



UNIVERSITY OF  
**CENTRAL  
ARKANSAS**

**UCA Core Handbook**

Prepared by:

**Dr. Jacob Held, Director of the UCA Core**

**Dr. Brandon Combs, Director of Assessment**

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose of the UCA Core.....	3
UCA Core Administrative Structure.....	5
Charge .....	5
Council Membership.....	5
Meetings .....	5
Reports To.....	5
UCA Core Curricular Structure .....	6
First Year Seminar (FYS) .....	7
Capstone Experience (Z).....	8
UCA Core Standards.....	9
Curriculum Procedures.....	17
Guidance for Departments Submitting UCA Core Proposals .....	21
Adding a course to the UCA Core.....	21
Removing a course from the UCA Core.....	21
Core Assessment Plan.....	22

Draft - Pending AAC Approval of Assessment Plan

## **Introduction**

The UCA Core is a comprehensive academic program of study designed to develop and reinforce students' knowledge and skills of critical inquiry and effective communication, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for living responsible, ethical lives in a diverse and changing world.

The overarching goal of the program is to facilitate the development of thoughtful, knowledgeable, articulate, and ethical citizens.

### **Purpose of the UCA Core**

At UCA we believe that the purpose of an education is the development of the whole student. Learning is about more than vocational or career specific training. Although it is crucial that students develop the skills necessary for the demands of the modern workplace, a comprehensive education is about something greater.

The hallmark of an educated person is the ability to engage all facets of the world through critical reflection and by integrating knowledge from a variety of disciplines. An educated person is thus prepared for the workplace AND the demands of engaged citizenship in an ever-changing world. The UCA Core reflects this expectation.

The UCA Core is UCA's approach to providing a comprehensive, liberal education to all undergraduate students. It is designed to:

- Help students develop the knowledge and skills recognized as fundamental to a broad liberal education and necessary for success in a diverse and ever-changing world.
- Develop and build knowledge and skill areas across the curriculum from introductory, lower-division courses to junior and senior level, upper-division course work.
- Apply what the student has learned in a culminating, capstone experience.
- Complement the knowledge and skills particular to any field of study or career path.

The UCA Core is a cohesive course of study carried through the student's entire undergraduate career that builds core competencies around four knowledge and skill areas:

- Critical Inquiry – The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions.
- Effective Communication – The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.
- Responsible Living – The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.
- Diversity – The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

Draft - Pending AAC Approval of Assessment Plan

## UCA Core Administrative Structure

The UCA Core is guided by the UCA Core Council.

### Charge

To review the current UCA Core program and make appropriate recommendations to the Council of Deans; to review and recommend to the Council of Deans new and revised UCA Core curricula proposed by the various departments and colleges; and to initiate and recommend policies and procedures relevant to UCA Core requirements.<sup>1</sup>

The UCA Core Council oversees the UCA Core curriculum. It is incumbent on the UCA Core Council to: 1) articulate a clear vision of the UCA Core as a cohesive program of study; 2) determine and apply rigorous standards for all courses included in the UCA Core curriculum consistent with the goals of the UCA Core; 3) oversee assessment of the program to guarantee that the goals of the UCA Core are met by the Core curriculum.

### Council Membership

- a. One department chair is elected from each of the academic colleges.
- b. Two faculty members elected from each academic college with at least one holding the rank of assistant professor or above;
- c. One faculty member elected by the University College faculty.
- d. One faculty member elected by the Schedler Honors College faculty.
- e. Two students are invited to serve as members of the council, one representing the Student Government Association and one representing Alpha Chi.
- f. The Director of UCA Core serves as chair of the Council.
- g. The associate provost as designated by the provost, university director of assessment, director of the library and the registrar are ex-officio, non-voting members.

Each council member serves three years on a rotating basis. Students serve one-year terms. The council elects its secretary each academic year.

### Meetings

X-period the first Tuesday of each month. Additional meetings as needed.

