UNDERGRADUATE CORE CURRICULUM GUIDEBOOK

VERSION 01.02

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

A) PURPOSE OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

The purpose of the core curriculum is informed by Point Park University's mission statement:

Point Park University educates students in a diverse urban environment and prepares them to apply knowledge to achieve their goals, advance their professions and serve their communities.

Towards this end, the core curriculum is designed to help students become effective problem solvers, researchers, and communicators. The core curriculum builds the foundation of a Point Park University education through courses that:

- Allow students to integrate knowledge and insights from diverse fields.
- Emphasize the development of critical thinking and written and oral communication skills.
- Prioritize interactive learning—students are encouraged to think independently and to seek creative solutions to intellectual, ethical, and practical challenges.

B) TERMINOLOGY

Courses in the core curriculum are organized around primary **outcomes** students should achieve within the following five **domains**: *communication, information literacy, problem solving, global/cultural literacy, and creativity/aesthetics.* Some courses have additional **sub-outcomes** within those domains. Learn more about core outcomes and sub-outcomes here.

Core courses **tie** (or **align**) their **course objectives** to those outcomes/sub-outcomes by ensuring their course objectives explicitly or implicitly relate to those outcomes/sub-outcomes. That way, core courses serve the purpose of the core curriculum.

Three core courses in the core are called **core fundamentals** courses: City-University Life (UNIV 101), Oral Communication and Presentation (COMM 101), and College Composition (ENGL 101). These address the core's primary outcomes directly. Learn more about the core fundamentals courses here.

Other courses fall within **core themes**. These are called **thematic core courses** or **core theme courses**. Themes are like disciplines, or collections of disciplines—e.g., the theme "Investigate Science" has courses with core outcomes and sub-outcomes germane to the perspective of scientific disciplines. Learn more about core themes here.

Some of the last courses students take at Point Park are also a part of the core: **capstone courses**. These are specific and tailored to every degree program. However, they are also organized around mastery of primary core outcomes, so they can also be considered "fundamentals" courses and are referred to as such on many degree requirement sheets. Learn more about capstone courses here.

C) CORE POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATION

Regulations for the core curriculum are established by curricular policies approved by Faculty Assembly. You can find the policies for the core curriculum in this folder.

The core curriculum is overseen by the **Director of the Core** and Senior Curriculum and Assessment Strategist, Dr. Brendan Mullan. The Director of the Core works in conjunction with:

- The **Core Outcomes and Assessment Committee (COAC).** This full-time faculty committee approves of, and conducts regular assessment of core outcomes in, core courses.
- **Core fundamentals leaders.** These individuals are responsible for successful implementation and assessment of core fundamentals courses.
- **Other ex-officio officers:** e.g., members of the Provost, Registrar, and Institutional Research offices.

Together, these units enforce core policies for undergraduate programs, approve courses for the core curriculum, assess core outcomes, and work to improve core processes and foster best practices in pedagogy relevant to all core courses.

2. CORE CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Within the core curriculum, there are primary **outcomes** and secondary **sub-outcomes**, all related to the essential domains of communication, information literacy, problem solving, global/cultural literacy, and creativity/aesthetics.

A) OUTCOMES

The five primary outcomes for the core are:

1) **COMMUNICATION:** [Students will] employ written and oral communication skills in order to convey clear and organized information to target audiences for specific purposes.
2) **INFORMATION LITERACY:** [Students will] locate, evaluate and use information effectively, ethically, and legally from a variety of formats both traditional and digital.
3) **PROBLEM SOLVING:** [Students will] analyze problems and develop independent solutions.

4) **GLOBAL/CULTURAL LITERACY:** [Students will] analyze issues within their political, economic, socio-cultural, historical, or environmental contexts.

5) **CREATIVITY/AESTHETICS:** [Students will] recognize, define, analyze and interpret a variety of aesthetic expressions and/or demonstrate originality and inventiveness.

Objectives of fundamental core courses, core theme courses, and capstones are tied directly to various combinations of these primary outcomes.

B) SUB-OUTCOMES

In addition, the objectives of core theme courses may be tied to sub-outcomes within the five established domains. Depending on the core theme, these sub-outcomes may be optional or mandatory for courses within the theme. See Core Curriculum Themes: Theme Outcome Maps below for more.

In sum, by graduation, students should exhibit clear achievement of all core outcomes, and thus successful completion of the core curriculum.

