



The University of Texas at San Antonio™



CORE REFRESH WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

May 8, 2023

Undergraduate Studies | Academic Affairs

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Introduction

The Core Refresh Working Group was established in Fall 2022 by Undergraduate Studies, a division of Academic Affairs, to provide recommendations related to refreshing the Core Curriculum to the Core Curriculum Committee. The scope of this Working Group is preliminary, in that the focus is thinking about visionary improvements to the Core, with other groups being formed later to focus on logistics and implementation. These recommendations could be implemented iteratively and in alignment with Catalog cycles, with more straightforward adjustments being prioritized for the next cycle. More complex changes would occur during later iterations, which allows for greater planning and implementation time, as well as more time to communicate changes to the University community for broad dissemination and concurrence.

The rest of this report details the Working Group charge, membership, and structure and suggests some possible next steps, followed by seven broad recommendations.

Working Group Charge

Institutions of higher education bear the responsibility to ensure that all students have a clear pathway through their chosen programs of study, of which the Core Curriculum is the foundation. Embracing UTSA's identity as an HSI, the main purpose of this Working Group will be to review our Core Curriculum to ensure UTSA, to the fullest extent possible, is utilizing the Core Curriculum to serve and support our students. The goal of the Core Refresh Working Group will be to review UTSA's existing Core Curriculum, along with data related to UTSA's degree pathways and the Core Curriculum requirements at other public universities in Texas; then the Working Group will develop a series of recommendations for refining the Core Curriculum at UTSA.

Working Group Membership

To solicit varied input, Undergraduate Studies recruited members from the following areas:

- Faculty from all Colleges, with an emphasis on representatives who teach Core courses
- Faculty Senators
- HTI Leadership Council
- Office of Inclusive Excellence
- Academic Innovation
- Student Success
- Student Affairs
- UTS
- Institutional Research
- SGA and PSAC student representatives

The full list of members appears on pages 3 and 4 of this report.

Structure and Focus Areas

The Working Group had its first meeting in October 2022 and identified three subgroups and self-selected subgroup membership.

The three subgroups and respective focus areas included:

- **Current Core Effectiveness & Operational Considerations:** This subgroup will assess data (available through the systems introduced during Meeting 1) related to the effectiveness of the current Core and Core objectives and provide recommendations for improvement. This group may also want to consider whether including upper-division courses in the Core would be beneficial.
- **Core Identity and Theme:** This group will continue the initial conversation the full-group will have during Meeting 2 surrounding a central Core theme, identity, or philosophy and will recommend an approach.
- **Career and Experiential Connections:** This group will consider how to incorporate marketable career and experiential learning opportunities into the Core Curriculum and make recommendations. This group will also consider how the Core can be used to create a sense of belonging at UTSA.

Meetings alternated between subgroup and full-group meetings. Subgroups discussed their focus area in detail, and each reported out to the wider group during full-group meetings for input and to discover cross-group synergies and potential recommendations.

Next Steps and Implementation

Recommendations are preliminary and visionary in their nature. The next steps include having University leadership and the Core Curriculum committee review this report and determine the recommendations they want to implement. From there, the Core Curriculum committee can determine which recommendations are within their scope to implement and which will require additional stakeholder involvement to plan and implement.

This report provides Structure and Governance suggestions for each recommendation. Central to each of these is the suggestion to amend the Core Curriculum Committee bylaws to create several standing subgroups with different focus areas: Core Identity; Core Theme; Core UD Tier 2; and Core Effectiveness and Substitution Process. This Working Group envisions that members from this group can be incorporated into the proposed subgroups, as well as additional stakeholders that will be needed as the focus evolves from the overarching, vision-based recommendations contained in this report to

more concrete implementation. These groups can be formed during Spring and Summer 2023 so they can begin working in AY 23–24.

Given the nature of these next steps, it follows that recommendations could be implemented iteratively. The simpler and more straightforward recommendations could be prioritized for the next Catalog cycle, while potential larger-scale changes as a result of these recommendations can be further studied, planned, and implemented for later cycles.

Core Refresh Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Articulate a Core identity

As a precursor to developing a theme, the Working Group recommends further work being done to elaborate on the identity (to include mission, vision, goals, purpose, etc.) of the Core at UTSA.

Instead of students seeing the Core as simply a list of requirements, effectively articulating an identity would help them see the value in the courses they're completing, their role in developing and applying marketable skills, and as a means of supporting and cultivating a sense of belonging. Finally, this identity should be tied to UTSA's history, mission, and location, and done so in a way that demonstrates UTSA's commitment to equity.

The Working Group also suggests creating a bank of guiding questions that link the Core identity to the Roadrunner Learning Outcomes. This could be built out as a Canvas module available to all faculty to support them in tying state-mandated objectives with the UTSA-specific Core identity.