### Reports To

Provost

---

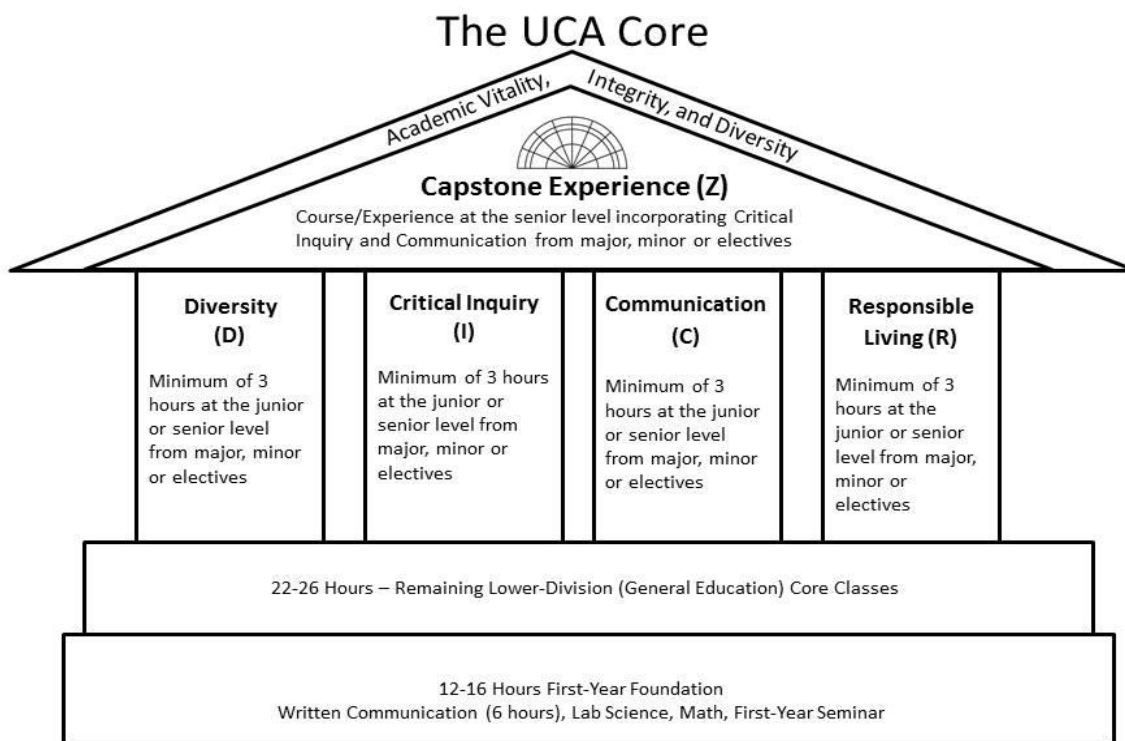
<sup>1</sup> <http://uca.edu/core/core-council/>

## UCA Core Curricular Structure

The UCA Core requires 38 credit hours at the lower-division (LD Core). These courses include the 35-credit-hour required state minimum core and one additional three-credit-hour course to satisfy the responsible living element in the UCA Core mission. The remaining 35 hours from the state minimum are distributed in the other knowledge and skills areas of critical inquiry, effective communication, and diversity.

Embedded within the lower-division is a first-year seminar (FYS). The first-year seminar comes from one of the lower-division academic courses. The purpose of the first-year seminar is to provide a small-class learning environment to facilitate engagement in academic study at the collegiate level, make a connection to the university, and reinforce the importance of communication skills.

At the upper-division (UD Core), additional courses within the four knowledge and skills areas [Critical Inquiry (I), Effective Communication (C), Diversity (D), and Responsible Living (R)] promote the development and application of knowledge and skills learned at the lower-division. In addition, a Capstone Experience (Z) provides a culminating, educational experience.



## First Year Seminar (FYS)

First-year seminar (FYS) courses provide an intimate educational experience, integrating knowledge and skills within an academic discipline with Core competencies, and connecting students to UCA. A variety of courses can be used for the first-year seminar.

FYS courses are specially designed to address Communications outcomes, including written communication and collaboration, as well as either a Critical Inquiry, Diversity, or Responsible Living outcome. In addition, FYS courses offer support for the unique needs of first-year students. Required content of the FYS includes the following:

- Written discourse, which will be assessed using the writing rubric Communication Rubric B (Written)
- Collaboration, which will be assessed using the collaboration rubric Communication Rubric C (Collaboration)
- An orientation to the UCA Core mission, purpose, and general learning outcomes, which will be integrated into the course and assessed (The assessment rubric title is FYS Rubric – Knowledge of the UCA Core)
- A focus on the basic principles of the discipline, which will allow the course to fulfill one of the Lower-division (LD) Core requirements other than communications.

Additional considerations for first-year seminars include the following:

- Class size must be small (25 students or fewer);
- Faculty must be selected by the department chair and have demonstrated an aptitude for high impact teaching;
- FYS faculty will agree to participate in more thorough assessment and additional development as it is made available (e.g. in teaching writing skills, developing collaborative assignments, etc.)

While the recommendation would be that an FYS course be taken in a student's first semester, it is expected that some students will need to take it in the second semester. Students entering UCA with more than 30 hours of credit are not required to take an FYS. However, as an introduction to college life and UCA, it is still recommended

that first time, degree seeking students enroll in an FYS course, even if they enter with 30 or more credit hours.

## **Capstone Experience (Z)**

Courses in the Upper-division (UD) Core offer opportunities for students to hone those skills developed at the Lower-division and provide summative experiences where students demonstrate how far they've come along their educational journey at UCA. Contained within the UD Core is the Capstone Experience (Z). The Capstone Experience is designed to be a culminating experience in the UCA Core, affording the student an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities in Effective Communication and Critical Inquiry. However, given its placement in the curriculum the Capstone Experience also serves as a culminating experience in the student's major, or chosen program of study.