3. CORE CURRICULUM THEMES

A) THEME DESCRIPTIONS

Core theme courses satisfy core outcomes (and sub-outcomes) within the context of core themes. The themes are listed below, along with their requirements for alignments between course objectives and core outcomes/sub-outcomes (details for those requirements are provided in the next section):

THEME #1: Explore the World / Develop Intercultural Competencies: *Courses in this category must address the way that history, politics, economics, and/or culture interact, and offer students the opportunity to interpret how these elements influence social change.*

- There must be three (3) course objective ties to primary outcomes in communication, information literacy, and global/cultural literacy.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in communication and global/cultural literacy.

THEME #2: Investigate Science: *Courses in this category must require students to use the scientific method, evaluate hypotheses, analyze quantitative data, solve problems, and effectively communicate scientific information.*

- There must be two (2) course objective ties to primary outcomes in problem solving and information literacy.
- There must be four (4) course objective ties to sub-outcomes in communication, problem solving, and information literacy.

THEME #3: Investigate Mathematics: *Courses in this category must emphasize the study of mathematics as a pure science (the study of quantity, structure, space, and change as they relate to mathematics), mathematics as a language (the study of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking mathematics), and mathematics as an applied science (the application of mathematics to several disciplines such as physical sciences, engineering, economics, statistics, and/or decision making).*

- There must be three (3) course objective ties to primary outcomes in problem solving, communication, and creativity/aesthetics.
- There must be five (5) course objective ties to sub-outcomes in communication, problem solving, and creativity/aesthetics.

THEME #4: Interpret Creative Works: *Courses in this category must give students the opportunity to analyze descriptive or narrative creative works with attention paid to genre, context, and content.*

- There must be two (2) course objective ties to primary outcomes in communication and creativity/aesthetics.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in information literacy, global/cultural literacy, communication, and creativity/aesthetics.

THEME #5: Understand People / Analyze Relationships of Humans: *Courses in this category must allow students to interpret human experience, behavior, and relationships within individual historical and cultural contexts.*

- There must be three (3) course objective ties to primary outcomes in global/cultural literacy, communication, and information literacy.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in information literacy, global/cultural literacy, and communication.

THEME #6: Succeed in Business: *Courses in this category must address basic business or financial theories and include practical application of these theories to real-world problems.*

- There must be three (3) course objective ties to primary outcomes in problem solving, communication, and information literacy.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in information literacy, communication, and problem solving.

THEME #7: Appreciate & Apply the Arts: *Courses in this category must include opportunities for artistic analysis, critique, and creation / expression.*

- There must be two (2) course objective ties to primary outcomes in communication and creativity/aesthetics.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in communication, problem solving, and creativity/aesthetics.

THEME #8: Discover Technology: *Courses in this category must include the application of technology to solve real-world problems.*

- There must be four (4) course objective ties to primary outcomes in communication, information literacy, problem solving, and creativity/aesthetics.
- Course objectives may be optionally tied to sub-outcomes in communication and problem solving.

B) THEME OUTCOME MAPS

Curriculum maps graphically show how the individual objectives of a course should relate to outcomes and sub-outcomes. For core theme courses, this is accomplished with maps that show (1) How

outcomes and sub-outcomes relate to the five domains of the core curriculum through a particular theme, and (2) How course objectives for the theme course are tied to outcomes and sub-outcomes, and therefore relate to those domains.

Curriculum maps for all core themes can be found here for reference (they are also found in course proposal documents when they are required). Note that the first map in each document, as indicated above, lays out how the theme's collection of outcomes/sub-outcomes relates to the core domains, and the second allows for ties between course objectives and those outcomes/sub-outcomes.
When courses are submitted for consideration into the core curriculum, proposers are directed to indicate those ties. As an example, observe the first map for the "Investigate Science" theme:

		Communication	Information Literacy	Problem Solving	Global/Cultural Literacy	Creativity/Aesthetics
				CORE LEARNING DOMAINS		
MANDATORY OUTCOMES	Analyze problems and develop independent solutions.			*		
	Find, evaluate and use information ethically and legally from a variety of traditional and digital formats.		*			
MANDATORY SUB-OUTCOMES	Students will be able to communicate information using scientific formulas and/or symbolic diagrams.	*				
	Ability to apply the scientific method to produce evidence-based analysis.			*		
	Ability to formulate, evaluate and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative information.	*	*			
	Ability to apply effective mathematical or other formal processes to reason and solve problems or develop arguments supported by quantitative evidence and communicate those arguments	*		*		

For courses in this theme, there are two mandatory outcomes, and also four mandatory sub-outcomes. These are aligned with the domains of problem solving, information literacy, and communication.

