A Plan to Implement the Silver Core Curriculum

Presented by the Core Curriculum Board. Effective Fall 2016.
Silver Vein I: Fundamental Practice

CO1. Effective Composition & Communication. Students will be able to compose written, oral, visual, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.

CO2. Quantitative Reasoning. Students will be able to apply quantitative reasoning and statistical analysis methodologies to understand and solve problems.

CO3. Critical Analysis & Use of Information. Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information. These skills will include the ability to 1) employ systematic methods to search for, collect, organize, and evaluate information, 2) critically evaluate the methods, context, findings, or arguments that produced that information, and 3) formulate conclusions based on their own analysis of the information.

Silver Vein II: Primary Areas of Focused Inquiry

CO4. Physical & Natural Phenomena. Students will be able to explain the processes by which the natural and physical worlds are investigated, articulate basic principles used to explain natural phenomena, and apply the scientific process to real problems using observational or experimental methods.

CO5. History & Culture. Students will be able to understand the processes by which past and present societies have been created and perpetuated through their history, ideas, and cultural products. Students will engage both historical and contemporary cultural texts through critical reading, analysis, and interpretation in the context of culture, society, and individual identity.

CO6. Cultures, Societies, & Individuals. Students will analyze social/human conditions by systematically studying individuals, groups, communities, and cultures. Students will interpret, model, observe, or experiment, as means of inquiring into human problems.

CO7. Artistic Composition, Interpretation, & Expression. Students will apply techniques of critical analysis to study and interpret works of art, dance, music, and theater in the context of culture, society, and individual identity. Students may also cast their interpretation in the form of creative expression.

CO8. Constitution. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the origins, history, and essential elements of the constitutions of the United States and Nevada as well as the evolution of American institutions and ideals.

Silver Vein III: Advanced Areas of Focused Inquiry

CO9. Science, Technology, & Society. Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by analyzing scientific data related to a problem of societal concern, be able to discriminate between sound and unsound interpretation of data, employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and evaluate the applications of science and technology in societal contexts.

CO10. Diversity & Equity. Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of contexts. Students will engage in modes of analysis attentive to considerations of diversity and equity.

CO11. Global Contexts. Students will apply modes of academic inquiry, creative expression, or results of research to problems in historical and contemporary global contexts. Students will understand the connections among local, national, and international contexts and evaluate the ways that historical and contemporary global influences affect their current local situations.

CO12. Ethics. Students will evaluate the ethical principles in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, consider how ethical principles might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of various actions.

Silver Vein IV: Integrative Experience

CO13. Integration & Synthesis. Students will be able to synthesize and transfer learning to new complex situations.

CO14. Application. Students will be able to apply knowledge in both focused and broad interdisciplinary contexts.
After an intensive three-year review, a campus-wide vote in Spring 2013, and several months of development by the Core Board, we now have a plan for implementing the Silver Core Curriculum. This document explains the objectives and structure of the implementation process to roll out the new Silver Core in Fall 2016.

The new Silver Core Curriculum will help enable the University of Nevada, Reno to respond to changes in its intellectual, social, and economic setting in the following ways:

• Streamlining the Core Curriculum to help students graduate on time with a consistent high-quality university education.
• Shifting the Core’s focus from static courses to dynamic skills and knowledge that our students will need to succeed in the real world.
• Creating more flexible paths for students to attain essential skills and knowledge.
• Respecting the expertise of individual degree programs in defining competency in institutionally-recognized skills and knowledge.
• Tracing a map from Core objectives to course offerings to student learning outcomes so we can articulate how students attain competency.
• Putting in place a regular, sustainable, and meaningful assessment cycle that will provide timely feedback on how the curriculum is working, allow us to intervene to keep the Core fresh, facilitate data-driven decision-making and problem-solving, and substantially simplify accreditation reporting.
• Clarifying and confirming the benefits of higher education for our students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Implementing the new Silver Core Curriculum will require a campus-wide effort. Over the next two years, members of the Core Board will engage with faculty from across campus in the cooperative efforts required to turn the promises of the Silver Core Curriculum into realities. Those efforts are detailed in the following pages.

The current Core Curriculum of the University of Nevada, Reno was introduced in 1989; other than the conversion of its Western Traditions courses to Core Humanities, little has changed since then. Following an external review that contained both praise and criticism for the Core, with particular concern for its static nature, a General Education Task Force was created in 2010 to review the Core Curriculum and devise new alternatives. Following two years of discussion and faculty forums, two alternatives were brought to the university faculty. With a campus-wide vote in Spring 2013, the university faculty chose the Silver Plan as the preferred way to update the Core Curriculum.