The Working Group identified several questions to begin probing UTSA's identity:

- What is the role of the Core, and how does it shape students' ability to say what it means to have a UTSA education and degree?
- What do we as UTSA want them to come away with, and how does it prepare them for life and careers after college?
- Every public university in Texas is required to have this curriculum. What's distinct about going through it at UTSA?

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends the creation of a standing subgroup on Core Identity that would create recommendations by building on the preliminary recommendations of this Working Group) during Fall 2023. The Core identity would undergo a comprehensive review every five years and be assessed every catalog cycle.

Recommendation 2: Develop a Core theme

The Working Group supports packaging the Core in a central theme to complement the articulation of a Core identity. While the Core identity would remain relatively static over time, a theme would allow for a different focus that changes on an ongoing basis.

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends the creation of a standing subgroup on Core Theme to build on this report's recommendations and make implementation plans during AY 2023–2024.

Theme Parameters and Selection Process

The theme should be sufficiently broad that it doesn't need to change often to stay relevant and should be able to be easily applied across disciplines. A Core theme should last long enough to follow the student (minimum 3 years, maximum 5 years).

The proposed Core Theme subgroup would generate a list of possible themes two years before next cycle that would go to the full Core Curriculum Committee and be shared out with faculty, staff, and students for a vote. This would be tied to a significant University-level communication campaign, which would provide an opportunity for campus-wide input and concurrence.

The theme experience should extend beyond what's taught in individual courses so that students can make connections across courses and in their broader student experience. As such, while the Core theme should be reflected at the course level, institutional-wide programming and resources should be made available as well.

- While faculty would not be expected to fundamentally alter their existing Core course content, the idea is that they think about where their course articulates with the theme and how to draw out some of those points over the course of the semester.
- The Working Group suggests coordinating with Academic Innovation to create a centralized bank of resources to help faculty think through and incorporate Core theme connections, so that it's not a responsibility that falls solely to them.
- The theme should also be reflected in University-wide programming. Ideas include community-wide lectures, a distinguished lecture series, small conference, student-led conferences, film festivals, and a Core-related book (One Book, One Campus). This programming extends beyond the classroom

experience and can work as standalone events, though faculty could also connect these events to their coursework.

As a preliminary idea, the Working Group recommends exploring “Crossroads” as a first theme for the new subgroup to consider implementing. The Working Group believes that this theme could apply to UTSA students in a number of ways (coming to college as a crossroads, navigating multiple identities), their classes (finding connections across their selected courses), and it also connects with the UTSA Core identity described in Recommendation 1. (San Antonio as a crossroads between North and South, East and West, and UTSA as an HSI with a large number of first-generation students.)

Other theme ideas (which could form future suggestions from the proposed subgroup included: Borders; Circulations/Flows; Security and Risk (or Securing Futures); Viajes or Journeys; Crilloismos/Mestizos; Natures; Codes and Code Switching; Imagination/Futures; Climates of Change; Representation and Identity.

Recommendation 3: Provide a Core framework that includes a touchpoint for upperclassmen

The Working Group feels some sort of Core gateway course/module/experience would help students see the value/meaning across Core (in keeping with the recommendation about articulating the Core identity), as well as reinforce the Core theme if that recommendation is adopted. Based on information shared with the Working Group from our AIS members, it sounds as if the AIS course already does a lot of excellent work helping students acclimate to the University, but perhaps there’s a way to work in information about the Core/Core identity into that course. The Working Group suggests that the Core UD Tier 2 subgroup proposed below (see “Structure and Governance”) gets input from additional AIS stakeholders to consider whether this is a feasible option and, if so, what it could look like.

The Working Group also recommends that concurrent with considering any AIS changes, the proposed subgroup takes a holistic look at First Year Experience (FYE) programming and requirements—and coordinates with the ongoing FYE Framework project—as this may provide opportunities to re-image the FYE and SYE for FTIC, transfer, etc.

The Working Group also recommends that the proposed subgroup looks at whether the current AIS course could/should be split into multiple shorter courses that are completed at different points during students’ academic careers. Some possible models were suggested, but these are offered merely as starting points for consideration:

Suggestion One:

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- Split existing course into two shorter courses, with one being offered at the usual time and the other being taken once students are upperclassmen to provide them with an opportunity for critical reflection (and review of the Core identity).

Suggestion Two:

- First touchpoint, first semester freshman year: Offer introduction to UTSA, campus resources (e.g., UCC, libraries)
- Second touchpoint, second semester freshman year: Pathway-specific signature project
- Third touchpoint, end of second or beginning of third year: More detailed career preparation (e.g., refresh on UCC services, resume writing, and so on)

Suggestion Three:

- Instead of splitting the AIS course, continue to offer it in its current form but work with AIS, AI, and other relevant campus entities to create required “refresh” modules that students would take as upperclassmen. These would be similar to required faculty/staff compliance training but related to career services and other areas as identified. Completing the training would be tied to class registration to ensure all students are reminded of existing resources.

