



The University of Texas at Austin

UT Austin Core Curriculum Task Force Report

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Introduction

The Core Curriculum Task Force was formed in the fall of 2025 and asked to conduct a review of The University of Texas at Austin's core curriculum and recommend changes. The last review and update of UT Austin's core was in 2004. Because it had been more than twenty years since the last review, President Davis and Provost Inboden asked our task force to undertake a thorough reconsideration of UT Austin's core requirements. Our mandate was to rethink the core in a comprehensive way. In keeping with that mandate, we have outlined a new version of the core curriculum that we think would be worthy of UT Austin as one of the nation's leading public universities. The core curriculum is a critical starting point for UT Austin students. It should prepare them for their advanced studies and provide a common experience that integrates them into the vibrant intellectual community of the University. It should also help them grow into informed, thoughtful, and responsible members of society.

The Current Core

The current core curriculum consists of ten component areas in which students must earn core credits through courses passed at UT Austin or another university, or through advanced placement or dual credit. The ten component areas are:

- First-Year Signature Course: 3 credits selected from seminar-style or large-format Signature Courses, each on a different topic
- Communication: 6 credits, including 3 credits of rhetoric and writing taught in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing and 3 credits selected from hundreds of courses taught in many departments
- Humanities: 3 credits selected from one of three literature survey courses taught by the Department of English
- American and Texas Government: one 3-credit survey course in American and Texas government and 3 additional credits selected from one of several courses that focus on U.S. politics
- U.S. History: 6 credits selected from 29 courses offered by the Department of History and other departments
- Social and Behavioral Sciences: 3 credits chosen from courses offered by 23 departments across multiple colleges
- Mathematics: 3 credits selected from courses offered by 10 departments across multiple colleges
- Natural Science and Technology, Part I: 6 credits selected from courses offered by 14 departments, primarily in the College of Natural Sciences
- Natural Sciences and Technology, Part II: an additional 3 credits selected from the Natural Sciences and Technology, Part I list or from 8 courses offered in the Cockrell School of Engineering or the Department of Computer Science
- Visual and Performing Arts: 3 credits selected from courses offered by 17 departments across multiple colleges

Why is Change Needed?

The central problem with the current system is that it is a core curriculum in name but not in fact. Rather than a genuine core curriculum that provides a coherent general education, the current system is a vast distribution requirement that includes more than 600 courses, many of which are on topics that are quite narrow. Highly specialized courses have an important place in UT Austin's curriculum, but not as parts of its core. Student leaders reported to us that students do not see a clear rationale behind the current system, and thus they experience the core more as a set of random boxes to be checked than as something tied together by a vision of what educated human beings should know. Because there are so many core courses to choose from, students are not given a sense of the uniting purposes of the core, and they tend to choose courses for reasons of convenience, idiosyncratic interest, and ease. The current system has an advantage for instructors because it gives them wide latitude in constructing and teaching courses closely tied to their research interests. But that advantage has come at the cost of the proliferation of narrow courses that do not provide students with a broad education that can complement and guide their more specialized studies.

The core has expanded over time at UT Austin, as it has at many other universities. At UT Austin, this is primarily because there has not been a sufficiently rigorous insistence that courses in the core be not only excellent courses but true *core* courses on fundamental themes and questions. As one of the most respected public universities in the country, UT Austin has an opportunity to lead the way and become a model for other universities by designing a core in the true sense—that is, a rigorous and cohesive curriculum based on what students most need to learn in their first years of college. It is not easy to construct a genuine core curriculum at a large university with over 44,000 undergraduates, but UT Austin can and should rise to the challenge.

In addition to the difficulty of scale, UT Austin faces a new challenge that all universities confront: preparing students to thrive as artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies change the landscape of education and the workplace. The emergence of technologies that have a direct impact on cognitive work is creating exciting new possibilities, but it is also disrupting established practices and endangering precious aspects of higher education. UT Austin needs to think seriously and creatively on many fronts, including in designing a new core curriculum, about how to handle this challenge well. For instance, students need to know how to interact with AI technologies effectively and how to evaluate their use by others; students must be “AI literate.” But they should also know the limits of AI technologies and should not be overly dependent on them. Courses should help students develop capacities—such as the capacities for deep reading, independent reflection, skillful writing, and civil discussion—threatened by AI's proliferation. These capacities will make them wiser and better users of AI and other emergent technologies.

Guiding Principles

Our work has been guided by four principles:

1. *The interests of the students should be paramount.* We have taken a student-centered approach, keeping the question of what is best for the students at the center of our discussions, even when that meant contemplating changes that would disrupt expectations and practices that have developed under the current system.