The new Silver Core Curriculum refines the existing Core in several ways. There are now 14 Silver Core Objectives representing competencies that every University of Nevada, Reno graduate must acquire. The minimum number of credits in the Core has been reduced, necessitating modifications in the core course requirements and creating a greater role for major programs in addressing the Silver Core Objectives. A new periodic review schedule will require all core courses to be verified, assessed, and re-verified on a regular basis to ensure they are meeting their designated objectives. This new Silver Core Curriculum will be implemented and managed by the Core Curriculum Board, which has been formally restructured as a body representing major units with undergraduate programs and reporting to the Executive Vice-President & Provost.

Like a silver mine that continues to follow precious ore into new leads, the new Silver Core Curriculum will continue to evolve as a result of ongoing assessment and verification. The implementation plan described herein represents a general framework for the Silver Core Curriculum and is not final. Like the Silver State itself, we expect it to keep changing to keep up with the times.

Silver Core Objectives

The Silver Plan begins with thirteen competencies that all University of Nevada, Reno graduates should have. The first five of these are competencies in skills in communication; quantitative reasoning; methods of inquiry; critical and creative thinking; and integration, synthesis, and application of knowledge. Students are also expected to graduate with knowledge in the arts, the humanities, natural sciences and technology, social sciences, diversity, globalization, ethical reasoning, and the U.S. and Nevada Constitutions.

To provide our students with these competencies, the Silver Core Curriculum mines 14 Silver Core Objectives, which we divide into four veins. In general, the Core Objectives in Silver Veins I and II will be addressed by the Core’s general education course requirements. These courses include those required by NSHE and align with those of other institutions in the system. The Core Objectives in Silver Veins III and IV are more specific to our
The Silver Core’s General Education Requirements

While the Silver Core Curriculum allows more flexibility for satisfying Core Objectives than the old core, students still have the following 24 minimum credits of specific general education course requirements:

- **Core Writing & Math (6 credits).** NSHE requires students to complete ENG 102 and at least three credits of an approved college math course. These two courses may require additional prerequisites, and majors may specify which college math course is most appropriate for their majors. These two courses will build foundations for the three objectives in Silver Vein I.

- **Core Natural Sciences (6 credits).** NSHE requires six credits of approved natural science courses, and for at least one course this must include a substantial laboratory experience. Technology courses that include study of the natural sciences may be considered. At minimum, these two courses will satisfy CO4 in Silver Vein II, while developing CO2 and CO3.

- **Core Social Science (3 credits).** The Core Social Science course will develop two of the three objectives in Silver Vein I, while satisfying CO6.

- **Core Fine Arts (3 credits).** The Core Fine Arts course will satisfy CO7.

- **Core Humanities (6 credits).** Two Core Humanities courses will satisfy CO5 while also developing both CO1 and CO3. CO8, the last objective in Silver Vein II, will need to be satisfied by one of the Core Humanities courses unless it is satisfied elsewhere.

In some cases, these courses may satisfy additional objectives in Silver Vein III. For example, a course in the Core Natural Science category may also satisfy CO9, or a Core Humanities course might also satisfy CO12.

Consistent with NSHE policy, students who transfer to the University with an associate degree from another NSHE institution will be assumed to have met the minimum requirements for the first eight Core Objectives in Silver Veins I and II. The university may have similar transfer agreements for other associate degree programs, while students who transfer in without the associate degree will generally be evaluated on a course-by-course basis.

- **Core Humanities (6 credits).** Two Core Humanities courses will satisfy CO5 while also developing both CO1 and CO3. CO8, the last objective in Silver Vein II, will need to be satisfied by one of the Core Humanities courses unless it is satisfied elsewhere.

Consistent with NSHE policy, students who transfer to the University with an associate degree from another NSHE institution will be assumed to have met the minimum requirements for the first eight Core Objectives in Silver Veins I and II. The university may have similar transfer agreements for other associate degree programs, while students who transfer in without the associate degree will generally be evaluated on a course-by-course basis.

- **Core Humanities (6 credits).** Two Core Humanities courses will satisfy CO5 while also developing both CO1 and CO3. CO8, the last objective in Silver Vein II, will need to be satisfied by one of the Core Humanities courses unless it is satisfied elsewhere.

Like courses that build a foundation in the Core Objectives of Silver Vein I, courses that satisfy the Core Objectives of Silver Veins II, III, or IV must ensure that a substantial amount of student effort is devoted to that objective, effort that is roughly commensurate with one student credit hour. Thus, core courses will each typically satisfy only one or two Core Objectives. Courses that develop a discipline-specific competency in a Core Objective do not have a minimum expectation of student effort or a maximum number of objectives that can be developed. Similarly, there is no limit to the number of objectives that the Core Capstone may integrate, as long as those objectives are assessed.