Below is the second map for a hypothetical course in this theme, *NSET 199: Introduction to Zebra Studies:*

		MANDATORY: Problem Solving Analyze problems and develop independent solutions.	MANDATORY: Information Literacy Find, evaluate, and use information effectively, ethically, and legally from a variety of formats, both traditional and technological.	MANDATORY: Communicate information using scientific formulas and/or symbolic diagrams.	MANDATORY: Apply the scientific method to produce evidence-based analysis.	MANDATORY: Formulate, evaluate and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative information.	MANDATORY: Apply effective mathematical or other formal processes to reason and solve problems or develop arguments supported by quantitative evidence and communicate those arguments effectively.
	COURSE: NSET 199 COURSE TITLE: Introduction to Zebra Studies						
COURSE OBJECTIVES	Course objective #: 1		*	*			
	Course objective #: 2					*	
	Course objective #: 3						*
	Course objective #: 4	*					
	Course objective #: 5				*		
	Course objective #: 6	*					*

For reference, the course objectives are:

1) <u>Describe</u> different species of zebras and <u>explain</u> their characteristics based on evolutionary pressures.
2) <u>Investigate</u> and <u>compare</u> properties of zebra habitats and their influences on zebra populations.
3) <u>Describe</u> zebra biology with relevant biological processes and diagrams and <u>compare</u> it to similar species
4) <u>Analyze</u> wildlife conservation center and zoo data on zebra population maintenance and growth and make recommendations for future work.
5) <u>Design</u> biological or ecological studies to further zebra conservation.
6) <u>Evaluate</u> mathematical predator-prey models to interpret trends in zebra populations.

From a comparison of the objectives and the above map, it can be seen how these objectives tie to the mandatory outcomes and sub-outcomes in this theme, and in conjunction with the outcome map, how the course is aligned with the indicated domains.

Note that many objectives can tie to multiple outcomes and sub-outcomes (more than is represented in the map, in fact), but the **minimum requirement is that every mandatory outcome/sub-outcome exhibits *one* tie to a course objective**. More are certainly possible but are not strictly required—every alignment is eligible for assessment, so course proposers should be prepared to offer artifacts and other data about every alignment indicated in these maps (see Course Assessment and Reporting below).

4. TYPES OF COURSES IN THE CORE

A) FUNDAMENTALS

With the exception of some transfer and AP credit-bearing students, all undergraduate students are directed to take the three core fundamentals courses (9 credits total; current course descriptions can be found on PointWeb):

- **UNIV 101 (3 credits):** City-University Life.
- **ENGL 101 (3 credits):** College Composition.
- **COMM 101 (3 credits):** Oral Communication and Presentation.

B) THEME COURSES

Undergraduates must take courses from all core themes (30 credits total):

1) **Explore the World:** 2 courses required (6 credits)
2) **Investigate Science:** 1 course required (3 credits)
3) **Investigate Mathematics:** 1 course required (3 credits)
4) **Interpret Creative Works:** 1 course required (3 credits)
5) **Understand People:** 2 courses required (6 credits)
6) **Succeed in Business:** 1 course required (3 credits)
7) **Appreciate and Apply the Arts:** 1 course required (3 credits)
8) **Discover Technology:** 1 course required (3 credits)

A list of all accepted and current theme courses can be found here, listed by course catalog number. Current course descriptions and objectives can be found on PointWeb. Note that many courses that have been adopted into the core curriculum without formal curriculum mapping; see Theme Course Requirements below.

C) CAPSTONES

Each degree program has a capstone course that represents the apex of a student's journey through that program. It is typically a high-level, student-directed academic thesis or project, a rigorous learning experience designed with the highest tiers of Bloom's taxonomy in mind. Capstones reflect a student's progression through the degree program *and* the core curriculum (along with its five domains), so capstones must represent the primary outcomes of those domains. Capstones are typically three credits.

A list of all accepted and current capstone courses can be found here, listed by course catalog number. Note that many courses that are listed as program capstones have not yet been formally aligned to the core curriculum; see Capstone requirements below.