Capstone courses should be placed intentionally at the end of the student's program of study affording her an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of disciplinary knowledge in her chosen field as well as exemplary communication and critical inquiry skills.

Capstone courses provide summative experiences in the following core competencies:

- Effective Communication Goal B (Written) AND
- Effective Communication Goal A (Oral) OR Effective Communication Goal C (Collaboration) AND
- Critical Inquiry Goal A (Inquiry and Analysis) OR Critical Inquiry Goal B (Scientific) OR Critical Inquiry Goal C (Quantitative)



## UCA Core Standards

The UCA Core is a cohesive program of study carried through the student's entire undergraduate career that builds core competencies around four knowledge and skill areas: *Critical Inquiry*, *Effective Communication*, *Responsible Living*, and *Diversity*. The goal of the UCA Core, as an educational program, is to introduce, develop, reinforce, and ultimately provide opportunities to demonstrate mastery of these competencies.

The UCA Core is designed to help students develop the knowledge and skills recognized as fundamental to a broad liberal education and necessary for success in a diverse and ever-changing world. Students develop and build knowledge and skills across the curriculum from introductory, lower-division courses to junior and senior level, upper-division course work, applying what the student has learned in a culminating, *Capstone Experience* that complements the knowledge and skills particular to their field of study.

The UCA Core is a comprehensive four-year program that introduces, develops, and reinforces core competencies. It is the charge, and the duty of the UCA Core Council to evaluate curricula and policies as they pertain to the mission of the UCA Core as an educational program.

As indicated by the charge of the UCA Core Council, the UCA Core Council in part functions as a curriculum review body whose primary duty in this regard is to review proposed undergraduate courses proposed for the UCA Core insofar as they are consistent with and exemplify the educational goals of the UCA Core. Thus, it is imperative that the goals of the UCA Core be explicitly stated, expectations for achieving these goals clearly articulated, an assessment procedure in place for verifying that these goals are being met, and an improvement plan in place for developing and implementing interventions to continually improve the UCA Core program. Below are the expectations for courses in the UCA Core as well as guidelines to assist in determining if proposed or extant courses meet these expectations.

**The Lower-Division (LD) Core** at UCA is intended to provide a foundational education in the four core competencies: Effective Communication, Critical Inquiry, Diversity, and Responsible Living. Lower-division Core courses are defined by their role in knowledge and skill acquisition. In order to be foundational experiences, these courses must introduce and develop key concepts and skills in the four competency areas. A course in the lower-division Core, as foundational, is the primary course in

which a Core competency is introduced and corresponding skills introduced and developed. The focus of the course should be primarily the development of a Core competency, irrespective of course content. Courses in the LD Core assess in order to validate that they are an optimal educational experience, but these courses are placed within the LD Core due to their content, not by the simple fact that they assess for a particular competency. In order to provide a foundational experience, these courses must be essentially designed around this competency and with an eye on the specific goal under which they are designated and the learning outcomes affiliated with that goal.

It is the UCA Core Council's responsibility to adjudicate proposed as well as extant courses in relation to their commitment to offer these foundational experiences. The question before the UCA Core Council is not whether a particular course will assess for a specific goal or set of student learning outcomes, but whether the course in question provides, in essence and when considered as a whole, an introduction to, and opportunity to develop through repeated exposure, the knowledge and skills indicated by the learning outcomes under the competency and goal under which the course is proposed to be designated.

As the UCA Core Council considers proposals to add a course to the LD Core, considerations will include: 1) Does the majority of course content in the proposed course explicitly address the outcomes of the competency and corresponding goal under which the course would be designated; 2) does the course curriculum, as a whole, address the Core competency in question. Provision of a course syllabus is crucial in determining context; 3) Is the assignment or assignments designated as assessing for the learning outcomes of the competency and goal indicated well designed. Will it adequately capture student performance in these areas?

*Effective Communication:* The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.

- At the lower-division, courses that are dedicated to Effective Communication are fundamentally oriented to teaching students about the fundamentals of communication (oral, written, collaborative) and developing these skills to a basic level of competence. This development requires the introduction of fundamental skills and concepts, repeated exposure, and frequent opportunities for feedback.

*Critical Inquiry:* The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions

- At the lower-division, courses dedicated to Critical Inquiry are oriented fundamentally to introducing students to and developing those skills necessary to engage critically (through analytic, scientific, and quantitative skills) in the pursuit of truth. This development requires the introduction of fundamental skills and concepts, repeated exposure, and frequent opportunities for feedback.

*Diversity:* The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

- At the lower-division, courses dedicated to Diversity (understanding and appreciating one's own culture, other cultures, and the way in which they influence and are influenced by creative expressions and the fine arts), expose students to and provide opportunities to engage with and develop a basic understanding and appreciation of one's own culture, other cultures and their interrelatedness, or how these ideas and perspectives are reflected in humanity's creative output. Courses in this area don't simply recognize diversity in fact, but are about educating students about a critical engagement and appreciation of diverse cultures and values. This development requires the introduction of fundamental skills and concepts, repeated exposure, and frequent opportunities for feedback.

