Extreme Make-Over: Transformation of the Core Curriculum of Southampton College, Long Island University

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Structure of the New Core Curriculum

The key components of the new core are the Freshman Experience (Global Lecture and Seminar and Writing Seminar), a prescribed number of interdisciplinary and linked integrated courses that focus on eight "essential literacies," Foundations of Modern Thought I and II, an experiential education component, and a capstone course. Following is a short description of each of these components.

- **The Freshman Experience (Global Lecture and Seminar and Writing Seminar)** 6 credits

  The Global Lecture and Seminar consists of a once weekly lecture with an additional two hours of associated discussion seminar in smaller breakout groups. The focus of the course is on the demands of world citizenship in the 21st century. Central themes include, but are not limited, to such global concerns as environmental sustainability, globalization, multiculturalism, and advocacy. Faculty participating in the lecture series and seminar are from diverse disciplines. The theme may be repeated, or may vary widely from year to year. This fall, the topic is water (more specifically water in our own backyard: Peconic Estuary), and the effects of nitrogen on the quality of this body of water. The course examines this topic through four different perspectives (hydrology, ecology, economics, politics) and through group assignments and projects offers students ways of integrating and reconciling these perspectives

  All students in the Global Lecture and Seminar also take a writing seminar. Regular writing assignments are designed to reinforce students' grasp of the material and introduce them to the fundamentals of rhetorical analysis and formal essay writing. Reading and writing assignments reflect, but do not duplicate, topics of lead lectures and discussions.

- **Interdisciplinary and Linked Integrated Courses**

  Interdisciplinary Courses combine the distinctive knowledge, methodology, and perspective of two or more disciplines in the academic treatment of a topic or problem. The course should facilitate such interaction among disciplines that students integrate the disparate fields of study in their singular treatment of the topic. The content of the course must fall within the context of the liberal arts and science focus of the college.

  Integrated Courses are sets of two coordinated courses in which at least two distinct disciplines focus on a common theme, topic, or problem. Students are necessarily enrolled in both parts of the linked course during the same semester. These linked courses are taught by faculty from different areas of study. The link between the courses should serve to integrate the skills and concepts associated with disparate fields of study in the singular treatment of a topic or problem. The content of these courses must fall within the context of the liberal arts and science focus of the college.

  Students are required to take three interdisciplinary courses (3-4 credits each) and two sets of linked integrated courses (6-7 credits each set). Courses that include a laboratory in science or art go to an additional credit.

  The curriculum for each of the interdisciplinary and integrated courses must focus on at least one of eight "essential literacies." They are aesthetic, critical analysis, cultural analysis, environmental, ethical action and citizenship, quantitative reasoning, scientific and verbal. Students make their choice of courses in this group not on course distribution, but on the essential literacies covered in that course. Students must satisfy all eight.

- **Foundations of Modern Thought I and II** (6 credits)

  Foundations of Modern Thought I (3 credits)
  The first part of a two-part chronological course taught by faculty of diverse academic backgrounds in the sciences and arts. Students study the foundations of knowledge in science, the arts, the social sciences, and humanities from diverse cultural perspectives. This course covers works from the beginning of civilization through the sixteenth century. Prerequisite: Sophomore status.

  Foundations of Modern Thought II (3 credits)
  The second part of a two-part chronological course taught by faculty of diverse academic backgrounds in the sciences and arts. Students study the foundations of knowledge in science, the arts, the social sciences, and humanities from diverse cultural perspectives. This course covers work from the seventeenth century up to modern times. Prerequisite: Foundations of Modern Thought I.

- **Experiential Education Component** (6 credits)

  Experiential learning places the student in a context beyond formal classrooms and provides the opportunity for personal growth by enabling participants to engage in independent research in laboratory or natural settings not available on campus, to learn first-hand about diverse cultural and social settings around the world, and to translate their developing beliefs and values into action. Students are required to participate in six credits of approved experiential education courses. Each student will propose one or more experiential education experiences under faculty advisement, and these proposals will outline the student's goals and expectations relative to the core curriculum. Students may satisfy the Experiential Education Component at any point after they have successfully completed thirty credits.

- **Capstone Course** (3 credits)
  The capstone course is offered to seniors as a culmination of the core curriculum experience. The course allows the student to reflect on the skills and literacies acquired during his or her college career. Students share their academic experience with peers through the lens of their respective programs in a meaningful fashion such as the presentation of a project or comprehensive portfolio. The capstone course completes the cycle that began with the freshman group lecture and serves as an assessment of the core experience. The capstone course augments the interdisciplinary mode of the core. Sections are open to students of any major. The instructor determines the appropriate pedagogy and content in each section.

Student Progress Through the Core

The Freshman Year: 12 credits minimum

1. All freshmen are required to take the Freshman Experience: Global Lecture and Seminar and Writing Seminar (6 credits) in the fall semester.
2. In addition, freshmen must take a minimum of 6 additional credits, either as one offering of linked integrated courses (6 credits) or two offerings of interdisciplinary courses (3 credits each).
3. The Writing Proficiency Requirement (0 credits).