D) SUMMARY

The core curriculum consists of 9 credits of fundamentals, 30 credits of theme courses, and 3-credit capstone, or 42 credits total. This degree sheet template shows how these are usually organized when programs are created/managed; note capstone courses are often organized with fundamentals courses but the 42-credit requirement is unchanged.

5. REQUIREMENTS OF COURSES IN THE CORE

A) FUNDAMENTALS COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Fundamentals courses and their relationship to core outcomes are governed by passed core proposal documents. Core fundamentals faculty leaders may set other requirements related to the administration and evaluation of these courses.

B) THEME COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A Point Park University undergraduate course is an eligible core theme course if it satisfies the following requirements:

- The course has no pre-requisites, aside from Fundamental core courses.
- The course is at a 100-200 level
- The course is available to all students

To ensure alignment with the core curriculum, faculty seeking inclusion of a new course into the core should map the course's objectives to core outcomes (and any mandatory sub-outcomes). This was a requirement of entry into the core for all courses until 2017.

After 2017, courses are automatically enrolled into the core if they fall into disciplines represented by core themes *and* meet the criteria expressed above. See the 2017 core policy change for details. Note that, to be automatically included, prospective core courses must have a prefix code that matches an

approved discipline for inclusion (e.g., MATH for math courses in *Investigate Mathematics,* PYSC for psychology courses within the *Understand People* theme, etc.). While this policy allows greater inclusive scope for the core (particularly for transfer students), faculty are encouraged to map their automatically-included course's objectives to core outcomes/sub-outcomes according to theme for standardization of assessment practices and reporting for accreditation. The core director can assist with this process; see this list of core theme courses to see which still need to be mapped).

For prospective core theme courses that do not fit this criterion, e.g., new courses that faculty want to add to a certain theme that do not belong to pre-approved prefixes and disciplines, faculty must propose those courses to COAC for approval and formally map their objectives to core outcomes.

New, temporary courses can be made to count for core themes without explicit adherence to the above prefix policy. This is designed for trials of experimental, interdisciplinary, inter-thematic, special topics, or co-taught courses that may lack a "home" discipline. These courses cannot be run more than three times without review by COAC before they can be offered again and must have particular course numbers. See the corresponding policy for details.

C) CAPSTONE REQUIREMENTS

Like fundamental core courses, capstones align directly with primary core outcomes. The current policy is that **capstone courses must align with at least three (3) primary core outcomes.** A list of all accepted and current capstone courses can be found here, listed by course catalog number, and including mapping status. Faculty associated with those programs should consider mapping any unmapped capstones to core outcomes (see course proposal policies below). The core director can assist with this process.

D) CORE BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The office of the Director of the Core maintains a database of best practices for core courses, including:

- Use of open educational resources (OER)
- Direct and indirect assessment strategies
- Pedagogies and course design for multiple modalities

Feel free to contact the core director for advice or a personal recommendation for your course.

E) TRANSFER STUDENTS AND AP CREDIT

Transfer students may transfer courses from other institutions for core credit if they fall within approved disciplines that are appropriate for core themes, with the provision that they obtain a C or higher in those courses. See this policy for details, particularly the table in Section V.

Students wishing to count AP credits towards core completion must earn a 3, 4, or 5 on an exam related to a discipline listed under the core themes in Appendix B of this policy. See the document for details.

6. REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

A) ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) requires the following:

- PDE: 40 credits of instruction in a general education curriculum, including:
  - **Humanities** *(Core theme equivalent: Explore the World; Understand People; Interpret Creative Works)*
  - **Arts** *(Core theme equivalent: Appreciate and Apply the Arts; Interpret Creative Works)*
  - **Communications** *(Core foundations equivalent: COMM 101/ENGL 101; communication primary core objective in other themes/fundamentals/capstones)*
  - **Social Sciences** *(Core foundations equivalent: UNIV 101; Core theme equivalent: Explore the World; Understand People; Succeed in Business)*
  - **Mathematics** *(Core theme equivalent: Investigate Mathematics)*
  - **Technology** *(Core theme equivalent: Discover Technology)*
  - **Science** *(Core theme equivalent: Investigate Science)*
- MSCHE: competencies in the following areas:
  - **Oral and written communication** *(Core foundations equivalent: COMM 101, ENGL 101; communication primary core objective within other themes/fundamentals/capstones)*
  - **Technology** *(Core theme equivalent: Discover Technology)*
  - **Scientific and quantitative literacy** *(Core theme equivalent: Investigate Science, Investigate Mathematics)*
  - **Critical analysis and reasoning** *(information literacy, problem solving, and global/cultural literacy primary core objective within themes/fundamentals/capstones)*

The core curriculum (through 42 credits, including core fundamentals, themes courses, and capstones) thus satisfies Point Park's accreditation requirements, with one important provision, explained in the next section.