*Responsible Living:* The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society

- At the lower-division, courses dedicated to Responsible Living (Ethics or Well-Being) are fundamentally oriented towards the introduction of basic concepts necessary for a critical engagement with ethical traditions and the world, or a deep, broad understanding of human well-being, our place in the world, and our relationships to others. These courses do not merely address these issues, but are designed to assist students in framing fundamental questions about human values, appreciating historical and present responses to these questions, and developing their own, defensible positions. This development requires the

introduction of fundamental skills and concepts, repeated exposure, and frequent opportunities for feedback.

Insofar as a course falls under one of these competencies and represents the corresponding goal, it should, considered as a whole, provide a foundational educational experience. This experience is provided through a majority of the course content being dedicated to the competencies indicated above, as well as a specific goal within that competency area and the affiliated outcomes of that goal. A course is not fundamentally dedicated to one of these areas merely because a small component or singular assignment addresses the competency above. In order to be a truly developmental experience a student's exposure to these skills must be prolonged, intensive, and repeated. Such an experience cannot be provided with a single exposure or through a singular assignment.

**First Year Seminars (FYS):** FYS courses are defined by their placement in the LD Core. FYS courses are to be introductions to the university experience providing a seminar style, intensive educational experience as well as opportunities to connect to UCA. First-Year Seminar courses provide a highly interactive, small-class learning environment for first-year students. Students work together in small groups to develop skills in teamwork and written communication as well as knowledge in one other UCA Core area (Diversity, Critical Inquiry, or Responsible Living) as it applies to the subject matter of the course. Students also learn about the importance of general education and its place at UCA. In addition, these courses offer support for the unique needs of first-year students, providing discussions about issues such as effective study skills and exam preparation as well as orientation information about the services UCA provides to support students. FYS instructors are provided with faculty development opportunities to address the unique needs of first year students. In considering whether a course will be approved as being able to be delivered as an FYS course the UCA Core Council will assess the course proposal as a whole looking specifically at how the course addresses, beyond its knowledge area (Diversity, Critical Inquiry, or Responsible Living) Effective Communication Goals B and C and the FYS knowledge outcome.

**The Upper-Division (UD) Core** at UCA provides a summative educational experience. Courses in the UD Core present opportunities for students to emphasize those skills developed at the Lower-division. Upper-Division Core courses are an opportunity to apply the skills introduced and developed at the lower-division and

demonstrate mastery. The UCA Core is not connected to any individual major or minor program, and if programs wish to offer a full complement of UD Core courses for their majors or minors they are welcome, so long as they respect the integrity of the UCA Core program, and so long as those courses exemplify the UCA Core's values. However, should a program decide, or otherwise be unable, to provide a full complement of UD Core courses within a major program, it is the responsibility of that program to develop an academic map or program of study that integrates UD Core courses from outside of that program in a pedagogically sound and efficient way to afford students an efficient path to graduation.

As the UCA Core Council evaluates courses for inclusion in the UCA Core at the Upper-division it will consider: 1) Whether the course offers ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery across all of the outcomes of the competency and goal under which it is being considered. An ample opportunity is comprised of a significant student output in an assessable, deliverable artifact or artifacts. These project(s) should represent at least 20% of course work being produced in the proposed course; 2) Provision of a course syllabus is required to demonstrate the role the assessed activity plays within the context of the course as a whole and whether it is an adequate opportunity to assess mastery of the outcomes indicated; 3) Is the assignment designated as assessing for the learning outcomes of the competency and goal indicated well designed.

*Effective Communication:* The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.

- At the upper-division, courses in Effective Communication provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of communication skills (written, oral, or collaborative) developed during lower-division course work. The experience should be designed specifically with the goal of assessing a student's communicative ability as outlined in one of the Effective Communication assessment rubrics. The creation and placement of these educational opportunities must be intentional and comprise an adequate opportunity to demonstrate mastery. Thus, the assignment must be a considerable academic engagement.

*Critical Inquiry:* The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions.

- At the upper-division, courses in Critical Inquiry provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of critical thinking skills (analytic, scientific, or quantitative) developed throughout lower-division course work. The experience should be designed specifically with the goal of assessing a student's ability as a critical inquirer as outlined in one of the Critical Inquiry assessment rubrics. The creation and placement of these educational opportunities must be intentional and comprise an adequate opportunity to demonstrate mastery. Thus, the assignment must be a considerable academic engagement.

