

features

Why the core curriculum? Ashland's policies on the core

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The core curriculum at Ashland University has sparked some debate among students and faculty. The current 45 credit hour requirement has been deemed excessive and unnecessary.

Nonetheless, Ohio universities require core curriculum or general education for accreditation. Greg McBrayer, the core director of AU since 2017, spoke to the difference between the two.

"The difference between a core curriculum and a general education is trying to be intentional about the questions that we firmly believe educated young people should begin to think about," McBrayer said.

Each area of the core is disciplined by a guiding question that is to be reflected on after completing course requirements.

McBrayer stressed the importance of the core in providing shared experience for all AU students. Despite there being 10 categories of the core, there is a unique way of thinking involved within each area.

"A successful liberal education will expose you to alternatives that maybe you haven't thought of before," McBrayer said. "A liberal education should liberate or free you."

The former 8-year core director of AU, William Vaughan, admits that the university does not do a good job explaining the importance of the core curriculum.

"Unfortunately it is telegraphed to students as a burden," Vaughan said.

Many students feel that the value of a college education is only gained from their major. "However, some of the most important things in life are not necessarily in their major," Vaughan said.

Another concern students have about the core is the lack of time to perform the demands of these courses.

In response to this issue, Vaughan suggested that perhaps there is a need to reduce the amount of credit hours within majors rather than cutting the core.

It is a faculty-driven decision to have AU's core curriculum set in place the way it is.

"Faculty have come together and said, collectively, this is what we think students need," McBrayer

said. "Faculty should know better than students as to what is good for an undergraduate education."

Although it may feel like an inconvenience, McBrayer believes studying these areas will make students' lives better.

"It seems to be the training for all kinds of jobs and life in general," McBrayer said. "The idea here is that we are trying to educate a whole human being."

As for the determination of the categories included in the core, there is consideration for tradition and the necessity of these areas of knowledge.

"It has just been recognized as part of a university education that students be exposed to some of

categories.

Students should study in areas of weakness for the purpose of becoming stronger in them, McBrayer said. "Playing only to your strengths would mean just do your major and I think that would be deficient at the end of the day."

The core aims to create a well-rounded thinker. "You might hate it, but a university educated person god damn has to know something about science," Vaughan said. "Even if it's enough to know why you don't like it."

When compared to other university curriculums, Ashland University's core is average.

John Carroll University requires 43-55 credit hours of core, Mount

He recognizes that sometimes it is the luck of the draw and it is possible that the professor a student has may not be the best one for the course.

"You might not see its importance right now but at the very least its developing student skills in you that are transferable in a lot of different contexts," Vaughan said.

The use of pass/fail for a course is an alternative to the core affecting a student's GPA.

"If that gives students some feeling of control over their lives, then more power to them," Vaughan said.

McBrayer sees the importance of being pushed and challenged within the core.

change, the longer it takes."

Classes can be added or removed from the curriculum within a few months.

Richard Gray, Chair of the Foreign Languages Department, has seen an overlap of themes and topics taught within the core through his observations of colleagues.

"There is a unity that goes about with the core," Gray said. "Students are getting similar ideas from multiple faculty and different disciplines."

As a French professor, Gray has understood his responsibility within the core to be the cultivation of the human experience and to enlighten students to different perspectives and cultures.

"Through critical cultural inquiry, we teach students to understand the 'other,' to look at perspectives that are not their own," Gray said. "It is more than simple appreciation of other things, but really to walk the path in another language."

The tools gained within this area of the core help to problem solve and break down obstacles, Gray said.

Departments that are primarily rooted in the core hope to inspire students and evoke passion in areas that they may have disregarded.

Hilary Donatini, Chair of the English Department, wants students to fall in love with literature and writing even if it is not their major.

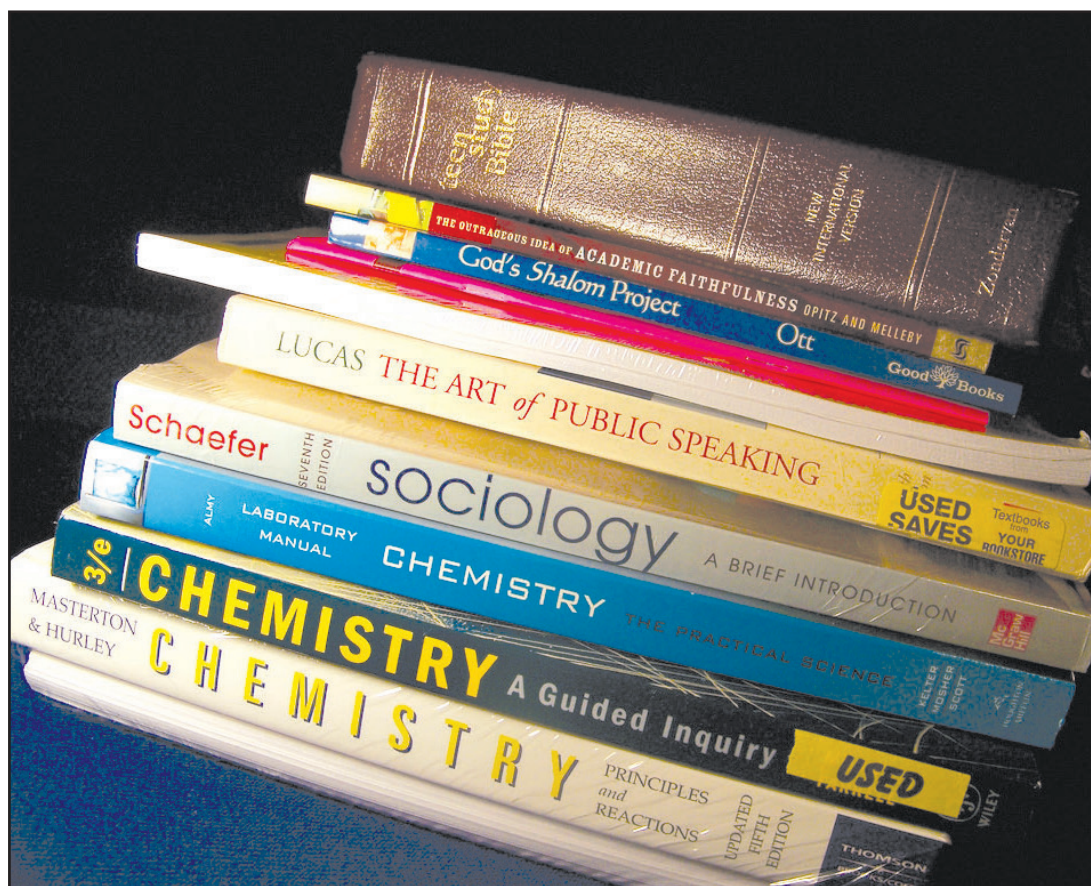
The novels and plays that are discussed within the English department, involve timeless themes of human existence.