2. *The core should be structured by realms of study and modes of inquiry.* Students will develop important skills and valuable habits of mind through a well-designed core curriculum, and we describe those skills and habits below. But the core should be given its shape by substantive considerations of what students most need to know and the modes of inquiry with which they should be familiar.
3. *Core courses should be about fundamental questions and themes.* The purpose of a core is to provide a broad education for non-specialists, giving students a foundation for their further studies in the rest of the curriculum. Students will pursue more specialized and preprofessional work in their schools and majors.
4. *The core should prepare students both for further study and for life.* The core curriculum should prepare students for their more advanced studies at UT Austin. It should also prepare them for well-lived lives as thoughtful citizens, well-educated human beings, and capable members of the workforce with the adaptability they will need in an evolving economy.

Our Process

In the fall of 2025, the Office of Academic Affairs in the Provost's Office charged our task force with reviewing UT Austin's core curriculum. In keeping with the spirit of the Commission of 125 (2002-2004), which aimed to find ways to more fully achieve UT Austin's 1876 constitutional mandate to be "a university of the first class," we were asked to evaluate the current core curriculum and to offer recommendations for a new one that can provide a better general education for all UT Austin students.

We began meeting in November. Our first five meetings were general discussions of guiding principles, the strengths and weaknesses of the current core, and possible new models. We then divided our weekly meetings between meetings of the whole task force, in which we continued to discuss broad questions germane to the entire core, and meetings of two subcommittees, one focused on the arts, humanities, and social sciences, the other on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). At various points in this process, we sought the input of people outside the task force, including representatives from UT Austin's student government, deans, and other stakeholders from across campus.

The most significant input from outside our task force came at a day-long retreat on March 6, 2026. At that retreat, we were joined by Melinda Zook of Purdue University and Roosevelt Montás of Bard College, two national leaders in rethinking general education. The retreat was the culmination of the first main phase of our work, and it helped us complete a provisional sketch of a proposed new core curriculum. In the second half of the spring semester, our focus turned to questions of deliverability, structure, and the criteria by which courses should be evaluated for inclusion in the proposed new core. During this phase, we continued to hold our weekly meetings, but we also formed consultation groups that reached out to faculty members outside the task force with expertise in the fields most important to the core. The aim of those meeting was to hear from a range of voices and invite broader participation in our deliberations. Near the end of our work, two representatives from our task force also met with the President's Faculty Advisory Board and received valuable feedback on our efforts.

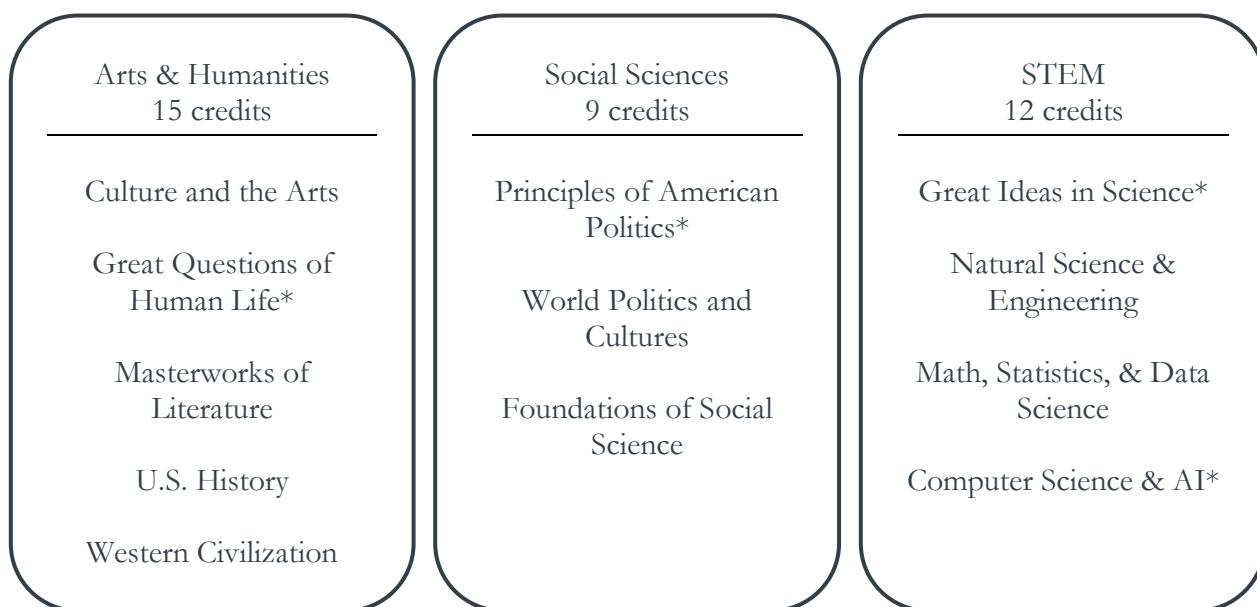
Vision for the Core Curriculum

UT Austin students will learn to wrestle with important questions about human life, society, science, and technology through a core curriculum based on foundational coursework in the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and STEM. We think that the most valuable skills and competencies are best acquired by engaging directly with the substantive bodies of knowledge and rigorous modes of inquiry that are at the heart of our university. Through an early encounter with these, students will develop their capacities for careful investigation, effective communication, and evidence-based reasoning, and they will learn how to participate in probing discussions of significant and sometimes contentious issues.

