Virtues of the Unified Core Curriculum

**Baylor College of Arts and Sciences**

The College of Arts and Sciences’ core curriculum enables students to “acquire the knowledge, skills, and virtues needed to uncover and recognize truth, to deepen their faith, to live virtuously, to strengthen their communities, and to affect the world in transformative ways.”¹ To that end, the core curriculum aims to “inspire moral, intellectual, and spiritual virtues.”²

Virtues are excellences of character that enable a person to live a life of well-being and happiness. Furthermore, virtues direct one’s actions because they allow one to love and desire what is true, good, and beautiful. There is a long history, from the relatively early medieval period to the present, of the university cultivating the intellectual and moral virtues through the Trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and then the Quadrivium (math, geometry, music, and astronomy) in a way that prepares the student for philosophy and theology, the spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and love being the subject of the latter. Within the Christian tradition, seven virtues—four cardinal and three theological—are understood as those from which all other virtues flow. The cardinal virtues—wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance—are those which can be fostered through diligent practice. The theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—are considered gifts, imparted through God’s grace, and are therefore exclusively spiritual virtues that cannot be generated or perfected solely by human effort.

Though the virtues are not necessarily acquired in any particular order and are inherently interdependent (one cannot be just without also being courageous), the following list of virtues from the unified core curriculum is ordered to mirror what historically has been understood to be the logical and pedagogical progression of virtue formation in the university, culminating in faith, hope, and love.

- **Humility**: Humility is the virtue of acknowledging one’s own limitations, of acknowledging one’s imperfections and ignorance, and of being willing to learn and grow. One cannot learn unless one has the strength and vulnerability to recognize that there is still much to learn. As Augustine says, humility is the foundation upon which all other virtues are built.

- **Courage**: Courage is the virtue of resolve and strength in the face of fear, pain, or the unknown. It is not heedless but rather cognizant of the challenge faced. It recognizes the vulnerability of humility and yet boldly embraces the difficulty of the rigor that lies ahead in pursuit of the good.

- **Rigor**: Rigor is the virtue of being exact and thorough in one’s thinking. Rigor provides an intellectually determined foundation and methodological approach to life that can then lead to right action.

- **Integrity**: Integrity is the virtue of thinking, believing, and acting in ways consistent with one’s convictions. Building on rigor, integrity takes the next step and names *how* meticulous and exacting thinking is enacted. That is, it names the unity of thinking and existing. As one moves through life, convictions will develop in

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¹ Baylor College of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision, p. 2.
² Ibid.
ways that are named more fully by the virtues listed below. Integrity simply recognizes the necessary alignment between thinking and living.

- **Respect**: Respect is the virtue of honoring the rights, perspectives, and situations of others. With this virtue, the corner is turned to acknowledging others. Respect is, at base, the acknowledgement or awareness of others. Often this is based in a kind of admiration (the recognition of something good in another), but it can also be simply an acknowledgement that requires civility or deference. In this way, civic engagement seeks to cultivate “mutually-respectful debate.”

- **Justice**: Justice is the virtue of actively rendering to each what belongs to him or her. Justice extends respect in a legal or calculated way. An ancient generalization of this is “giving each their due,” and it is predicated on an awareness that there are others and that they may have claims that one is responsible for.

- **Empathy**: Empathy is the virtue of being able to understand and imagine what another might be thinking, feeling, or doing. Following after justice and respect, empathy not only acknowledges the other and one’s legal obligations to the other but also begins to appreciate the full humanity of the other, to identify with the other, to begin to understand and feel what it is like to live as another.

- **Compassion**: Compassion is the virtue of being able to feel the suffering of another and be moved to right action as a result. Compassion is empathy applied rightly. As such, compassion is not limited to applying justice in a legal or calculable sense but may lead to action that others might consider supererogatory, action beyond the call of duty.

- **Responsibility**: Responsibility is the virtue of fulfilling one’s obligations to all that has been entrusted into one’s care. Responsibility assumes, first and foremost, that an individual is a moral agent and is therefore culpable for one’s actions. In this context, responsibility refers to more than merely fulfilling one’s legal or social duties; responsibility is the virtue of exhibiting integrity in a manner that fulfills and habituates all of one’s moral responsibilities.

- **Patience**: Patience is the virtue of forbearing in challenges or difficulties. Patience shows restraint and yet endurance, tolerance and yet persistence. It is the virtue of continuing and holding firm through difficulties and challenges.

- **Wisdom**: Wisdom is the virtue by which one grasps what is good most generally so that one may act accordingly in a particular situation. Wisdom is the virtue of drawing upon all of one’s experience and knowledge to determine what is best. Wisdom prudently seeks the truth and seeks to determine good and right action appropriate to one’s context.

- **Faith**: Faith is a theological or infused virtue. It is the virtue of believing the divine mysteries and truths that are revealed in the Scriptures and Christian tradition even as one seeks to understand them. It is, as Aquinas says, “a habit of the mind by which eternal life begins in us.”

- **Hope**: Hope is also a theological or infused virtue. It is the virtue of desiring and expecting goods or ends (both for oneself and for others) that are divinely ordered—ends that ultimately lead to God—even in the midst of circumstances in which optimism is not warranted.

- **Love**: Love is the third and greatest theological or infused virtue. It is the virtue of desiring and willing the good of the other (the neighbor) and giving oneself wholly to friendship with God. Love perfects, orients, and orders all the other virtues.