"We read stories and our lives are stories and we tell our own stories about our own lives," Donatini said. "We are always constantly trying to forge that connection between the stories that we read and the stories that we are living everyday."

Donatini believes that being attuned to beautiful literature can make students more sensitive and empathetic.

Although some minds may not thrive with a certain way of thinking, core courses are not structured to be impossible, but rather to challenge students.

"The core, better than anything, generates critical thinking and that is what we need more of," Vaughan said. "As a university education person you're going to have a huge influence on people."



Having a core curriculum helps students think about many topics and develop a wide range of skills.

these subjects," Vaughan said.

Most areas of the core require a single three credit hour course however, there are exceptions. Aesthetics, Composition, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences require six credit hours.

"The sheer diversity and complexity of those fields require more than three credit exposure to them," Vaughan said. "Giving students six credits is an opportunity for them to get different perspectives."

Those that influence the core have attempted to provide a plethora of choices for courses in most

Union University requires 32 hours, Malone University requires 41-43 hours, and Miami University requires 45 hours.

All five universities, including AU, have similar categories of the core.

To any student that is having difficulty with their core classes, Vaughan believes that sometimes a little struggle is a good thing.

"I try to tell the struggling students, do you best, try to get something out of that course, you are studying with someone who has devoted their life to it," Vaughan said.

"I would try to encourage struggling students to be positive and get them to look at the bigger picture," McBrayer said. "You are not just here to prepare for a career."

There are many assessments performed, as well as the data collected from course evaluations, to judge the core curriculum.

McBrayer frequently sits in classes to see if students are engaged in the material and he has also discussed the core with student senate to get their feedback.

For a change to be made in the curriculum, it must be voted on, McBrayer said. "The bigger the

The girl in the white scarf

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She sits on the edge of her bed, her green eyes gaze at the snow through the window. Dana Awlia is not used to this cold weather and the look of the accumulated snow that covers everything outside.

While she knows she needs to get ready for school, she does not resist her desire to go through her Twitter timeline for one more minute.

She finds the stories there scary. "today is the very first time i have legitimately been scared to be a muslim woman in america" @Humairabear

"A lot of people aren't just heartbroken. They're scared. It doesn't feel safe to be gay/black/female/Muslim/Latino/Jewish in America tonight" @benjpasek

Muslim girls are taking their hijabs off because they are afraid for

their lives and others are not feeling safe just because of their identity.

She knows it is the election season, but she does not understand the hate wave that is happening around America. The 2016 Presidential election brought a wave of hate election and violence against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern and Arab Americans in the United States, according to the South Asian Americans Leading Together organization.

The tense atmosphere is frightening her, and she is afraid to go outside of her small dorm room. She is not around her family or the community she is used to, but far, far from Jeddah. Jeddah, the city where she lived her whole life in. She tries to convince herself that Ashland is a small town, nothing will happen.

In an attempt to clear her mind she flounces her head and stands up to change her clothes and go to her classes.

She decides to wear a long blue and white striped shirt, but she was not sure about which scarf she should wear with it. Two flashlights and a text message are all that Dana needed. A few seconds and her mom's reply comes in favor of the second picture, the white scarf.

Dana reads the message and smiles because she was hoping her mom would choose the white scarf, her favorite. The scarf is as white as snow falling outside.

The clock is ticking, and if she does not move fast, she undoubtedly will be late for her class.

In a swift move, she starts combing her long hair into a bun and wrapping the white cotton cloth around her head, covering her hair.

She steps outside of her dorm room on the to her classroom.

It is a night class, and light begins to dissolve into dark. The snow is filling the path from her dorm to her classroom, so she needed to give extra attention to her steps, so she does not step into some unnoticeable black ice and hurt herself.

She is late, one minute late.

The class is almost full. There is only one seat left, right in the middle of the class. Dana hurries to take her place.

The course is Race, Ethnic & Minority. Issues, where students learn about the consequences of living in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and multi-cultural society. Her luck made her the only Muslim student and international student in the class. She felt like she was the only one standing out from the rest of the students.

The professor begins his lecture

talking about different races and religions in the country and how every group has their own beliefs and doctrine.

A picture is shown on the slide. A man is praying facing a pillar. The professor turns to Dana, the only girl in a scarf, and clear Islamic appearance.

"Hey! What is your name?"

"Ammm, my name is Dana."

"Welcome to class, Dana! Can you tell me what this man is doing?"

"He is praying."

"So can you tell me why is he praying facing the pillar?"

She rubbed her head and narrowed her eyes and mustered up some confidence.

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