mission Vision Themes, they still represent foundational values for all faculty and programs. (See Appendix F)

Requirements from the Higher Learning Commission

Criterion 3b in the report requirements for university accreditation by the Federal Higher Learning Commission addresses the nature, structure, and composition of a Core Curriculum and its assessment. The criteria it outlines require the demonstration of five central qualities:

1. The Core Curriculum must be substantially and identifiably grounded in the school’s mission, and reflect the offered programs of study.
2. The purpose, structure, and content of the Core Curriculum should reflect the university’s identity and mission, and be defined in clear intended learning outcomes.
3. The Core Curriculum needs to address analysis, communication, creative work, various modes of inquiry, and “skills adaptable to changing environments.”
4. The Core should provide students with a broad exposure to “human and cultural diversity.”
5. Scholarship, creative activity, and the discovery of knowledge should be central to the Core Curriculum, though shaped in a way that reflects the university’s mission.

See Appendix G.

The following sections, then, are meant to proceed logically from one to another. The guiding documents above provide a sense of the institutional priorities a Core Curriculum should address, as outlined in the following narrative. That narrative, in turn, defines the ideas and themes we believe should be explored in the Core, which (along with an in-depth study of core curriculum practices at peer institutions) helps us understand the structural characteristics that will make the program effective. With these ideas established, the ULAOs function integrally as a measurement tool by which to evaluate and assess the degree to which our classes meet the needs of our students and the mission of the university.

INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

Therefore let all of us, of all ranks and positions, harmonize our minds and our wills, let us join together our work and studies, and support each other by mutual duties. For just as otherwise no community can flourish or endure for long, so the civil administration and that of schools cannot be torn apart and divided without danger to the state....God will approve of this joining together, and He will favor and promote our efforts, studies and work therein, guiding it all towards the praise of His holy name and towards the increase of the Church of Jesus Christ.

—Philipp Melancthon

The Core Curriculum of Concordia University takes the four following concerns as central to a student's education. The ultimate goal is to form a distinctive identity in our graduates that they may carry the university's mission out into their families, communities, workplaces, and the world at large.

Mission

As a "Lutheran higher education community committed to helping students develop in mind, body, and spirit for service to Christ in the Church and the World," the development of "mature Christian students" forms the *raison d'être* for Concordia. The Core Curriculum functions as a primary means of fulfilling this mission. A Liberal Arts education at Concordia represents a broad course of study directed at educating the whole person by developing skills necessary for future careers and providing insights that shape Christian citizens for a global society.

Liberal Arts

The Liberal Arts are the foundation and hallmark of Lutheran education. At its heart, an education in the liberal arts (*artes liberales*, i.e., arts befitting a free person) was designed to prepare citizens for an active life of Christian public service, an invaluable goal in modern democratic society. The founders of Lutheran education urged learning in the redesigned Protestant university to cover a broad range of disciplines so that students could gain a full understanding of the world that is "genuine and useful for humankind."

Programs and Majors

The Core curriculum has a dual purpose as a constituent part of a student's college career: it is both preparatory for, and complementary to, the education students receive in major programs and areas of study. In its preparatory function, it serves to provide foundational skills, knowledge, and background on which programs can build. As complementary it gives students cultural context, modes of inquiry, and opportunities for spiritual growth that enhance the many vocations they will fill in life.

Development of the individual

Luther said, “Every occupation has its own honor before God as well as its own requirements and duties.” As part of our commitment to this ideal, the Core Curriculum’s design provides a framework for continued learning, development, and growth in a lifelong pursuit of Vocation. This reflects our understanding that all of us are called by God to labor for the common good of society and for the welfare of our neighbor as a means to accomplish His will. The Core also provides students, through a study of the liberal arts, a broad understanding of their place in the world and a substantial augmentation to major programs of study. Thus, the Core Curriculum provides a meaningful, unifying influence for all Concordia graduates.

CORE THEMES

As a program of integrative knowledge based on the priorities above, the Core Curriculum addresses common ideas and questions through the methodologies, content, and approaches of many different disciplines. Rather than focusing exclusively on a field coverage model that bases requirements on academic areas of study, the Core should take the following six themes as central to the projects of intellectual inquiry and growth among our students:

Faith

Students will explain and analyze the basic tenets of the Christian faith and will apply the Christian worldview to consider the paradox of humans as eternal souls in a mortal world. Students are encouraged to use this understanding to shape engagement with historical and contemporary issues in the world around them.

Society and Culture

Students study the human interactions that form the basis of daily life, in order to develop a sense of citizenship in a global society. This should provide context for leading meaningful lives and making significant contributions to the church and the world through individual vocation.