Our aim is to encourage wide latitude in discussion and inquiry, open up the most important questions of the past, present, and future, and educate students in the ways of deep reflection and civil discourse. Our hope is that students will build a foundation for learning that will extend their intellectual reach beyond any single discipline. By coming to know the different ways in which human beings attempt to understand the world, they will become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the various modes of inquiry and be able to move among them, using them to complement each other, to engage with their peers across campus, and eventually to display the intellectual flexibility called for by an ever more integrated world.

Our recommendation is to replace the existing core, with its ten component areas, with a simpler three-pillar structure (Figure 1). Each requirement listed in Figure 1 should have variants that fulfill it; we are not proposing that any requirement be met by only a single course. But to qualify for inclusion any variant should have to meet specific criteria outlined later in this report, and all courses must be genuine *core* courses, that is, broad courses on fundamental questions and themes. Faculty from all departments should be invited to develop courses for the new core, and no department should have a monopoly on any of its parts.

Figure 1: The recommended core curriculum structure consists of three pillars: arts and humanities, social sciences, and STEM. Each pillar includes requirements that are listed below the horizontal lines.



*Four of the requirements—Great Questions of Human Life, Principles of American Politics, Great Ideas in Science, and Computer Science & AI—have special places in the proposed core. Together, they reflect the spirit of the new core by offering students the chance to discuss enduring questions and great ideas, prepare themselves for thoughtful citizenship, and work with cutting-edge technology. Some of these requirements reach back to what is old; others focus on what is new. But they serve the shared purpose of helping students ponder the continuities of human experience as they confront modern challenges. We envision students who can draw from the wisdom of the past to think about their lives today, discuss a wide range of issues with nuance and civility, and use emerging technologies to seek new solutions to old problems. Because of the special role of these four requirements, students should be required to fulfill them at UT Austin.

The Three Pillars of the Proposed Core

Our task force is proposing a core structured by the pillars of the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and STEM because these are the three main spheres of intellectual endeavor, and each should be part of a well-rounded education. Students should learn about the primary ways in which human beings experience and study the world, and they should develop a set of important and intersecting capacities. The most fundamental of these capacities are for clear and rigorous thinking, effective communication in speech and in writing, and civil discussion of complex and controversial issues. Below is a sketch of how each pillar helps support the development of those capacities and others more specific to it.

Arts & Humanities

Courses in the arts and humanities give students the opportunity to wrestle with enduring questions, learn from foundational texts and artistic works, and understand the most important historical developments that have shaped the modern world.

Courses in the arts and humanities will develop students' capacities to:

- Analyze complex artistic works from multiple perspectives
- Understand how the arts convey meaning and shed light on human experience and society
- Read, interpret, and discuss foundational texts that confront the deepest questions of human existence
- Analyze complex arguments and evidence
- Express their thoughts orally and in writing on important and disputed questions with clarity and civility
- Grasp and explain crucial historical developments, especially as they have shaped modern institutions and culture
- Reflect on how to live meaningful lives in a rapidly changing world

Social Sciences

Courses in the social sciences help students understand the social behavior of human beings, the role of political, social, and economic systems in shaping the world, and the ways in which such behavior and such systems are studied.

Courses in the social sciences will develop students' capacities to:

- Grasp key concepts and methods of the social sciences as ways of studying human behavior and use them to reason about social phenomena
- Understand the fundamental structures of our political, social, and economic systems
- Appreciate the complexity of the political, social, and economic challenges facing modern societies
- Engage in civil discourse, using reliable evidence to construct sound arguments about contested issues

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

Courses in STEM help students understand the natural world and the foundations and frontiers of science and technology, use scientific and quantitative methods with facility, gain literacy in the scientific method and cutting-edge technologies, and develop habits of precise thinking that they can apply in all facets of their lives.

Courses in STEM will develop students' capacities to:

- Engage in scientific inquiry and discovery
- Explain the nature and limits of scientific investigation, including how observation, experimentation, modeling, and proof contribute to reliable knowledge amid uncertainty and error
- Interpret and evaluate data, models, experiments, and algorithms, recognizing their assumptions, limitations, and implications for explanation, prediction, and decision-making
- Communicate technical ideas clearly and responsibly
- Use insights from STEM to inform personal, professional, and civic judgments, and to better understand issues of public policy

Recommendations Regarding Teaching

A core with 12 requirements entails a wide range of methods and modes of teaching. While respecting the diversity of approaches and the need for flexibility, our task force makes three broad recommendations.