*Diversity:* The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

- At the upper-division, courses in Diversity provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery in analyzing diverse cultural values (own, other, or in creative works) in the contexts in which they occur. Whereas at the lower-division students were introduced to this ability and provided opportunities to develop a capacity in analysis as it regards diverse values, at the upper-division students demonstrate their continued development and growth through intensive analysis. The experience should be designed specifically with the goal of assessing a student's ability as outlined in one of the Diversity assessment rubrics. The creation and placement of these educational opportunities must be intentional and comprise an adequate opportunity to demonstrate mastery. Thus, the assignment must be a considerable academic engagement.

*Responsible Living:* The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.

- At the upper-division, courses in Responsible Living provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery in the ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society. The experience should be designed specifically with the goal of assessing a student's ability as outlined in one of the Responsible Living goals. The creation and placement of

these educational opportunities must be intentional and comprise an adequate opportunity to demonstrate mastery. Thus, the assignment must be a considerable academic engagement.

**The Capstone Experience (Z):** The UD Core culminates in a Capstone Experience (Z) that integrates effective communication and critical inquiry alongside one's chosen field of study. Capstones are defined by their placement in the UCA Core. Capstones are designed to be a culminating experience in the major, affording the student an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities in effective communication and critical inquiry, alongside her disciplinary knowledge. Capstones are opportunities for students to engage in an integrative educational experience drawing from their comprehensive education. As such these courses should be intentionally placed at the end of a student's program of study and provide an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of disciplinary knowledge as well as the Core competencies otherwise indicated. The same guidelines would apply to the Effective Communication and Critical Inquiry goals and outcomes covered in a Capstone course.

### **Breadth Requirements**

In order for UCA's Core to be consistent with Arkansas's state minimum core requirements, students must meet certain "breadth" requirements. At UCA this means that as students complete the LD Core they must meet the state requirements including the required 3 credits designated Fine Arts (FA), 3 credits designated Humanities (HUM) and 6 credits of Social Science (SS). At UCA students meet these as they satisfy their area requirements of the LD Core with the specific requirement that one course be selected from the Social Science category of the LD Core. In this regard, we are emphasizing the need for students to acquire a level of competency in the social sciences.

Social sciences (SS) are defined as a branch of science that deals with the institutions and functioning of human society and with the interpersonal relationships of individuals as members of society, or a science (as anthropology or social psychology) dealing with a particular phase or aspect of human society. Here, we should be diligent to make sure that students in completing their social science requirements are being afforded exemplary, paradigmatic experiences in the social sciences. This is equally true for the Fine Arts (FA) and Humanities (HUM).

With regard to the Fine Arts, we ought to remember that education in the arts is an integral part of the development of any mature adult. The Fine Arts encompass the creative arts, especially visual arts (painting, drawing), plastic arts (sculpture), and performance arts (dance, theater, music) whose products are appreciated for their aesthetic and intellectual content. Study in the arts is essential to a liberal education. The arts are a part of the cultural heritage of every citizen, and often an opportunity to be exposed to diverse cultures and ways of life. We must emphasize that the arts cannot be learned through random exposure any more than math or science can. Thus, Fine Arts courses need to be selected as exemplars of this type of focused engagement with the creative endeavors of humankind.

The Humanities are defined as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, history, and language to understand and engage the world. These modes of expression, now academic disciplines, have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall within the penumbra of the Humanities. These topics are fundamental to developing an appreciation for our place in the world, and shape how we understand ourselves and interact within our communities and the world at large. In order to provide a foundational experience within the Humanities a student must participate in a sustained engagement with a particular area, and be provided the tools to apply what has been learned to their own experiences, community, and the broader world. This cannot be achieved in passing or with random exposure, but must be the result of dedicated, focused, academic engagement within a singular discipline or focus of study.

### **Summary Statement**

The goal of the UCA Core is to provide a common, foundational educational experience to all UCA undergraduate students. The UCA Core achieves this by providing a coherent educational program oriented around four Core competencies scaffolded throughout the student's undergraduate career at UCA. This objective can only be achieved if the UCA Core Council continuously evaluates the UCA Core curriculum and assesses it for programmatic cohesion and effectiveness. It is imperative that the UCA Core Council continuously monitor and evaluate the UCA Core to assure that students are receiving the best possible educational experience that UCA can offer. The preceding guidelines are offered as the framework for maintaining integrity within the UCA Core.



## Curriculum Procedures

The UCA Core Council reviews all proposals to add courses to or remove courses from the UCA Core Curriculum. Proposals are reviewed based on course content and fitness, as well as with respect to UCA Core curricular needs.

### Guidance for Departments Submitting UCA Core Proposals

In order to offer guidance to departments seeking to add or remove courses from the lower- or upper-division Core, the UCA Core Council provides the following, brief guidelines.

**The Lower-division (LD) Core** at UCA is intended to provide a foundational education in the four core competencies: Effective Communication, Critical Inquiry, Diversity, and Responsible Living. LD Core courses are defined by their role in knowledge and skill acquisition. In order to be foundational experiences, these courses must introduce and develop key concepts and skills in the four competency areas.