The Sophomore Year: 12 credits minimum

4. Depending on the courses taken in the freshman year, sophomore students will typically take one set of integrated courses and two sections of interdisciplinary courses, or a combination of these two requirements.
5. Students taking Foundations of Modern Thought I (3 credits) must be of sophomore status, must have successfully completed the Global Lecture & Seminar and Writing Seminar, and must have passed the English proficiency exam.

Sophomore & Junior Years

6. After the successful completion of Foundations of Modern Thought I, students will take Foundations of Modern Thought II.
7. Students may complete core requirements in the integrated courses and interdisciplinary courses during their junior and senior years.
8. Students may satisfy the Experiential Education Component (6 credits) at any point after they have successfully completed thirty credits.

Senior Year

9. The Capstone Course

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PHILOSOPHY OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

At its best, education is both informative and transformative. It imparts not only knowledge and skills but character and a sense of purpose. It is a preparation both for a livelihood and for a life worth living. A good education develops the critical and practical capacities necessary for students to succeed in the diverse and evolving cultures that constitute our world as well as nurturing in them an appreciation of the natural and aesthetic truths that unite the human experience.

Recognizing the myriad functions of higher education, Southampton College has created a unique interdisciplinary core curriculum designed to provide our undergraduates with a cohesive 42-47 credit set of courses. A carefully coordinated set of interdisciplinary and linked courses from varied disciplines encourages students to integrate ideas, to develop meaningful conceptions of what the world is and where we belong within it, and to appreciate the complexity of the issues we face in our daily lives and in the broader world. This approach provides not only a broad perspective but also a context to reflect on the strengths and limitations of the disciplines themselves that we use to understand and interpret the world. Our students learn to question assumptions and to think for themselves, to create their own understandings, perspectives and judgments.

The process of intellectual growth and discovery is both personal and social. It requires the full engagement of each student and offers multiple opportunities for dialogue. The core provides a common foundation for students to explore ideas together. In this context, cohorts share common courses and participate in learning as a communal activity. These groups give students invaluable peer support and a socially vital ground for the testing of ideas.

We subscribe to Ralph Waldo Emerson' notion that learning is doing. We believe students must develop the skills necessary to translate what they think to what they do. Our emphasis on education as a social responsibility extends beyond the classroom and encourages students to seek opportunities for community service. The core requires active participation in local and global communities that make up our world, whether they be comprised of scientists or baymen, teachers or business leaders, authors or artists.

Central to the core is its primary focus on essential literacies. They form the bedrock of our approach to liberal education. The essential literacies described below are the fundamental qualities of mind and character necessary for graduates to guide their own continued development over the course of a full life. Our goal is that every student will come to appreciate the multiplicity of literacies that can be brought to bear to understand our world, each other, and ourselves.

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ESSENTIAL LITERACIES

Aesthetic literacy refers to the ability to appreciate the unique possibilities for human experience presented through the arts, to understand the role of the arts in the evolution and/or preservation of culture, and the capacity to encounter the natural world with a sense of its mystery and beauty.

Critical analysis allows students to discern underlying assumptions, lines of reasoning, consistent and inconsistent patterns in argument, helping them to arrive at sound conclusions in the analysis of written, oral, and artistic expression.

Cultural analysis embraces awareness from a global, local, and historical perspective of cultures in time and place, as well as the role of self, society, and human behavior in the life of cultures, allowing students to analyze, evaluate, and reflect upon cultural assumptions, beliefs, values, customs and religious traditions.

Environmental literacy requires an understanding of basic ecological facts and theories in a way that integrates natural sciences, social sciences, the arts, and humanities, and develops an awareness that dependence on the natural world is a fundamental condition of human life and that the natural world is also a source of inspiration, creativity, and connection to life.

Ethical action and citizenship embraces an awareness of the choices and responsibilities facing citizens in contemporary society, their historical and cultural context, and the means by which ethical and social issues are resolved in responsible and intelligent action, preparing students to use this awareness and knowledge to participate ethically and intelligently as citizens in today's world.

Quantitative reasoning allows students to draw inferences from data; interpret formulas, graphs, tables, and schematics; draw conclusions from them; estimate results; make reasonable, testable guesses; pose problems in testable ways; and use arithmetical, algebraic, geometric, and statistical methods to solve those problems within the context of the real world.

Scientific literacy encompasses an understanding of the processes that define science, such as observation, testing, discrimination between coincidence and cause and effect, the establishment of general laws and the skeptical evaluation of claims to truth; the attitudes and dispositions that undergird scientific inquiry; the relative value of scientific theory in light of other modes of human understanding; and the significance of scientific discoveries to culture and society.

Verbal literacy refers to the ability to interpret and critically reflect upon written and oral information as well as artfully to generate clear, cogent and well-organized ideas in writing and through speech.