1. *The University should offer as many core courses as possible in small classes.* This recommendation pertains more to some parts of the envisioned core than to others, because extensive class participation is more important in some subjects than in others. For instance, the arts and humanities offerings, especially Great Questions of Human Life, will be best delivered in small classes that allow for seminar-style discussion among the students. The University should aim to offer as many small sections as possible as the new core is implemented and then to increase their number over time. We also recommend providing a small class option for every requirement in the core. This, too, may take time to achieve, but it is a goal worth setting.
2. *The University should prioritize in-person teaching and limit online teaching in the core.* UT Austin is a residential campus that offers primarily in-person instruction, which allows for rich, interactive

experiences that build relationships among teachers and students and among the students themselves. In-person teaching is better in almost all cases. Therefore, we recommend that proposed courses that will be held entirely online or have an extensive online component be held to a high standard in justifying those modes of delivery and that they be required to receive approval from the Provost's Office.

3. *The University should encourage as much writing as possible and provide support for writing in the core.* Writing is among the most important skills students should develop. Accordingly, we recommend that, where practical, core courses should incorporate some form of writing, on the understanding that the forms will vary by the subject matter of courses and the size of classes. The University can support writing by generously funding TA positions and other writing support for core courses.

Implementation, Administration, and Incentives

Implementing a new core will bring many challenges; our task force must leave the processes of meeting them in the hands of others. This is especially so since the State of Texas is rethinking its requirements, and UT Austin will need to adjust its plans once those new guidelines are released. But we would like to make several recommendations that are general enough to be relevant to any new version of the core.

- *Establish review committees for the main sections of the core.* We envision three such committees: one for the arts and humanities, another for the social sciences, and a third for STEM. These committees, which should be composed primarily of faculty, should determine which proposed courses are accepted for inclusion. Since processes of this kind tend to become loose and inconsistent over time, the review committees should be provided with clear criteria from which to work and empowered to maintain strict standards. The envisioned role of the review committees is described in more detail in Appendix A.
- *Incentivize faculty, departments, and schools to offer courses in the core.* There are several ways in which this could be done. Colleges, schools, and units (CSUs) could receive additional semester credit-hour-based funding for teaching core courses; faculty could be offered course development grants, research funds, or course reductions for teaching in the core; new hires, at least in some units, could be required to teach in the core; and departments could receive increased funding for their graduate students if they serve as teaching assistants for core courses. We also recommend creating new teaching awards for outstanding teaching in the core and recognizing the value of such teaching in tenure and promotion processes.
- *Consider new hiring that prioritizes teaching in the core and a post-doctoral program that contributes to teaching in the core.* To help meet the goal of offering many small classes, the University should consider creating teaching faculty positions for the core—that is, positions that are compensated at least roughly as well as tenure-track research positions but devoted to teaching primarily in the core. The University should also consider developing a post-doctoral teaching program modeled on the University of Chicago's Harper-Schmidt Program and the Preceptors of Expository Writing Program at Harvard. Such a program would involve well-paid fellowships of three or four years; the fellows would be asked to do extensive teaching in the core.

- *Incentivize students to take as many of their core courses as possible at UT Austin.* The University should think creatively about how to encourage students to take their core courses on our campus. Among the incentives the University might offer, two that should be considered are a significant tuition discount for students taking their core courses at UT Austin (to counter the financial incentives that currently exist to take them elsewhere) and a special honors designation for students who commit to taking all or a high percentage of their core courses at UT Austin. Such students might also be given priority registration privileges for core courses. In addition, we must offer enough seats in core courses so that students can readily access them. One way of helping to achieve that would be to expand summer offerings of core courses.
- *Explore ways of fostering community, common experiences, and awareness of UT Austin's extraordinary resources among the students.* In the current core, the Signature Course Program encourages students to learn early in their college careers about UT Austin's library system and the "Gems" of the University, such as the LBJ Library, the Blanton Museum, and the Ransom Center. Building on the success of that program in helping students explore UT Austin's extraordinary resources, the new core should continue to encourage that exploration. This could be done by tying various experiences to the most relevant requirements—for instance, Culture and the Arts courses could ask the students to visit the Blanton Museum or the Visual Arts Center or attend a concert or play; Computer Science & AI courses could include a component on information and library literacy; and Great Questions of Human Life courses could introduce students to UT Austin's writing resources. The University should also consider working with the University Lecture Series and the Reading Round-Up program to institute an annual lecture that all first-year students attend on a "book of the year" they all read.

The Proposed Requirements and their Criteria

Culture and the Arts

This requirement will give students the opportunity to encounter the arts as subjects of serious study. Courses will focus on the visual and performing arts as vehicles for illuminating great questions and elevating both private and public life. Because the arts engage with philosophy, history, and politics—as well as science and technology—a robust engagement with the arts will help students see the connections within human experience and the ways in which it is grasped, expressed, and transformed. Courses will also use the arts to highlight the practical uses and impacts of advancements in science and technology, and they will introduce students to the cultural riches of UT Austin and the wider Austin community.

The criteria:

- Courses should be focused on, but not necessarily limited to, the visual and performing arts, either one of them or several.
- Courses should cover large swaths of time, examining the context of cultural creation and the ways the arts shape and are shaped by important dimensions of human experience, such as historical movements, political debates, philosophic reflections, and technological changes.

- Students should be required to discuss works of art in speech and in writing, honing their skills of communication.

