Assessment

UT Dallas Core Curriculum

UT Dallas requires that every student pursuing a baccalaureate degree, regardless of their major, complete a general education Core Curriculum of 42 semester credit hours (SCH). All core courses are assigned to a foundational component area, allowing students to easily identify core curriculum requirements. Additional information pertaining to the core curriculum can be found in UT Dallas’ undergraduate catalog.

Foundational Component Areas

• Communication (6 SCH)
• Mathematics (3 SCH)
• Life and Physical Sciences (6 SCH)
• Language, Philosophy and Culture (3 SCH)
• Creative Arts (3 SCH)
• American History (6 SCH)
• Government/Political Science (6 SCH)
• Social and Behavioral Sciences (3 SCH)
• Component Area Option (6 SCH)

Core Curriculum Assessment

In accordance with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), UT Dallas’ general education courses incorporate six component area objectives:

• Critical Thinking Skills—to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
• Communication Skills—to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
• Empirical and Quantitative Skills—to include the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions
• Teamwork—to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal
• Personal Responsibility—to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making
• Social Responsibility—to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

UT Dallas assesses the underlying skills associated with these objectives using measures embedded in an institution-level project called Comets to the Core.

Comets to the Core

Comets to the Core is a co-curricular project in which students work in interdisciplinary teams of 4 to propose a solution to a complex world problem. Students complete individual- and group-level assessments that are used to measure critical thinking, communication, empirical
and quantitative skills, teamwork, social responsibility, and personal responsibility.

1. Individual-level assessments include:
   • 1-to-2 page short essay on which area of focus—economic, environmental, health, political, or social—is most relevant to solving the problem
   • Responses to targeted questions on personal responsibility
   • Evaluation of team members’ contributions to the project
   • 1-to-2 paragraph written response on how individuals can affect positive change in their local, regional, or global communities

2. Group-level assessments include:
   • 3-to-5 minute video pitch to potential investors/grant review board
   • Group contract regarding roles and responsibilities for the project

A baseline measure is collected from all incoming first-time in college students during the first semester of their first year at UT Dallas. A second measure is obtained during students’ third year, when most students have completed their core curriculum\(^1\). Transfer students complete the project once, during their first semester at UT Dallas. Participation in the Comets to the Core project is a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. A committee of faculty and staff conduct rubric-based evaluations of a representative sample of student projects from both assessment periods (i.e., pre- and post-core curriculum). The results of these evaluations are compared to explore changes in students’ skill levels from their first year to their third year.

For additional information, please visit https://www.utdallas.edu/core.

1. It is common for students majoring in programs within the schools of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication, Engineering and Computer Sciences, and Natural Sciences and Mathematics to postpone some of their core courses until their junior and senior years. Therefore, some students will not have completed their core curriculum by their junior year, but will be very close to becoming core-complete.