It is important to understand that the Silver Core Curriculum will not just be a set of courses that students must take before they begin their major studies. One key idea is that the Core Objectives tunnel through every undergraduate major in the university. Although some of the objectives in Silver Veins III and IV may be satisfied by courses within the Core’s general education requirements, academic units should also work to integrate them into students’ major programs.
Core Course Designations

Core courses are defined as those that either meet the Core’s general education requirements or satisfy one or more Core Objectives. Courses will be designated as addressing Core Objectives in four ways: (B) Builds Foundation, (D) Develops Competency, (I) Integrates Objective, and (S) Satisfies Objective.

Because of the amount of student effort required for either B or S designations, core courses will usually satisfy only one or two Core Objectives. If a course does little else, then a course might be able to satisfy a maximum of three Core Objectives. Courses with B or S designations must be verified by the Core Board.

Courses with D designations may address the designated Core Objectives in a variety of discipline-specific ways. There is no minimum time expectation and no maximum number of objectives that can be developed by a single course. These courses will not require verification, but will nonetheless be tracked and reported to encourage major programs to pay attention to the Silver Core Objectives.

To satisfy CO13, the Core Capstone must also integrate other Core Objectives, including at least two of the three objectives in Silver Vein I and at least one additional objective from Silver Veins II and III. The Core Capstone may also satisfy CO14 and up to one additional objective. Assessment will be required as necessary to the integration of any Core Objectives.

Verification and Assessment of Core Courses

Regular and continuous assessment will be a hallmark of the new Silver Core Curriculum. Gone will be the days when courses, once approved for core status, would remain part of the core forever. Instead, we expect that the timbers and the cross-beams of the Silver core will be shored up or replaced when necessary, and that even the Core Objectives and core course requirements will be able to follow rich new leads.

The Core Board’s verification of core courses will be centered on course-based assessment of measurable Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The university’s standards for syllabi already require all courses to have clear SLOs. For the Silver Core Curriculum, the university will now require that each core course have at least one SLO that drills down into the Core Objective. The Core Board will suggest SLOs appropriate to each Silver Core Objective, but the choices of which SLOs are most appropriate will ultimately rest with the faculty responsible for the courses in each major.

Once the faculty have adopted or developed SLOs for their core courses and included them in their syllabi, faculty will need to determine how best to directly assess whether students are acquiring the knowledge and skills described in the SLOs. The Core Board will suggest assessment methods appropriate to each Core Objective, but direct assessment of student learning (including methods, schedule, collection, analysis, and action) will remain the responsibility of the major units, departments, and faculty. The Provost’s Office will also collect indirect assessment measures of student learning, including student evaluations and alumni surveys, and share this with the faculty as appropriate for their courses.

We can best understand assessment as a data-driven faculty discussion on how to improve courses and ensure that students are acquiring competencies that are identified in the SLOs. A university’s institutional inertia and its many competing goals can sometimes make this continual improvement seem less important. However, most faculty should agree that curricula need to be updated periodically and that revisions should be guided by evidence. Our students should graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for professional success and the broad foundation and critical thinking skills needed to be good citizens and informed voters. Different sections of the same course should deliver comparable learning outcomes. Our majors and programs should be comparable to those of other peer and aspirant universities and meet the national and international standards of disciplinary fields.

The Core Board will begin in Fall 2015 with a five-year periodic cycle. Each core course will be re-verified during the first three years of the cycle. In the fourth year, the Core Board will review how each major satisfies the Silver Core Objectives. In the fifth year of the cycle, the Silver Core Curriculum will itself be reviewed. The cycle will then begin again, and we expect that the Core Curriculum will dynamically evolve and improve as a result of this continuous assessment.

For the first cycle, we propose the following schedule:

| 2015-16 | a) Core Writing and Humanities.  
|         | b) Capstone courses and Core Objectives 13 and 14. |
| 2016-17 | a) Core Math and Natural Science.  
|         | b) Core Objectives 8 and 10. |
| 2017-18 | a) Core Social Science and Fine Arts.  
|         | b) Core Objectives 9, 11, and 12. |
| 2018-19 | Review of major program reports on Core Objectives. |

In periodically re-verifying core courses, the Core Board will review course syllabi and the departments’ direct assessment reports, as well as any indirect measures the Provost’s office collects. When there are concerns about courses that may prevent re-verification, departments will be given assistance, advice, and time to correct any problems. Ultimately, however, courses that are not re-verified will not remain part of the Silver Core Curriculum. It is the intent of the Core Board that the assessment and verification process will be transparent, and the results made available to the faculty, the university’s accreditors, and the public.
Transition to the New Curriculum

The Silver Core Curriculum will be in effect for all majors and all undergraduate students beginning Fall 2016. It will apply to freshmen who enter in 2016 as well as prior students who choose a Catalog Year of 2016 or later. Much work needs to be done to ensure a smooth transition to the new Core.

