Why We Have A Core

Union University provides excellent liberal arts based undergraduate education; the foundation for this education is the core curriculum. The core curriculum provides our students with the opportunity to gain foundational knowledge across the range of scholarship and experience, become skilled in the acquisition and application of that knowledge, and develop a love of virtuous thinking and living. The core provides a common grounding in the knowledge, skills, and virtues which we believe all Union graduates should possess while providing a foundation for specialization in majors and minors as well as careers and lives of constructive learning. This document does not prescribe any particular selection of core courses. Rather, it establishes the goals of the core curriculum as a whole. Specific goals mentioned below can be actively pursued in many, if not all, courses in the core curriculum. We intend that connections between disciplines will be made overtly in the classroom and discussed by faculty and students alike. At all stages of our students’ education, the Union faculty is intent upon academic excellence for ourselves and for our students.

God’s creativity and governance shape all of life, make all knowledge possible, and unify the academic disciplines. In light of this, we want our students to know God and to develop a maturing awareness, understanding, and appreciation of God. We want them to acquire broad biblical knowledge and detailed knowledge of portions of the Scriptures. We want them to learn the essential doctrines that have guided historic Christianity and we desire that our students exercise the gifts and skills of living in the knowledge of God.

Union students need to know and love God's creation: anything physical and metaphysical which is distinct from God. They need to know about the inanimate from the subatomic to the cosmic, and about life, from its simplest to its most complex forms. Interactions between inanimate and animate are important to learn, as are the abstract concepts that have guided the study of the cosmos. They should understand how scientific views have changed, be skilled in scientific methodologies, and know their advantages and limitations. They should also understand and appreciate things we can not touch, such as logic, numbers, goodness and evil, beauty and ugliness. Guided by Christian ideals, students should know how our understanding of creation can be used to improve life, alleviate suffering, and inspire beauty.

Union students need to know and love the human realm of creation. We want our students to understand (and wonder at) the physical, spiritual, and imaginative nature of humanity—in themselves, in others, in communities, and in cultures past and present. It is important for them to know the great ideas that have shaped how we live and think and to contemplate the creativity and self-reflection that so distinguish people from the rest of creation. We want them to see models of excellence in others that they may seek excellence for themselves. They need skills associated with human interaction. Finally, in all our studies of humanity, we want our students to be guided by Christian conceptions of human identity and purpose and to imitate Christ in service to others.

Throughout these academic pursuits and built into core courses, we want our students to develop a Christ-like character. The core curriculum at Union not only challenges students to know and to be skilled, it also challenges students to perceive and pursue virtue in their studies, social experiences, and in all areas of life. Knowledge and skill need guidance; that guidance comes from cultivated and practiced virtue. There are many ways to nurture Christian character;
we will encourage students in the pursuit of the virtues presented in Scripture and in the Western tradition, such as the Beatitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, and the seven classic virtues.

The purpose of the core curriculum is to establish a common foundation of knowledge, skill, and virtue. These are valuable in their own right and also serve as a base for formal studies and life-long learning. The core challenges students to appreciate all legitimate human endeavors as Godly calling and to discover such calling in their own lives. It provides opportunity for understanding, action, and faith to dwell together. The core provides the intellectual underpinning for engaging with the ideas of history and the issues of our day. The productive unity of the core will be found in the minds and actions of the faculty and students who work to see humankind, nature, and God together in as much of their extraordinary complexity as we can master. We intend that the core and additional formal studies bring to life the age-old belief that all truth is God’s truth.

Approved by the Union University Faculty, May 6, 2002