A baccalaureate education at the University of Colorado Denver is based on a strong commitment to a liberal arts philosophy. The traditional translation of the term ‘liberal arts’ is to provide a set of skills to set one free. A modern adaptation of the translation is a set of skills to provide for life-long learning and multiple careers. A 21st century student requires a foundational skill set for multiple careers, and possibly for a career that doesn’t exist at the time of graduation. UC Denver believes that the best approach to prepare students for the 21st century is based in a general education commitment in the liberal arts.

UC Denver Core Curriculum
The UC Denver Core Curriculum Oversight Committee (CCOC), which is a faculty governance committee made up of faculty from each undergraduate school/college, developed the Core Curriculum around a format based both on skills and on breadth of knowledge. The faculty of each undergraduate school/college approved the following Core Curriculum for a Fall 2006 implementation:

**Intellectual Competencies:** minimum C– grade
- English composition I 3 hours
- English composition II 3 hours
- lower division MATH course 3-4 hours

**Knowledge Areas:** outside a student’s major
- Arts and Humanities 6 hours
- Behavioral and Social Sciences 6 hours
- Biological and Physical Sciences, Mathematics 7-8 hours

**International Perspectives:** lower or upper division course 3 hours

**Cultural Diversity:** upper division course 3 hours

The UC Denver Core Curriculum of 11 courses, 34-36 semester hours, has a fairly traditional format when compared to other institutions with a liberal arts philosophy of undergraduate education; however, the Core was specifically designed to meet the mission of the UC Denver downtown Denver campus and has several unique attributes.

- applies to all undergraduate students independent of student’s college/school or major
- facilitates students transferring from a Colorado community college in the gtPathways program
- restricts departments/programs to the number of Core courses offered
- establishes a faculty governance Core Curriculum Oversight Committee to approve and assess Core courses

That the engineering major takes the same number of English composition courses as the history major is a strength of the UC Denver Core Curriculum, and unique among Colorado public institutions of higher education. That the Core provides every undergraduate student insight into the effects of globalization and into cultural diversity issues helps prepare graduates for multiple careers on a global scale.

**Core Curriculum Learning Objectives**

The Core Curriculum of the downtown Denver campus is designed to provide each UC Denver undergraduate student a high quality general education based on a liberal arts foundation while allowing students flexibility based on their individual backgrounds and specific career goals. The Core Curriculum develops multiple literacies, stimulates creative thinking, and utilizes technology. A goal of the UC Denver Core Curriculum is to engage students in developing sensitivity to diversity and developing their place in an urban environment as well as in the rapidly changing global environment.
The Core Curriculum courses are designed with specific learning objectives for student learning. Every Core course must include (1) critical thinking and (2) writing objectives. Additional learning objectives are determined by the specific area of core:

- English – writing for different purposes using different print and electronic contexts
- Mathematics – logic, quantitative reasoning, numerical relationships in social/physical phenomena
- Arts – creativity, self-expression, appreciation of artistic and cultural aesthetics
- Humanities – skills for human development, contemporary life issues, responsibilities of social actions
- Behavioral Sciences – behavior, communication, analysis of human experience/development
- Social Sciences – understanding of social, political, and economic relationships in human society
- Biological and Physical Sciences – scientific method and reasoning, solutions to complex phenomena
- International Perspectives – insight into globalization effects and influence of world-wide society
- Cultural Diversity – insight and sensitivity to race/ethnicity and gender issues in US

**Core Curriculum Assessment**

The assessment of the general education Core Curriculum has been implemented through a variety of crosscutting approaches under the auspices of the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee and the Office of Assessment. The Core Curriculum Oversight Committee recently initiated the first of an expected annual survey, which asks faculty to rate student performance for critical thinking and writing. The results of the survey and follow-up faculty discussion will be shared with the CCOC to inform about strengths and weaknesses of the Core courses and about teaching Core courses. In another approach based on a directive from the CU Board of Regents, general education performance in critical thinking and written communication is assessed through a standardized assessment known as the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP). It will be the responsibility of the CCOC to compare the results from the two measures of critical thinking and writing embedded in the UC Denver Core Curriculum.

UC Denver was one of thirteen universities that participated in the FIPSE-funded validity study in the Fall of 2008 to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the three main standardized assessments of undergraduate learning for use in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

The bulk of the UC Denver Core Curriculum courses is located in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). In each of the knowledge areas of core, CLAS has identified key general education outcomes and has designed assessments specific to those outcomes. This plan was piloted in Summer 2009 and undertaken on a large scale for the first time in Fall 2009. The plan and initial reports are available at http://thunder1.cudenver.edu/clas/faculty/assessment.html.

Under the Director of Assessment, UC Denver formed the General Education Assessment Advisory Committee for the Fall 2009 to provide oversight and recommendations on the various strategies for assessing student learning for general education outcomes and for using the information to advance teaching and learning in general education courses. During the 2008/2009 academic year, the University also analyzed the assessment practices related to the first-year experience and undergraduate learning, of which general education is a major component, in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) program. The Foundations of Excellence identified a number of useful and potentially valuable assessments of academic performance of first-year students at UC Denver, including: ACT/SAT scores, student remediation test results, mathematics and English placement testing, D/F/W/I non-completion rates, Early Alert, First-Year Seminar grades, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) data, Faculty Course Questionnaires (FCQs) data, and student summer orientation surveys. The FoE evaluation concluded that while some of the assessments, such as Early Alert, are put to effective use, other assessments, such as NSSE and FSSE data, add little to the understanding of the first-year experience and are poorly communicated between units of the University. The FoE assessment committee ranked overall ‘Assessment Uses’ as low.