Courses in the lower-division Core teach the relevant competency with explicit focus on the outcomes under the goal for which the course is being considered. The Core is a comprehensive program, not unlike a major or minor, thus to offer a course in the lower-division Core is to commit to teaching the Core curriculum.

It is the UCA Core Council's responsibility to evaluate proposed as well as extant courses in relation to their commitment to offer these foundational experiences. The question before the UCA Core Council is: Does the course in question provide an introduction to and opportunity to develop through repeated exposure and directed learning activities, the knowledge and skills indicated by the learning outcomes under the competency and goal under which the course is being considered. Here it is of pressing importance to recognize the distinction between teaching a skill and merely offering opportunities to use the skill. LD Core courses teach the knowledge and skills of their respective competencies.

As the UCA Core Council considers proposals to add a course to the LD Core, considerations will include: 1) Does the majority of course content in the proposed course explicitly address the outcomes of the competency and corresponding goal

under which the course would be designated; 2) does the course curriculum, as a whole, address the core competency in question. Provision of a detailed course syllabus indicating relevant learning opportunities as well as their placement within the course curriculum as a whole is crucial in determining context; 3) Is the assignment or assignments designated as assessing for the learning outcomes of the competency and goal indicated well designed. Will it adequately capture student performance in these areas? Thus, the Core Council does request a complete, detailed course syllabus as well as all relevant course assignments in order to adjudicate these cases.

**The Upper-division (UD) Core** at UCA provides a summative educational experience. Courses in the UD Core present opportunities for students to demonstrate those skills developed at the Lower-division, while engaging with advanced areas of discipline specific skills and knowledge.

As the UCA Core Council evaluates courses for inclusion in the UCA Core at the Upper-division it will consider: 1) Whether the course offers ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery across all of the outcomes of the competency and goal under which it is being considered. An ample opportunity is comprised of a significant student output in an assessable, deliverable artifact or artifacts. These project(s) should represent at least 20% of course work being produced in the proposed course; 2) Provision of a course syllabus is required to demonstrate the role the assessed activity plays within the context of the course as a whole and whether it is an adequate opportunity to assess mastery of the outcomes indicated; 3) Is the assignment designated as assessing for the learning outcomes of the competency and goal indicated well designed. Thus, the Core Council does request a complete, detailed course syllabus as well as all relevant course assignments in order to adjudicate these cases.

The goal of the UCA Core is to provide a common, foundational educational experience to all UCA undergraduate students. The UCA Core achieves this by providing a coherent educational program oriented around four core competencies scaffolded throughout the student's undergraduate career at UCA.

In order to insure integrity within the UCA Core, and to guarantee that students are being afforded the strong, liberal education we profess to offer, the UCA Core council will need sufficient evidence to evaluate the fitness of the proposed course for the area of the Core for which it is being proposed.

The UCA Core Council will also need sufficient evidence to evaluate potential changes to the UCA Core curriculum. Beyond academic rigor, other relevant considerations include: programmatic offerings in the LD and UD Core and general accessibility of Core courses for students to insure adequate opportunity for students to matriculate through their chosen course of study effectively.

### **Adding a course to the UCA Core**

In order to add a course to the **Lower-division (LD) Core** the petitioning program must demonstrate that the proposed course meets the standards of the potential area of the LD Core. If the program believes it can demonstrate fitness, the process for adding a course to the LD Core is as follows:

- If the course being proposed is a new course, complete Curriculum Form U1. If the course being proposed is an existing course, complete Curriculum Form U2-A. All forms may be located here: <http://uca.edu/panda/curriculum-development-process-guide/cdpg-forms/>.
- Complete and attach to U1 or U2-A, Curriculum Attachment A (Proposal to Add a Course to the UCA Core).
- If you wish to also have the course designated as a First Year Seminar (FYS) then you will also need to complete Curriculum Attachment B.
- NB: The UCA Core council will need sufficient evidence to evaluate the fitness of the proposed course as a formative experience in the competency area and for the goal(s) for which the course is being proposed. Thus, we require that proposals explicitly address each student learning outcome relevant to the competency and goal under consideration and include a detailed syllabus contextualizing the educational experiences to be offered, as well as all relevant assignments.

In order to add a course to the **Upper-division (UD) Core** the petitioning program must demonstrate that the proposed course meets the standards of the potential area of the UD Core. If the program believes it can demonstrate fitness, the process for adding a course to the UD Core is as follows:

1. If the course being proposed is a new course, complete Curriculum Form U1. If the course being proposed is an existing course, complete Curriculum Form U2-

A. All forms may be located here: <http://uca.edu/panda/curriculum-development-process-guide/cdpg-forms/>.

2. Complete and attach to U1 or U2-A, Curriculum Attachment A (Proposal to Add a Course to the UCA Core).
3. NB: The UCA Core council will need sufficient evidence to evaluate the fitness of the proposed course as a summative experience in the competency area and for the goal(s) for which the course is being proposed. Thus, we require that proposals explicitly address each student learning outcome relevant to the competency and goal under consideration and include a detailed syllabus contextualizing the educational experiences to be offered, as well as all relevant assignments.