Human Creativity and Expression

Students learn to appreciate and comprehend the aesthetic expression of others throughout time and also explore how to express the complex aspects of human experience through a variety of media.

The Natural World

Students study the laws, language, and patterns of the natural world in order to understand their responsibility of its stewardship. To this end, they will think rationally, critically, and creatively to analyze problems and propose potential solutions.

Human Beings and Being Human

Students study the interactions among the various aspects of being human. The understanding of human health & wellness, the workings of the human body, human thought, and psychology serves as the foundation for a joyful life of service.

Communication and Language

Students will develop skills in both oral and written communication, developing knowledge of different communication/language systems, in order to employ cogent, coherent, and accurate language for both general and specialized audiences.

THE DEFINING ATTRIBUTES OF APPROACH AND STRUCTURE

There is only one thing lacking, and that is the earnest desire to train young people and to benefit and serve the world with well-bred men and women...If we miss this opportunity, we may perhaps find our hands tied later when we would gladly attend to it, and may be compelled in vain to suffer, in addition to the loss, the pangs of remorse forever.

-Martin Luther

As part of this initial study, the Core Task Force carefully examined the core curricula of approximately 25 institutions, many of which have undertaken a similar restructuring process to ours within the last decade. These schools are largely peer institutions in terms of identity, size, and program offerings, though several are also highly selective schools that represent a level of national reputation and excellence that Concordia should aspire to achieve. Based on our evaluation of what would work best with our programs and with our unique identity and mission, the committee identified five attributes that should define Concordia's approach to, and construction of, a new university core.

Integration with Faith and Mission

The Core Curriculum builds on the tradition of Christian liberal arts education as a primary means of fulfilling the university's mission. As such, the Core should be a broad curriculum that lays a foundation for students to serve Christ in the Church and in the world by educating them in the Lutheran Christian worldview, developing cultural awareness, and fostering habits of mind necessary for responsible citizenship and stewardship.

Unity and Flexibility

Some courses will be required of all students to achieve a common experience and vision. At the same time, within many areas of the Core students will have options for fulfilling requirements based on interests and major programs of study. Accommodations will be made for transfer students without compromising Concordia's mission.

Logical Sequencing

Rather than an unrelated collection of courses, the Core Curriculum should promote sustained, directed thinking over each student's college career. Courses will be sequenced not only to promote continuity and development within a liberal arts framework, but also to support and enhance student programs and majors.

A Unified, Meaningful Freshman Experience

In order to promote the university community and shape the engagement, attitudes, and habits of mind common to a Concordia education grounded in the Lutheran tradition and approach to learning, students will have an introduction to these ideas sometime in their first two semesters. An equivalent experience is equally important, and will thus be provided, for transfer and non-traditional students. The Core Curriculum will include courses to meet these students' needs.

Interdisciplinary Content and Courses

The Core Curriculum will contain courses that bridge traditional disciplines and areas of study. These courses would not be organized around requirements in particular areas of study, but around major themes and ideas that can be addressed from many perspectives.

UNIVERSITY LIBERAL ARTS OUTCOMES (ULAOS)

The University Liberal Arts Outcomes represent a substantial effort undertaken by the Concordia Core Curriculum Committee over the course of three semesters, FA14 through FA15. This standing committee, made up of representatives from each of the schools at the university, collaborated to create a set of learning outcomes by which we could measure the effectiveness of an ideal Core Curriculum. The CTF believes that this is a very strong document and has presented it here with only minor modifications. The ULAO's have been reorganized to reflect a logical progression from the broadest, mission-focused ideas to the most specific, concrete skills. In doing so, the CTF thought it necessary to add one additional ULAO, "Worldview Proficiencies," as a sort of bridge between "Christian Faith" and "Global Citizenship."

University Liberal Arts Outcome 1: Christian Faith

The student will explain and analyze the basic tenets of the Christian faith and will apply the Christian worldview and Christian doctrines to current situations (personal, professional and societal) and to historical problems and situations.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 1a. demonstrate accurate knowledge of Bible content and the centrality of Christ to its meaning;
- 1b. classify biblical teachings into a coherent body of Christian doctrine;
- 1c. apply biblical teachings to contemporary and historical situations ;
- 1d. analyze problems and moral dilemmas using evidence gathered from Christian doctrine and practice;
- 1e. articulate a biblical theology of the body, including the dignity of human life, the place of human sexuality, and godly ways of disciplining the body;
- 1f. demonstrate a biblical understanding of human nature in relationship to the Gospel.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 2: Worldview Proficiency