Great Questions of Human Life

This requirement will give students the opportunity to read great texts and discuss some of the most important questions of human life. As we envision the courses, instructors will choose works by authors on a list of great thinkers (“The Texas 40: Great Thinkers”), and each course should be based around a question or a closely related set of questions of enduring significance to human life. Because these courses should help students learn to combine reading and reflection with discussion with their peers, they should be offered as much as possible in sections of 30 students or fewer.

The list of great thinkers should be determined by a group of faculty members across the humanities. They should consult with students and other stakeholders as part of their process, and the list should be a living document that is reconsidered at regular intervals. A set of preapproved syllabuses should be developed for these courses, but instructors should also be encouraged to devise syllabuses of their own.

The criteria:

- At least two-thirds of the course content should be drawn from authors on the list of great thinkers, to be determined by the number of classes devoted to readings, not by the number of works.
- Courses should be on a single question or a closely related set of questions of enduring significance to human life.
- To develop students’ skills in oral communication, participation should be a significant part of the students’ grades if the course has 30 students or fewer.
- Courses should include works by a minimum of three authors.

Masterworks of Literature

This requirement will introduce students to major works of the literary tradition across a broad chronological span and a range of literary forms. In keeping with the aims of the proposed core and its emphasis on enduring questions and fundamental themes, Masterworks of Literature will invite students to engage with challenging texts that explore central questions of human experience while attending to the way those questions take shape in language. A central premise of the requirement is that literary form—whether in poetry, drama, or narrative prose, and in such genres as the ode, tragedy, or the novel—is not incidental but constitutive of meaning: how something is said conditions what is understood. Students will select among British, American, and World variants, each designed to provide both historical breadth and sustained attention to form as a mode of inquiry.

Whenever possible, courses should be taught in small classes that can balance analytical writing with active participation. As with Great Questions of Human Life, courses should draw from a list of 40 authors, although in this case there should be three lists, one for each variant (British, American, and World). The process of determining these lists should be similar to the process for the Great Questions of Human Life requirement, with due attention to maintaining chronological and generic range.

The criteria:

- At least two-thirds of the course content should be drawn from authors on the relevant list of authors, to be determined by the number of classes devoted to readings, not by the number of works.
- Courses should include works from each of the major eras of the type of literature to which they are devoted (American, British, or World).
- Courses should include at least one substantial text in each of the following modes: poetry, narrative prose, and drama, with “substantial texts” defined by sustained thematic, formal, and/or narrative coherence rather than by length alone.

U.S. History

U.S. History has long played an important role in UT Austin’s core, and it should continue to do so, although there should be a greater insistence on breadth in the courses. Since the envisioned core aims to help UT Austin students become not only well-educated human beings but also well-informed citizens, a knowledge of U.S. History is essential. There should be a range of courses that fulfill this requirement, differing in how they strike the balance between breadth and depth, while still striving to achieve both. Some courses should offer a broad survey of the entirety of U.S. History. Others should explore in greater depth and detail either a large portion of U.S. History or a major theme or set of themes central to it.

The criteria:

- Courses should be of broad chronological sweep, covering either the whole of U.S. History or a large portion of it (for instance, from the colonial period to the Civil War or from the Civil War to the present).
- Courses that are more thematic than panoramic should pass muster only if the themes they treat are of profound significance to U.S. History and provide a wide lens through which critical aspects of U.S. History can be seen.
- If courses are based on a theme—e.g., economic development, the expansion of rights, or the changing character of American democracy—that theme should be of broad scope, involving issues relevant to the whole country throughout much of U.S. History.

Western Civilization

This requirement will broaden and deepen students’ knowledge of the roots of Western civilization, especially of the great developments and debates that have shaped it. In the current core, students are required to take two courses in U.S. History. We think that U.S. History is best understood in a broader perspective and that, despite the difficulty of defining the West in precise terms, there are identifiable developments and debates that have given Western civilization a distinctive character and that have directly shaped the founding and identity of the United States. Western civilization has also had a profound influence throughout the world, as it has interacted in complex ways with other civilizations. As we envision them, courses that meet this requirement will focus on capacious themes, great ideas, and broad historical developments, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, the rise of modern science and industry, or the development of liberal democratic nation-states.

The criteria:

- Courses should be on broad themes, major developments, and ideas that have transformed the world in profound and lasting ways.
- Courses should cover large swaths of time—two centuries at a minimum, and in many cases much more than that.
- Although courses may use textbooks, primary texts, secondary scholarship, or a blend of all three, they should be rigorous courses that resemble neither high-school survey courses nor highly specialized courses for advanced students.

Principles of American Politics

Courses fulfilling this requirement will take up themes of enduring significance in American politics. The courses will focus on issues that have long been central to American political life, such as the character of American constitutionalism, the relationship between freedom and equality, and the scope of individual rights. Courses that provide an overview of the structure and principles of American government will meet this requirement. So will courses that focus on broad themes and questions—for instance, on the development of American democracy over time, the challenges of federalism, America’s role in the world, or the meaning and application of America’s founding principles. By helping students understand the foundations of our political system and the great debates that have shaped American political life, these courses will help students become responsible citizens who can understand and discuss complex political issues.

