A University of Chicago education is more than a set of skills, a rite of passage, or even the ability to think critically. **It is a lifelong experience**—being part of a dialogue that encourages conversation across cultures and disciplines.

The Core brings undergraduates and faculty members together in this wide-ranging conversation. Small, discussion-based classes and an emphasis on primary texts evoke the debates that have shaped the world we live in. We examine—and reexamine—questions that philosophers, psychologists, economists, biologists, writers, and social theorists have been grappling with for centuries, questions like:

- What defines the human experience?
- Are humans molded by genetics, culture, and history or by an underlying human nature?
- How should we understand rational thought? Is it independent of context?

The Core’s primary texts engage a set of shared concerns and issues, but this material evolves as faculty members reframe fundamental questions and principles across high and low cultures, in and out of Western traditions, and from the perspective of both past and present. Students may discuss Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War as a product of Greek culture but also as a lens for journalistic reporting on current events in the Middle East.

A vital tenet of the Core is that interdisciplinary collaboration can illuminate complex problems—and that this exploration is best achieved when students are well-versed in multiple disciplines.

The Core offers broad exposure to the arts and sciences so that all students gain.
> a multitude of perspectives regardless of their major. In the University of Chicago community, a budding mathematician, a biology research assistant, and a linguistics enthusiast can gather around the same table to examine a given issue or text. In the classroom, students bring their growing exposure in a multitude of fields to bear on a piece of literature, a painting, or a philosophical tract. Students enrich the communal reading of a text by using mathematical principles or laws of physical science to examine a writer’s musings on memory, for example.

Discussions that start in the classroom quickly spread to coffee shops, House Tables, and residence hall lounges, where veterans of the Core, professors, and students currently enrolled in Core courses continue to develop and share ideas. This conversational experience kindles enduring relationships between undergraduates and faculty, while the Core’s methods of inquiry help students discover passions that guide them in their academic choices.

Students complete the Core with a heightened appreciation of enduring questions and sharpened skills in close reading, analytical writing, and critical thinking. By learning how others have posed big questions, they take up the challenge to ask their own. The result is transformative: students better understand themselves, their lives, and society, all while gaining skills applicable to their academic and professional futures.

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The Core: The Building Blocks

Most Core courses come in integrated, often interdisciplinary sequences. Students choose their courses in consultation with their College advisers and faculty counselors.

1. Humanities (2–3 courses)
   Students engage with literary, historical, and philosophical texts through the Humanities Core in the first year.
   **Sample courses**
   - Greek Thought and Literature
   - Readings in World Literature
   - Human Being and Citizen
   - Reading Cultures: Collection, Travel, Exchange
   - Media Aesthetics: Image, Sound, Text
   **Sample texts**
   - Homer, *The Iliad*
   - Aristotle, *Poetics*
   - Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
   - Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)
   - Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’”

2. Social Sciences (3 courses)
   Students examine how societies are organized through the Social Sciences Core in the first or second year.
   **Sample courses**
   - Self, Culture, and Society
   - Power, Identity, and Resistance
   - Mind
   - Classics of Social and Political Thought
   - Social Science Inquiry
   **Sample texts**
   - Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
   - Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
   - Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy*
   - Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
   - Plato, *The Republic*
   - Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
### 3 Civilization (2–3 courses)
Students encounter the history, culture, and literature of an area of the world either on our campus or through one of our study abroad programs.

**Sample courses**
- History of European Civilization
- Jewish Thought and Literature
- America in World Civilization
- Jerusalem in Middle Eastern Civilizations (in Jerusalem, Israel)
- Beijing: East Asian Civilization (in Beijing, China)
- Civilization in the Western Mediterranean (in Barcelona, Spain)

### 4 Art, Music, or Drama (1–2 courses)
Students choose among courses in the theory or practice of the arts in our Art History, Music, Theater and Performance Studies, Creative Writing, or Visual Arts programs.

**Sample courses**
- Islamic Art and Architecture, 1100 to 1500
- Introduction to Western Art Music
- Visual Language
- Staging Terror

### 5 Biological Sciences (2–3 courses)
Students choose among course options that explore the process of scientific inquiry in the biological sciences.

**Sample courses**
- The Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases
- Metabolism and Exercise
- Life through a Genomic Lens
- Healthcare and the Limits of State Action

### 6 Physical Sciences (2–3 courses)
Students are exposed to scientific observation and reasoning in Core physical sciences courses.