Draft - Pending AAC Approval of Assessment Plan

## Removing a course from the UCA Core

Before removing a course from the UCA Core, the UCA Core Council must review the proposed removal to consider both programmatic needs of the UCA Core, as well as the ability of students to matriculate efficiently through all programs at UCA while meeting their LD and UD Core requirements.

In order to petition to remove a course from the LD Core:

1. Complete Curriculum Form U2-A.

In order to petition to remove a course from the UD Core:

1. Complete Curriculum Form U2-I.
2. NB: Before removing a course from the UD Core, the UCA Core Council will need to consider programmatic offerings in the UD Core competency under consideration, as well as general accessibility of alternative courses in that competency in order to insure adequate opportunity for students potentially effected to matriculate through their chosen course of study effectively. Such considerations should be addressed directly in the proposal to remove a course from the UD Core.

In order to **remove the FYS designation** from a course in the LD Core:

1. Complete Curriculum Form U2-I
2. NB: Before removing the FYS designation from a course in the LD Core the UCA Core Council will need to consider first-year student needs and the demand for courses designated FYS in order to insure that student needs are being met.

# UCA Core Assessment Plan

## UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN

### **Basic Information**

Program Name: UCA Core

College: N/A

Department: N/A

Program Level (check all that apply)

- Associate's
- Bachelor's
- Undergraduate Certificate
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Graduate Certificate
- Undergraduate

Date Plan Submitted: (TBD)

Director of the UCA Core & email: Dr. Jacob M. Held; [jmhheld@uca.edu](mailto:jmhheld@uca.edu)

Director of Assessment & email: Dr. Brandon Combs; [bcombs@uca.edu](mailto:bcombs@uca.edu)

### **1. Introduction**

The UCA Core is a comprehensive academic program of study designed to develop and reinforce students' knowledge and skills of critical inquiry and effective communication, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for living responsible, ethical lives in a diverse and changing world.

The overarching goal of the program is to facilitate the development of thoughtful, knowledgeable, articulate, and ethical citizens.

At UCA we believe that the purpose of an education is the development of the whole student. Learning is about more than vocational or career-specific training. Although it is crucial that students develop the skills necessary for the demands of the modern workplace, a comprehensive education is about something greater.

The hallmark of an educated person is the ability to engage all facets of the world through critical reflection and by integrating knowledge from a variety of disciplines. An educated person is thus prepared for the workplace AND the demands of engaged citizenship in an ever-changing world. The UCA Core reflects this expectation.

The UCA Core is UCA's approach to provide a comprehensive, liberal education to all undergraduate students. It is designed to:

- Help students develop the knowledge and skills recognized as fundamental to a broad liberal education and necessary for success in a diverse and ever-changing world.
- Develop and build knowledge and skill areas across the curriculum from introductory, lower-division courses to junior and senior level, upper-division course work.
- Apply what the student has learned in a culminating, capstone experience.
- Complement the knowledge and skills particular to any field of study or career path.

The UCA Core is a cohesive course of study carried through the student's entire undergraduate career that builds core competencies around four knowledge and skill areas:

- Critical Inquiry – The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions.
- Effective Communication – The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.
- Responsible Living – The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.
- Diversity – The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

## 2. Student Outcomes

- 1) Critical Inquiry: the ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions.
  - Goal A: Demonstrate a knowledge base to ask more informed questions and learn more complex concepts.
  - Goal B: Apply scientific processes to solve problems/answer questions
  - Goal C: Apply quantitative and computational processes to solve problems
- 2) Effective Communication: the ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.
  - Goal A: Students will use appropriate conventions and strategies in oral communication for various audiences and purposes.
  - Goal B: Students will use appropriate conventions and strategies in written communication for various audiences and purposes.
  - Goal C: Students will apply appropriate verbal and nonverbal strategies to promote collaboration
- 3) Diversity: the ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.
  - Goal A: Analyze one's own cultural values and assumptions.
  - Goal B: Analyze or compare diverse values, traditions, belief systems, and/or perspectives.
  - Goal C: Analyze creative works within diverse contexts.
- 4) Responsible Living: the ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.
  - Goal A: Apply ethical principles to solve problems.
  - Goal B: Make appropriate recommendations based on discipline specific knowledge to address an issue or scenario and evaluate the effect that decisions have on the well-being of self, others, society and/or environment(s).