The criteria:

- Courses should be broad overviews of the structure and principles of American politics or explorations of fundamental themes and questions of American politics.
- Courses should focus on issues that involve the whole country, not just one region or group within it, and the issues considered should be matters of enduring importance, not of passing or only contemporary significance.
- Courses should include components that develop students’ capacity for civil discourse.

World Politics and Cultures

These courses will take students beyond the borders of the United States as they study some of the most important issues of world politics and learn about other cultures. The current core does not include a world politics and cultures requirement, but we think that should change. Globalization, the increasing interaction of different cultures, and the fragility of the post-Cold War order have made it essential for students to think about the dynamics at work in the world today. Courses meeting this requirement will help them understand different political, cultural, and economic systems and the origins of the most important global challenges. We would especially welcome courses that reach back in time and examine major developments in world history that have shaped the world today. By studying the past and present of world politics and cultural interaction, students will become more mature and thoughtful observers of the world and more responsible actors in it.

The criteria:

- Whether they focus more on politics, culture, economics, or the interaction of all three, courses should be about broad themes and issues.

- Courses should take up issues of global importance; they should not be limited to a single country.
- Courses may consider the United States in a comparative perspective, but they should be primarily about the rest of the world.
- Courses may focus primarily on contemporary issues or on major historical developments, but they should do neither to the exclusion of the other. In other words, courses that focus primarily on contemporary issues should have a historical dimension, and courses that focus primarily on historical developments should consider their role in shaping the world today.

Foundations of Social Science

This requirement will introduce students to the study of human behavior and social interaction in the social sciences. Courses fulfilling the requirement will take up questions of major importance for human life, especially in its social dimensions, and show how social scientists gather and evaluate evidence to better understand human behavior and shed light on social phenomena. In keeping with the emphasis on realms of study and modes of inquiry in the core, courses will consider how one or more of the social sciences—e.g., economics, sociology, psychology, or anthropology—understands its parameters and undertakes its research. Courses will also take up issues, problems, and challenges of major consequence for modern society, developing the capacity of students to think with rigor, clarity, and balance about difficult and often contentious issues of modern life.

The criteria:

- Courses should focus on broad, field-defining questions, important concepts, and major themes in the social sciences.
- If a course is interdisciplinary, it should include a consideration of the differences between the approaches in the various social sciences from which it draws.
- Courses should include an introduction to the modes and methods of the social sciences, but they should also be about substantive questions; they should not be pure methodology courses.
- Students should learn about the nature of the evidence used in the social sciences and the strengths and weaknesses of the ways such evidence is gathered and evaluated.
- Economics courses under this requirement should be centered around broad topics in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and/or the history of economic thought. They should also require students to apply economic reasoning to real-world issues, with an emphasis on trade-offs, opportunity cost, and the impact of economic systems on human welfare.

Great Ideas in Science

This requirement will introduce students to great ideas, discoveries, and experiments through which science and mathematics have transformed our understanding of the world. Courses will emphasize the historical development of scientific thought as well as habits of mind associated with scientific inquiry, including observation, experimentation, quantitative reasoning, and the evaluation of evidence. By looking at landmark breakthroughs in science and their foundational underpinnings, courses fulfilling this requirement will help students appreciate the beauty of science as well as its explanatory power. Students will learn about some of the puzzles science has solved, some that it is currently wrestling with, and some that may be on the horizon. Students will also learn about and

experience critical components of scientific thinking, which requires curiosity, skepticism, and openness to revision.

The criteria:

- Courses should be organized around major scientific or mathematical ideas, discoveries, or experiments.
- Content should be accessible to both STEM majors and non-majors.
- Courses should focus on connecting science with everyday life and building curiosity and lifelong interest among students rather than on technical detail.
- Courses should engage students in analyzing evidence, methods, and theories without requiring extensive technical background.

Natural Science & Engineering

Students will choose to explore one of several scientific domains in the life and the physical sciences or engineering. Courses in the life sciences will help students understand living systems and how knowledge about these systems is discovered and revised. Courses in the physical sciences and engineering will help students understand the material and technological world, including how matter, energy, and forces interact and can be modeled, predicted, and controlled. Taking courses in the natural sciences and engineering will equip students to pose scientific questions; design or analyze experiments, observational studies, models, or devices that address those questions; interpret quantitative and experimental data, recognizing the limits of inference or assessing agreement between theory and measurement; and understand how core concepts explain phenomena in the real world.

The criteria:

- Courses should focus on central concepts, methods, and questions in the life sciences, physical sciences, or engineering.
- Courses should include an empirical, modeling, or design component that engages students in aspects of biological, physical, or engineering practice, such as experimentation, fieldwork, case analysis, simulations, or engineering design.
- Courses should require students to construct, apply, or analyze mathematical, quantitative or experimental data or models.
- Courses should help students learn how knowledge of the physical or life sciences enhances understanding of common phenomena in the day-to-day world and informs real-world decision-making under conditions of uncertainty or incomplete evidence.