The student will be able to identify a variety of major worldviews (e.g. materialism, Eastern mysticism, idealism, deism and postmodernism) and evaluate their congruence (or lack thereof) with a Christian understanding of the world.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 2a. develop the ability to identify and correctly categorize a variety of important worldviews;
- 2b. use conceptual analysis and logic to understand the major claims and implications of these worldviews;
- 2c. effectively compare and contrast these worldviews with an informed Christian understanding of the world;
- 2d. gather evidence and construct logical arguments for or against various worldviews;
- 2e. know how a thoughtful Christian can defend his or her faith against rival worldviews.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 3: Service and Global Citizenship

Students will demonstrate proficiency in local and global citizenship, including evaluation of what constitutes citizenship and a description of how various societies have organized and identified themselves across time and space.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 3a. describe historical and contemporary political and economic systems, in the United States and abroad;
- 3b. identify and describe social and cultural constructs of different peoples around the world, both past and present;
- 3c. demonstrate stewardship by identifying a political, economic, humanitarian, environmental, bio-ethical or public health challenge in a particular geographical area or across countries and cultures; describe the challenge based upon evidence compiled

through research; and articulate a position, solution or action plan to address that challenge;

- 3d.** Apply cultural understanding and demonstrate civic participation domestically or abroad in public affairs, the community, or in a service-learning project, and use either a spoken or written narrative to identify personal faith-based insights and values gained.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 4: Integrated Disciplinary Knowledge

Students will consolidate learning from different core fields to discover and explore concepts and questions that bridge these areas of learning. Core fields of study include the natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, history, languages, theology, health and human performance, and the visual and performing arts.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 4a.** study the human condition through the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences;
- 4b.** use discipline-specific methods of inquiry and debate;
- 4c.** identify and describe sound knowledge of human health and wellness (mental, physical and spiritual) that includes service to others;
- 4d.** articulate an understanding of the aesthetic qualities in human creative endeavors and in God's creation.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 5: Critical Thinking/Creative Problem Solving

Students will think rationally, critically, and creatively to research and analyze a problem, and to propose potential solutions.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 5a.** identify and frame a problem or question in selected academic disciplines;

- 5b. distinguish among ideas, concepts, theories or practical approaches to the problem or question;
- 5c. describe ethical considerations present in a problem or issue and show how Christian principles or worldview help to inform solutions and decision making;
- 5d. demonstrate creativity in evaluating and analyzing problems relevant to society;
- 5e. use technological and scientific tools critical for success in the workplace.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 6: Communicative Fluency

The student will communicate effectively.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 6a. develop and present cogent, coherent, and accurate writing for general and specialized audiences;
- 6b. communicate effectively to general and specialized audiences by listening actively and responding constructively;
- 6c. prepare and deliver structured oral presentations;
- 6d. negotiate an action plan for a practical task and communicate the results of the negotiation effectively and accurately, both orally and in writing;
- 6e. describe, both orally and in writing, how existing knowledge or practice is advanced, tested and revised in each core field studied.

University Liberal Arts Outcome 7: Analytical Fluency

Students will develop, use and interpret meaningful patterns in data, whether in the form of natural language texts/speech, qualitative information or quantitative data or formulae.

Core Proficiencies

The student will:

- 7a.** accurately carry out qualitative and quantitative analysis appropriate to specific academic disciplines;
- 7b.** explain how both calculations and symbolic operations are used in the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, computational sciences, and mathematics;
- 7c.** effectively utilize qualitative and quantitative information;
- 7d.** analyze, identify, and interpret meaningful patterns either in qualitative, conceptual, or quantitative information, using tools such as linguistic, logical, algorithmic, mathematical, empirical, or statistical reasoning and argumentation.

INTERSECTION OF THE CORE THEMES AND ULAOs

The following table indicates how the University Liberal Arts Outcomes could function effectively as an assessment tool for a Core Curriculum organized around the proposed Core Themes.

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Faith | ULAO 1 Christian Faith |
| Society and Culture | ULAO 2 Worldview Proficiency ULAO 3 Global Citizenship |
| Communication and Language | ULAO 6 Communication |

| | ULAO 2 Worldview Proficiency | ULAO 4 Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge | ULAO 5 Critical Thinking | ULAO 7 Analytical Fluency |
|----------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| The Natural World | | 4a, 4b | 5a-e | 7a-d |
| Creative Expression | 2a, 2c | 4d | 5a-e | 7a-d |
| Human Beings/ Being Human | 2a-c | 4a, 4b, 4c | 5a-e | 7a-d |