



# TRINITY UNIVERSITY

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## **Memorandum to the Trinity Community**

A New Curriculum for Trinity University

February 5, 2014

From: Michael Fischer, Vice President for Faculty and Student Affairs

Last Friday, the Faculty Assembly voted to approve a new general education curriculum. The new requirements will be applied to students who matriculate in Fall 2015 and after.

The new curriculum grows out of extensive and widespread faculty discussions, which began with an all-day campus retreat in September 2011 and included the work of several committees, an Ideas Lab, and a Curricular Design Lab, not to mention numerous sounding boards, electronic surveys, roundtable discussions, and department meetings. Several individuals took on leadership roles and deserve special thanks: Mark Brodl, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs: Budget and Research and original chair of the CCCR; Erwin Cook, subsequent chair of the CCCR; Nancy Mills, co-chair of the Trinity Tomorrow committee; Lisa Jasinski, Special Projects Coordinator; Duane Coltharp, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs: Faculty Development and Curriculum and liaison to the UCC; Kimberly Montford, the current chair of the UCC; and Glenn Kroeger, vice chair of the UCC.

The goals of the new curriculum are aligned with the vision of Trinity's recently adopted strategic plan. Through these combined efforts, the next generation of Trinity graduates will engage regularly in interdisciplinary conversations and inquiry; develop sophisticated ways of thinking in rigorous liberal arts and sciences courses; and be challenged by experiential learning courses that bridge our campus with the San Antonio community and communities around the globe. In addition to these benefits, the new curriculum will produce graduates who can write and speak effectively, think creatively and critically, and become leaders in a variety of academic disciplines and industries.

### ***Curricular Elements***

The new curriculum preserves some current graduation requirements, including a required academic major, a lifetime fitness course, a three-year campus residency requirement, and the ability for students to pursue double majors and self-designed interdisciplinary degrees. The new curriculum adds five new signature elements:

**1. Enhanced First-Year Experience:** *Taken in the student's first semester, this intensive course adopts a learning community model to impart substantial instruction in written and oral communication skills while engaging a topic of widespread or enduring significance.*

**2. Core Capacities:** *Students will develop transferrable skills that enable them to succeed academically at Trinity and in their post-graduate careers. The core capacities are: Written,*

*Oral, and Visual Communication; Digital Literacy; and Engaged Citizenship.*

**3. Approaches to Creation and Analysis:** *Students will demonstrate the ability to use disciplinary approaches characteristic of (1) the humanities, (2) the arts and creative disciplines, (3) the social and behavioral sciences, (4) the natural sciences, and (5) quantitative disciplines.*

**4. Interdisciplinary Clusters:** *Students will explore a complex subject of enduring or contemporary significance by completing three linked courses from a variety of departments.*

**5. Experiential Learning:** *Trinity is committed to helping students learn to apply knowledge in a real-world environment. The new curriculum recommends that all students complete at least one experiential learning opportunity, which might include service-learning and field-based courses, self-designed projects, internships, artistic works, study abroad, or mentored research.*

### ***Implementation***

Any major change to a curriculum creates obligations as well as opportunities. The overriding obligation is to implement and sustain the new curriculum that has been approved. All of us in the Office of Academic Affairs take that obligation seriously and are committed to carrying it out by working closely with the University Curriculum Council and with all departments.

The opportunities created by this new curriculum include faculty members working together to create new courses, revise existing ones, and expand their teaching. Our office is ready to help faculty members take advantage of these opportunities. We are prepared, for example, to support faculty members who want to incorporate core capacities in their coursework. The Collaborative for Learning and Teaching is poised to assist by creating workshops and other opportunities for faculty members to share their expertise. Faculty members will also need support for developing First-Year Experience courses and Interdisciplinary Clusters. We have submitted to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation an \$800,000 grant proposal to support some of this work and we are also exploring other sources of funding.

This new curriculum represents the first wholesale revision of the curriculum in 25 years. It is a major achievement. Please join me in thanking the many people whose hard work, persistence, and creativity made it possible.