- Refining Silver Core Objectives. In Spring 2014, the Core Board will prepare and refine the standards for the general education requirements as well as for each of the 14 Silver Core Objectives. These standards will include all expectations, suggested SLOs, and suggested methods of assessment. In addition, models and examples will be made available for use.

- Silver Curriculum Maps for each Major. In Spring 2014, the faculty responsible for each undergraduate major will be asked to complete a curriculum map, using a template prepared by the Provost’s Office. These maps will help us to find existing courses that may meet particular Core Objectives and identify gaps in each major’s curriculum, gaps that may need to be filled by redesigning courses either inside or outside the major. These maps will also provide the structure for updating each major’s catalog description. Curriculum maps will be reviewed by the Provost’s Office and feedback will be given to both deans and departments.

- Fast-track Course Verification. Beginning in Fall 2014, courses that are already approved for core status under the current Core will need to be submitted for Core Board verification. This clear, fast-track process will only check for an SLO in the syllabus that relates to each of the relevant Silver Core Objectives and ask for a general description of how the course outcomes are likely to be assessed. This process will utilize the new Curriculog software that the university has purchased, to ensure accurate tracking and prompt verification of each submitted course.

- New Core Course Verification. Beginning in Fall 2014, departments may submit to the Core Board existing courses that have not been part of the current core but that may meet new Silver Core Objectives. In addition to the expectations for fast-track verification, the syllabi and course descriptions will be reviewed by the Core Board for adherence to the available written standards. Courses already verified for one CO may also be submitted for verification of additional COs in this phase.

- New and Modified Courses. Beginning in Fall 2014, courses that have been created or substantially modified to meet Silver Core Objectives will be reviewed. These new courses will go through the normal curricular approval process, in addition to the process for new core course verification. The University Courses & Curriculum Committee (UCCC) will also use the Curriculog software so that the Core Board’s role in verification can more easily be incorporated.

- Developing Designations. Beginning in Fall 2015, departments may wish to designate courses that develop Silver Core Objectives. For example, many departments should work on courses in their majors that enhance students’ writing skills within the discipline, and these could then be assigned D designations for CO1. At least for the first assessment cycle, these designations will not require verification by the Core Board, assessment, or periodic re-verification. However, they should still have SLOs that relate to each relevant Core Objective. While there is no minimum requirement, these designated courses will be tracked and reported for each major during the fourth year of the Silver Core’s assessment cycle.

- New Catalog Descriptions. Once their Silver Curriculum Maps have been reviewed by the Provost’s Office, major programs will need to submit new catalog descriptions that adjust for the changes in the general education requirements, the changes to the core capstone requirement, and any changes to the college or major requirements to ensure that the Core Objectives will be satisfied. These new catalog descriptions must be completed by Fall 2015, in time for inclusion in the 2016 Catalog. Approval of these catalog descriptions by the UCCC may be contingent on the approval of new courses or the verification of core course status by the Core Board.

- New Reporting and Degree Audits. In order to ensure that every major incorporates the new Silver Core Curriculum and every student receives the skills and knowledge that the university expects by the time of graduation, the Provost’s Office will work with Admissions & Records to develop new reports that will be used to determine whether students graduating in every major are meeting Core Objectives. While this degree audit information will also be available to students, it will be the responsibility of every major to ensure their course requirements are meeting the Core Objectives.

Revised and Approved by the Core Curriculum Board on January 13, 2014
Approved by the Executive Vice-President & Provost on January 14, 2014
GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE MEMBERS • 2010-13

Diane Barone  Larry Engstrom  Ted Oleson
Kate Berry  Brian Frost  Chris Pritsos
Rod Case  Chris Herald  Kathy Ray
Jacob Camp  Guy Hoelzer  Elizabeth Raymond
Joe Cline  Mary Hylton  Tamara Scronce
Nora Constantino  Jeff Lacombe  Casey Stitel
Robert Delcarlo  William Macauley  Ziad Rashdan
Jane Detweiler  Rosemary McCarthy  ASUN
Dennis Dworkin  Scott Mensing  Danielle Swanson
Louis Niebur  Shane Templeton

THE CORE CURRICULUM BOARD • 2013-14

Danelle Clarke, Math Center  Maureen Cronin, Student Services
Greta de Jong, Core Humanities  Jane Detweiler, CLA
Chris Herald, Core Mathematics  Susan Lentz, Faculty Senate
William Macauley, Writing Center  Johnson Makoba, CLA
Elliott Parker, Core Director  Ziad Rashdan, ASUN
Maggie Ressel, Libraries  Melodi Rodrigue, Science
David Shintani, CABNR  Paul Torkelson, CLA
Lynda Walsh, Core Writing  Eric Wang, Engineering