B) CORE CREDITS AND DEGREE PROGRAMS

All undergraduate degrees must include 42 credits of core curriculum courses, including 3 fundamentals courses (9 credits), 10 theme courses (30 credits), and 1 capstone course, specific to the program (3 credits). Degree programs may include their own introductory (100-200) level-courses in the core if they satisfy core requirements.

> **IMPORTANT**: **To satisfy PDE requirements, all degree programs must ensure that, of the four courses students take within the *Explore the World* and *Understand People* themes, at least one must be a "Humanities" course, and one must be a "Social Science" course:**
>
> - **Humanities courses in these themes include:**
>   - Courses and course prefixes related to history and disciplines of ancient and modern languages, cultures, philosophies, and religions.
> - **Social sciences courses in these themes include:**
>   - Courses and course prefixes related to disciplines of anthropology, archeology, human geography, political science, and psychology

7. COURSE APPROVAL AND ASSESSMENT

A) COURSE PROPOSALS

Faculty proposing **new** courses for inclusion into the core and the undergraduate curriculum must abide by Undergraduate Curriculum Committee policies and timelines. The main UGC/COAC proposal form and/or other procedures can be found on the UGC Schoology page. Visit this page to:

- Propose that **new** undergraduate courses are also included in the core as theme or capstone courses
- Propose that **existing** undergraduate courses be newly included in the core, as theme or capstone courses
- Propose tying existing program **capstones** to core outcomes

All proposals approved by COAC are voted upon by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and Faculty Assembly before they are recommended to the University administration. The Provost's office has final approval of all course proposals.

In all proposals, alignments between core objectives/sub-objectives and course objectives are required. Nominally, all primary course objectives need at least one tie to a course objective, as do any *mandatory* sub-objectives. More alignments ("X's" or "*'s" in the curriculum maps) are allowed, but instructors of these courses may be required to submit data or artifacts testifying to any and every alignment, depending on the core outcomes assessed in a particular year (see Core assessment and reporting, below).

B) CORE ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Every year, COAC will:

- Coordinate the assessment of primary outcomes (and possibly sub-outcomes) associated with the core domains each year (within a repeating, five-year cycle):
    - Year 1: Communication
    - Year 2: Information Literacy
    - Year 3: Problem Solving
    - Year 4: Global/Cultural Literacy
    - Year 5: Creativity/Aesthetics
- Report results to the core director.
- Review and propose the eligibility of courses to the core curriculum.
- Review and propose changes to core courses based on assessment data.
- Review and propose additions, deletions, or movement of courses from among the core themes.

COAC is the primary outcomes assessment vehicle for the core curriculum. Assessment strategies may include but are not limited to student proficiency data, artifacts, or other metrics of fulfillment of outcomes/sub-outcomes. COAC may request data or artifacts corresponding to any and every tie between a course's objectives and core outcomes and/or sub-outcomes related to the domain for that year.

Moreover, the following positions are appointed every year for core fundamentals courses:

- COMM 101 Leader
- Director, Writing Program (ENGL 101)
- UNIV 101 Faculty Leader

Faculty in these roles coordinate the deployment of course sections, administer training to other faculty teaching these courses, independently conduct course-specific assessment of these courses, and report assessment results to the core director for feedback and improvement.

The core director receives and analyzes data from COAC, core fundamentals leaders, the Office of Institutional Research, and when possible, survey or other indirect feedback from faculty, to make recommendations to the faculty/Provost's office for modifications to the core curriculum.

C) COMPLIANCE REVIEW

All undergraduate degree programs are periodically reviewed for compliance with policies outlined in this guidebook and otherwise specified in the core policy database. If any program is found to be in violation of a core policy, the corresponding department chairs will be notified and the program will be given one academic year to make any necessary changes.

8. VERSION HISTORY

- Version 1.0 (SP 2022): Original document
- Version 1.01 (SP 2022): COAC edits for grammar, suggestions for proposal language
- Version 1.02 (FA 2022): Edited links to updated course lists, added short description for core fundamentals requirements, and defined history as a humanities field for PDE requirements