Advantages and Other Considerations:

A University-wide Core touchpoint provides the following opportunities:

- It is a chance for students to re-engage with Career resources when they’re further into their majors and perhaps thinking more specifically about career paths.
- It would support building community and a sense of belonging with students at UTSA outside of a specific major, as well as a chance for transfer students who didn’t take AIS as freshmen to build community.

Other considerations related to this possible model:

- More information needs to be collected in terms of which Colleges/majors have capstones to better understand how such a course would serve programs that do not have these and supplement the ones that already do.
- There’s a need to strike a balance between what’s taught in the University-wide Core course vs. ensuring departments/majors have the autonomy to determine what’s relevant to students’ career preparedness. If the model with multiple shorter courses was implemented, completion of the final course provides a neat handoff point.

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends the creation of a standing subgroup on Core UD Tier 2 with the goal of developing an upperclassmen touchpoint in 2024 and reviewing Core Upper Division courses annually.

Recommendation 4: Develop College/University infrastructure to provide comprehensive oversight and guidance for Core course effectiveness

To ensure Core effectiveness, the Working Group suggests forming a more central infrastructure that can both monitor and share knowledge related to best practices in developing Core courses. This would result in improved accountability structures and access to resources to support core effectiveness. The Working Group feels strongly that this should not nearly serve as a “check” on faculty creating Core course content but would support timely collection and dissemination of data to inform continuous improvement of the Core curriculum and the identification and adoption of effective practices that impact student success. (See the point below about developing Core design principles.) Creating University-recognized Core-course faculty champions and/or Core Fellows to coordinate with this infrastructure could help ensure successful implementation within Colleges.

Related, the Working Group suggests considering opportunities to streamline connections and alignment to Alamo Community Colleges as well.

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends the creation of a standing subgroup on Core Effectiveness and Substitution Process. This group would build a new annual process for reporting Core outcomes, which would be aligned with the Neuventive integration project with Canvas in Fall 2023.

Recommendation 5: Establish Core effectiveness metrics and standard tracking and reporting mechanisms

The Working Group suggests identifying effectiveness metrics and establish a continual tracking mechanism. Such a mechanism could help to assess the effectiveness of current courses as well as be applied on the front end to inform new Core course proposals and decisions. In addition, these metrics would support ongoing faculty learning and development.

While specific metrics still need to be identified, the Working Group thought course material costs could be a useful factor to track. Suggestions made to

establish metrics for learning effectiveness, teaching effectiveness, impact on economic mobility post-graduation, persistence impact, time to graduation impact, and others. Impact of course modality on Core effectiveness should also be considered.

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends having the standing subgroup mentioned in Recommendation 4 (Core Effectiveness and Substitution Process) lead the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation 6: Develop Core curriculum course and curriculum design principles and enhance assessment practices to ensure courses continuously meet them

All Core courses would be required to meet certain principles. These would be developed by Academic Innovation and could include items such as:

- Universal design
- Quality Matters alignment (or other external rubrics or standards)
- OER or low-cost course materials
- Equity in assessment practices
- LMS navigation structure

The Working Group pointed out that the Course Coordinator role that has been established in some Colleges has been effective in course-level design/quality alignment and is a resource that could be leveraged or built out in more Colleges to help develop and implement these principles. Assuring that design principles are applied could also be addressed through the earlier recommendation of establishing a centralized College/University infrastructure to provide comprehensive oversight/guidance for Core course effectiveness.

The Working Group also discussed the possibility of badging being incorporated into existing Core courses to help students see value in courses that are not directly related to their field of study or future career plans. Similar to the Core theme approach, faculty would not be required to adopt this recommendation, but the Working Group suggests identifying courses and badges that could be implemented and working with Academic Innovation to create a resource that documents how to implement this into a course.

In addition, the Working Group suggests developing more timely assessment processes (i.e., more frequent than the current 3-year cycle) so courses are being assessed on a more continuous basis. This would involve use of multiple measures to assess Core outcomes, including getting feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders (alumni, student, faculty, and staff). The standard tracking

and reporting mechanisms recommended above would make this more feasible to achieve than it is now.

Structure and Governance

The Working Group recommends having the standing subgroup mentioned in Recommendation 4 (Core Effectiveness and Substitution Process) lead the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation 7: Operational Considerations

These recommendations were identified over the course of Working Group discussions but were not tied to a specific focus area of any of the three subgroups:

- The Refresh should include a comprehensive assessment process, along with a timetable and documented strategy for making progress.
- As part of the implementation, a University-level shared communications strategy should be developed and deployed.
- While this Working Group sought to capture viewpoints from all across campus, more extensive input will be required. In addition to forming the proposed Core Curriculum Committee subgroups with membership that spans relevant campus stakeholders, the Working Group recommends seeking extensive student and alumni input.
- Create a living resource that documents “double-dipping”: There does not seem to be anything that exists that exhaustively documents these instances. Having such a document would be helpful in understanding which Core courses also count as major requirements and being able to assess program pathways and impact of any proposed potential changes to Core courses in the future.