Math, Statistics, & Data Science

Courses in mathematics, statistics, and data science will help students evaluate and apply quantitative methods and give them tools to analyze patterns, make predictions, identify limitations deriving from data integrity or sufficiency, and draw justified conclusions from data. Taking courses in mathematics, statistics, and data science will equip students to use mathematical and statistical reasoning to formulate and solve problems involving quantity, structure, change, or chance; interpret and critique quantitative information, such as formulas, graphs, models, and statistical summaries; analyze data using appropriate methods or algorithms; visualize data; draw conclusions that acknowledge

uncertainty, assumptions, and limitations; and explain how mathematical and statistical ideas inform decisions in science, economics, public policy, and everyday life.

The criteria:

- Courses should have a central focus on developing students' proficiency with core mathematical, statistical, or data-analytic concepts and techniques appropriate to the level of the course.
- Courses should require students to solve problems or carry out analyses that involve multiple steps of quantitative reasoning.
- Courses should engage students in interpreting the results of calculations or data analyses in context.
- Courses should use mathematics as a training ground to develop critical thinking, creativity, and effective communication in everyday life.
- Courses should include at least one application that connects quantitative reasoning to real-world questions or decisions.

Computer Science & AI

Courses in computer science and AI enable students to understand how computational systems are designed, how algorithms and data drive their behavior, and how these systems are transforming knowledge, work, and daily life. Taking courses in computer science and AI will equip students to describe, at a conceptual level, how algorithms, data structures, and modern AI models process information to solve problems or make predictions; configure or critically use computational tools or AI systems to accomplish clearly defined tasks; understand how algorithmic, training, data, and design choices shape system behavior and deployment outcomes; and analyze the ethical, organizational, and societal implications of computing and AI, including issues of privacy, bias, transparency, and the impact on work and civic life.

The criteria:

- Courses should introduce students to fundamental ideas in computer science and/or AI, such as algorithms, data representation, computing hardware, machine learning, or human-computer interaction.
- Courses should provide structured opportunities for students to engage in hands-on computation or AI-related work.
- Courses should require students to reason explicitly about correctness, efficiency, reliability, and limitations of computational or AI approaches.
- Courses should address ethical, legal, or societal questions raised by computing and AI, with attention to their consequences for individuals, organizations, and communities.
- Computer science and AI courses should include a strong technical component, such as analyzing the mathematical, algorithmic, or statistical underpinnings of AI. Courses that merely prompt AI systems are not sufficient for inclusion.

Appendix A: Administration and Governance

A successful core curriculum requires clear administrative structures that safeguard its integrity over time, ensure compliance with state law, and maintain alignment with its original vision. Primary responsibility for the core curriculum should reside in the Office of Academic Affairs in the Provost's Office. That office should be charged with:

- Ensuring that the core complies with all state requirements for general education
- Maintaining the official inventory of core courses and their designations in the undergraduate catalog and course inventory
- Coordinating communication about the core with colleges, schools, and departments, as well as with the central communications and development offices
- Supporting the development, assessment, and continuous improvement of core courses

Administrative Oversight

To move toward stronger and more coherent oversight, UT Austin should treat the core as a university-level academic enterprise rather than as a loose aggregation of departmental offerings. Departments and faculty across the University should be invited to propose courses that meet clearly articulated criteria and learning outcomes, with final decisions about inclusion made at the university level.

One way to signal institutional responsibility for the core curriculum would be to create a distinct core field of study (for example, a CRE field of study) under which approved courses could be listed. Alternatively, the University could use other catalog mechanisms to distinguish core courses from standard departmental offerings while preserving appropriate connections to the faculty and their home departments.

Core Curriculum Review Committees

To realize its commitment to the core curriculum, we recommend that the Provost's Office establish standing review committees for the major sections of the core. These committees should report to the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and be composed of faculty with recognized expertise in the relevant subject areas and in pedagogy appropriate to lower-division undergraduates. Members should be drawn from multiple colleges and schools.

We propose establishing three review committees, one for each of the core pillars: arts and humanities, social sciences, and STEM. There should also be a crosscutting committee or council charged with monitoring the coherence of the core as a whole and resolving issues that span pillars. For three of the four UT-specific requirements, because they have unique challenges, we recommend establishing dedicated subcommittees of the review committees:

- A Great Questions in Human Life advisory subcommittee should consist of faculty with expertise across the humanities. This group should be charged with stewarding the list of great thinkers, reviewing course proposals, promoting the distinctive pedagogical aims of this

requirement, and proposing activities outside the classroom (such as lectures, film screenings, or museum tours).

