



Campus-Wide Core Curriculum at CU Boulder

The possibility of a campus-wide core curriculum was a key issue raised during Academic Futures discussions. While many would like to see a campus-wide core, others point to the difficulty in designing and delivering such a core. Campus-wide core, which valued and gave permission for student exploration, could be used to unify undergrad students. Many students come in already tracked into "STEM" and "not STEM". Campus-wide core, if authentically designed around values of citizenship and core skills, could be used as a way to create campus community with traditions and legacy, not only discipline-based cohorts.

Current State: We are unusual in the state and in the country in not having a common core. However, an analysis indicates that there is not as great a difference between the general education requirements of the various schools and colleges as one might assume. It was pointed out that this in part arises from the fact that the state sets certain curricular requirements. All the schools and colleges have writing and mathematics requirements, along with some set of social science, natural science, and arts and humanities requirements. Some have a diversity requirement. Arts and Sciences has the largest core.

A number of concerns and possibilities were raised:

- **Subjects that people thought should be addressed in a campus core included: writing and communication, mathematics, digital and information literacy, U.S History/civics, computing and critical thinking.**
- **We need to consider different kinds of cores, from distribution requirements to a model where all students take the same set of classes.**
- **Core courses can be arbitrary, depending on which faculty sit on the curriculum committee when. Because the curriculum committee is faculty only, and therefore content-driven, the core doesn't reflect the connection to student skill needs and values of exploration**
- **Right now, core classes are generally simply the entry-level courses for each major. There is not an overarching design that creates community, embeds values, and establishes norms**
- **Many colleges are very limited, structurally, in what students can take and when (e.g., CMCI, ENVD, A&S, CEAS).**
- **Lack of permeability across colleges leads to duplication of courses (e.g. Herbst) without a duplication of the research-based community of practice. Colleges 'grow their own,' rather than take advantage of what's already**





there -- even when we're having trouble filling classes in the original home departments.

- The “tyranny of domain content” that demands that students take a great number of courses in a particular department works against the idea of a core or general education.
- Need depth as well as breadth, so don’t discount majors.
- We need to avoid “ghettoizing” a core which is taught only by contingent faculty.

Key Areas for Consideration:

- Definition of the kind of core we want/need.
 - We could define campus-wide core themes, for example, sustainability. This would include financial sustainability, human sustainability (equity, justice), environmental sustainability, etc.
 - We would need to look at defining core experiences to go along with a core curriculum – these would likely need to be different in the various schools and departments.
- The core should consider what we want our students to be and where they want to go. We need to focus on what students need to know, not just where we are going to put students.
 - Example: Many students do not write well, more emphasis should be put on developing writing skills. This does not have to be the same for each major, but would be focused on writing skills needed within their major, finding synergy between academic and career skills.
- Delivery of the core is a key.
- A core should provide common traditions and experiences.
- A core should make it easier for students to transfer between schools and colleges.

A common core should include common skills (e.g. writing), common themes (e.g. sustainability, global citizenry), and common experiences (to build confidence and “grit”).

What might success look like? Campus input indicates that a campus-wide core could improve the education of our students and provide a clear definition of what education at CU Boulder means.

- A shared sense of what the students of the future need to learn and know.
- A common set of traditions and experiences.
- A clear idea of whom a core serves—students? Employers? Society?

White Papers submitted to Academic Futures in this area





Academic Futures

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

- Herman, *Enhancing Students' Experience in On-Campus Jobs: Improved Career-Readiness for Post-Graduation Employment*
- Graf and Wuttke, *Undergraduate Research and Inclusive Excellence: A Strategic Combination*
- Murray, *Addressing Math Preparedness, Pathways, and Placement for Undergraduate Students*
- Mark, *The Case for Increased Emphasis on Internships at CU Boulder*
- Corwin, et al, *Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experiences: Advancing CU Boulder's Strategic Goals*
- Braider, *The Idea of Our University*
 - *The Idea of Our University II: Making it Real*
 - *Making a Campus Core*
 - *What the Humanities Do, and How They Could Do It Better*
- CMCI: *Media communication literacy: A campus imperative*
- Guinn-Chipman, et al, *Re-Imagining Teaching and Learning through Material Culture*
- Severy: *The Case for Career Development Core Coursework*
- Gerland, *Story Lab: A White Paper for the Academic Futures Committee*
- Ackerman: *An Academic Future for Writing Across the Curriculum*
- Desai et al. *Advancing engaged learning through dialogue practice at CU Boulder*