- 5) Understanding of the UCA Core: Knowledge of the meaning and interconnections of the components and requirements of the UCA Core as well as their contribution to the student’s education as a whole.
- Goal: Demonstrates an understanding of the mission, goals, and core values of the UCA Core, how the four core competencies relate to the mission and goals, and how the structure of the UCA Core contributes to the student’s education

### 3. Assessment Cycle

Academic Year	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
Assess	RL	D	C	I	RL
Evaluate		RL	D	C	I
Training			RL	D	C
Implementation				RL	D

Assessment of the UCA Core will proceed on a 4 year cycle. Each year a single competency, with all its associated goals, will be assessed. In practice, and following the cycle outlined above, in year one (AY 16-17) we will collect data for Responsible Living (RL). All courses designated Responsible Living will be sampled for assessment data. In year two (AY 17-18) the RL data will be evaluated by an improvement team under the aegis of the UCA Core Council, as outlined below. In addition, data will be collected from all courses designated Diversity (D). In year three (AY 18-19), training/faculty development/improvement measures will be offered for all faculty who teach courses designated Responsible Living as a result of the previous year’s evaluation of the RL assessment data and the recommendations of the improvement team. In addition, the D assessment data will be evaluated by an improvement team, and all courses designated Communication (C) will be sampled for assessment data. In year 4 (AY 19-20) full implementation of all RL improvement measures will occur. Training/faculty development/improvement measures will be offered for all courses designated Diversity. The data for all courses designated Communication will be evaluated by an improvement team, and all courses designated Critical Inquiry (I) will be sampled for assessment data. The full cycle then repeats beginning in AY 20-21.

Every semester data is collected from all FYS courses on the FYS knowledge rubric.

Once a complete cycle is complete, an assessment of the UCA Core program as a whole, as well as its assessment plan will be possible. The first four year cycle provides initial data. A second four cycle allows for an assessment of the process as a whole. Thus, a full programmatic assessment is recommended every 10 years, affording the completion and evaluation of two full cycles.

#### **4. Curriculum Map**

- See attached.

#### **5. Assessment Methods and Measures (Formative and Summative recommended)**

- All faculty scheduled for UCA Core assessment in the coming academic year will be provided an online Cover Sheet via Qualtrics. This cover sheet will allow faculty to indicate the assignment(s)/artifact(s) used for assessment purposes, its place within the course curriculum, as well as the relevant context of the artifact(s).
- The Director of UCA Core will work in collaboration with the Director of Assessment to collect all student artifacts, including the minimization of logistical concerns (e.g., oral presentation recording).
- The UCA Core Council will actively recruit a scoring team for each outcome from those instructors who teach UCA Core classes within that respective outcome.
- The Scoring Teams will be trained in the Spring semester annually.
- The Office of Assessment will create a systematic random sample of student artifacts to be scored each summer.
- In the early Fall semester, the scoring team will be brought back together to norm and score the artifacts contained within the sample via an electronic scoring system.
- FYS courses will be assessed through both direct and indirect means as pertains to both the Knowledge of the UCA Core rubric as well as their overall efficacy in terms of retention and persistence. FYS courses will collect and review assessment data on the Knowledge of the UCA Core rubric and this data will be scored via an improvement team (FYS subcommittee of the UCA Core Council). In addition, survey data will be collected and evaluated through MapWorks in coordination with the Assistant Director for Retention Initiatives. Institutional Research will also provide data on student retention, GPA, and other relevant factors at the direction of the Director of Assessment.

## **6. Data Collection and Review**

- Data collected via the scoring teams will be input into AQUA. The data will then be accessible by departmental chairs and college deans, as well as the Office of Assessment to facilitate both programmatic as well as UCA Core assessment.

## **7. Participation in Assessment Process**

- Scoring teams are comprised of full time faculty. Faculty are recruited from the area(s) of the UCA Core under which they teach, and will be remunerated for their service.
- Courses that fail to comply with requests for artifacts and participation in the UCA Core assessment process will be given a warning and a semester to become compliant. Failure to comply will result in the removal of courses from the UCA Core.

## **8. Data Analysis**

- Data will be shared at the department and college via AQUA
- UCA Core improvement teams will share their reports with the UCA Core Council and thus disseminate findings to the faculty at large.
- Improvement teams will work with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTE) to develop programming aimed at developing improvement measures relevant to a particular competency and goal. Actions might include roundtable workshops, seminars, assignment design assistance, etc.
- UCA Core Council will review data and mapping to make decisions regarding programmatic and curricular structure.

## **9. What are the plans to evaluate students' post-graduate success? N/A**

## **10. What are the plans to evaluate teaching effectiveness?**

- Track improvement measures via P.A.W.S. hosted by Taskstream.
- Track participation by competency and goal through the Center for Teaching Excellence.
- In conjunction with the work of the improvement teams, course syllabi of extant UCA Core courses (LD and UD) will be audited by competency and goal for consistency with UCA Core standards and compliance with syllabi language requirements.

## 11. Appendices

- Curriculum Map
- Required Syllabus language
- UCA Core rubrics

Draft - Pending AAC Approval of Assessment Plan