- A Great Ideas in Science advisory subcommittee should include faculty with expertise in a range of disciplines in and outside of STEM. This requirement will provide a broad view of STEM thinking, potentially across time and disciplines. The advisory committee should be charged with creatively guiding pedagogies, course designs, and teaching models for this area.
- A Computer Science & AI advisory subcommittee should be composed of faculty with expertise in computer science, data science, and artificial intelligence, as well as experts in ethics and pedagogy. The group should be charged with overseeing course design, scaleup, and alignment with the learning outcomes for this core area.

The three review committees, their subcommittees, and the crosscutting council should have clearly defined terms of service, transparent procedures, and regular reporting obligations to the Provost's Office. Their advisory responsibilities will span three areas: course and catalog management, implementation and support, and assessment and improvement.

Course and Catalog Management

Entry into the core should be decided at the course level rather than the instructor level. Proposals should be evaluated against published criteria and rubrics that reflect the course objectives. Affiliated catalog updates and course inventory changes should be managed on a regular cycle, with clear deadlines that allow new or revised courses to enter the core in time for each catalog cycle, beginning with the 2028-2030 catalog.

The review committees should be responsible for:

- Updating and applying criteria and rubrics for selection within their areas
- Ensuring that approved courses are genuine core courses—broad courses organized around fundamental questions and themes, not narrowly specialized offerings
- Coordinating with the Office of Academic Affairs to manage catalog entries, course numbers, and any new designations (such as a CRE field of study or other designation)

Implementation & Support

Because the four UT Austin-specific, in-residence requirements will pose distinctive challenges of scale and staffing, we recommend that the Provost's Office establish a time-limited implementation team to coordinate their launch. As recommended above, the University should also consider incentives for departments and faculty to participate in the core, such as recognizing core teaching in promotion and tenure processes, providing course development funds and instructor-replacement funds where necessary, and exploring new teaching-focused positions or postdoctoral programs modeled on successful examples at peer institutions.

The core committees and implementation teams should be responsible for:

- Developing a phased implementation timeline, beginning with pilot offerings and scaling up to full coverage for all entering cohorts

- Coordinating curriculum development support, including course development grants, time buyouts where necessary, assistance with course design, and gatherings to share pedagogical ideas and foster a sense of shared mission among faculty teaching in the core
- Working with colleges and departments to identify staffing needs, including new hires, postdoctoral teaching fellows, and graduate teaching assistants, and to address administrative implications
- Planning and executing a communication rollout to students, advisors, and faculty, explaining the aims and requirements of the new core
- Overseeing the sunseting of the current core requirements, ensuring that students in transition cohorts can complete their degree requirements without disruption

Assessment & Continuous Improvement

Finally, the governance structure for the core should include a robust assessment and continuous improvement process.

Under the direction of the Provost's Office, the core committees should:

- Identify key outcomes and indicators to be measured for each requirement and pillar (e.g., student learning outcomes, enrollment patterns, class size, and student experience measures)
- Periodically review the portfolio of core courses to avoid proliferation and maintain balance across pillars and departments
- Establish a schedule for assessment (for example, staggered reviews of each requirement every five years)
- Use assessment results to make recommendations about revising learning outcomes, adjusting criteria and rubrics, removing courses that no longer meet expectations, encouraging the development of new offerings where gaps emerge, and providing professional development to address problems
- Ensure that changes to the core remain aligned with state requirements and with the overarching vision of a coherent, shared educational experience for UT Austin undergraduates

By locating responsibility for the core curriculum in the Provost's Office, engaging representative faculty committees, and instituting clear processes for selection, implementation, and assessment, UT Austin can build a governance structure that protects the core's integrity, encourages innovation, and sustains a genuinely common educational experience for its students over time.

Appendix B: The Unique Situation of the PharmD Program

The Doctorate of Pharmacy (PharmD) program in the College of Pharmacy may be uniquely impacted by the proposed new core curriculum, and special arrangements should be made to avoid causing unnecessary problems for that program.

The PharmD program confers a doctoral degree, but it resides in the University's undergraduate catalog because enrollees are not required to have a prior bachelor's degree. Most enrolling PharmD students come with a bachelor's degree and are therefore exempt from the core curriculum mandates. But PharmD students who enter the program without a bachelor's degree must complete the core curriculum before they can receive a PharmD degree. Completing the core curriculum while enrolled in the PharmD program is difficult because the PharmD curriculum combines heavy class and experiential requirements with a highly regimented course of study over the four-year program. To graduate on time, PharmD students have historically used a variety of options to complete the core curriculum—for example, taking summer courses at UT Austin or transferring credits from courses taken at community colleges.

To ensure continued student success and on-time graduation in the PharmD program, our task force recommends that the Provost's office and the Dean of the College of Pharmacy work together to assess which aspects of the new core curriculum requirements should apply to the doctoral students in the PharmD program and determine how the students should complete those requirements that apply to them. This suggested resolution recognizes that the PharmD program has a unique place in the undergraduate catalog and that senior administrators in the Provost's Office and the College of Pharmacy Dean's Office are best equipped to handle the complexities created by that situation.