**Sample courses**
- Foundations of Modern Physics
- The Science of Global Environmental Change
- Introduction to Astrophysics
- The Earth’s Chemical and Physical Environments

_Credit may be granted through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or placement exams._

### 7 Mathematics (1–2 courses)
Students develop skills in formal reasoning and logic in mathematics courses.

**Sample courses**
- Calculus
- Elementary Statistics
- Multimedia Programming as an Interdisciplinary Art
- Honors Introduction to Computer Science

_Credit may be granted through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or placement exams._

### 8 Foreign Language
Students are expected to demonstrate language skills equivalent to one year of college study.

**Among the many languages offered are**
- American Sign Language
- Arabic
- Chinese
- Portuguese
- Urdu

_Credit may be granted through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or placement exams._

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“**The Core is premised in part on the conviction that there are key critical skills necessary not only to prepare you to master a discipline once you’ve decided which one you’d like to take up, but also to give you the capacity to view your chosen discipline from a point a little bit outside of its claims and justifications. This ‘outsider perspective’ is important because to believe in the incomparable power of a disciplinary methodology is to take ideas quite seriously. (And if there’s anything that defines the University of Chicago, it is taking ideas seriously.) To take one’s ideas seriously is to believe that they will produce good results when applied to the world.”**

**Kenneth W. Warren**
Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor in English Language & Literature; Committees on African & African American Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities, and History of Culture, and the College
The Core Experience.
How does the Core work? What do students gain from it? Below is a narrative of one student’s academic career.

1st year

AUTUMN QUARTER
- Readings in World Literature
  - Italian 101
    My family speaks a dialect of Italian, but they never taught it to me, so I started from the beginning! Ciao, mi chiamo Marcella.
  - Calculus 131

WINTER QUARTER
- Metabolism and Exercise
  Such a cool class! I recently ran into my old professor—over two years since I had him—and he not only remembered me but stopped to talk and wanted to know how everything was going in my life.
- Readings in World Literature
  - Italian 102
  - Calculus 132

SPRING QUARTER
- Metabolism and Nutrition
- Readings in World Literature
  This was a great chance to dive into books I might never have picked up otherwise.
- Reading the Suburbs
  We approached classic 20th century American literature with an eye to the role that place and space play in shaping the American experience.
- Core Course

2nd year

AUTUMN QUARTER
- From the Annals of Wales to Monty Python and the Holy Grail: King Arthur in Legend and History
- Italian 201
- Self, Culture, and Society
  We studied great thinkers from Durkheim to Freud. The class progresses from a discussion on the social theories of economics, to one on the lived experiences of culture, to one on the concepts of self and psychology. I really enjoyed conversations with my classmates on issues of class, identity, and even magic!

WINTER QUARTER
- Italian 202
- Chemistry and the Atmosphere
- Self, Culture, and Society
- Shakespeare I: Histories and Comedies

SPRING QUARTER
- Theories of Media
- Lines of Transmission: Comics and Autobiography
- Global Warming
  I really didn’t know much about the science behind global warming until I took this class.
- Self, Culture, and Society

3rd year

AUTUMN QUARTER
- (STUDIED ABROAD)
- Advanced Italian in Rome
- Rome: Antiquity to Baroque
  Ho amato l’Italia! We studied in Italy for 10 weeks—we were based in Rome, but also traveled to other parts of Italy for field trips. I walked past the Pantheon every day on my way to Italian class! We maintained the discussion-based class structure from UChicago, but had those discussions on-site at the landmarks we were studying.

WINTER QUARTER
- Documentary for Radio
- Academic and Professional Writing
  - The American Novel, 1880–1920
  - Drama: Embodiment and Transformation

SPRING QUARTER
- Haunted Spaces, Suspect Cases: American Gothic, 1900–1960
- Italian 211
- Strategy
- Summer Internship: Fox News Chicago Investigative Unit

4th year

AUTUMN QUARTER
- Documentary Video
  I’m interested in broadcast journalism, so this class is definitely geared toward my career aspirations.
- Beginning Screenwriting
- History and Theory of Drama
- Theater and Performance Studies BA Colloquium

WINTER QUARTER
- Introduction to Poetry
- History and Theory of Drama 2
  The professor is wonderful! I’d heard he’s one of the greatest Shakespeare scholars alive, and after taking his class I definitely believe it.
- Theater and Performance Studies BA Colloquium
  The projects in our colloquium (about 15 fourth-years) were all so different—but in the end we realized that they were all somehow connected. That, to me, is the Core in a nutshell.
- Reading as a Writer: Chicago Genres “City on the Remake”

SPRING QUARTER
- Acting Workshop
- Writing the Graphic Novel
  We explored texts and film from hieroglyphics to Hitchcock and learned about writing graphic novels as a business.
- Form as Content: The Arts of Reading Fiction