# EXPLORING UCHICAGO COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY IN THE CORE CURRICULUM

# Introduction

***Intro music***

**Faith**

Hello, hello. My name is Faith.

**Shuo**

Hello, I am Shuo.

**Faith**

We are sociology students at the University of Chicago. Thank you for joining us today! If you’ve found us through the UChicago voices site, then you might have read that this project is part of our Sociology of Higher Education class taught by Dr. Lara Janson here at UChicago. For all of you aspiring sociology students out there, or even any students interested in the sociological workings of higher education in the US, definitely check it out.

Alright, back to the project. As the title hints, we’re going to be talking about inclusivity within UChicago’s very own Core Curriculum. Specifically, we’ll be focusing on racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusivity. So, why inclusivity, and why the Core Curriculum? Well as you may or may not know, there’s already been a ton of research about the benefits of having an inclusive curriculum. These benefits come in both academic and social forms. Academically speaking, employing an inclusive curriculum has been shown to help improve students’ critical thinking skills and enhance student engagement, as shown by Scott et. al. in the article“Integrating Race, Class, Gen- Der, and Sexual Orientation into the College Curriculum,” published in the journal *Multicultural Prism: Voices from the Field* in 1994. From a social perspective, inclusive curriculums are known to help decrease ethnocentrism and create cultural bridges between students from different backgrounds, as shown by McPhee et. al. in the article “Infusing a Diversity Perspective into Human Development Courses,” published in the journal *Child Development* in 1994. This is where the Core comes in. Shuo, take it away.

**Shuo**

Yes, so UChicago’s Core Curriculum is very interesting as a concept. UChicago is actually one of the few American universities that still uses a Core Curriculum. Now in case you haven’t gone through the University’s course catalog lately, here’s a little reminder. The University defines the Core Curriculum as a series of required coursework designed “to raise fundamental questions and to encourage those habits of mind and those critical, analytical, and writing skills that are most urgent to be a well-informed member of civil society.” So the Core, in essence, is designed to provide students with the fundamentals of thinking and engaging with big, important ideas. And, as anyone who’s part of the University community knows, the Core is kind of a rite of passage, a shared experience. So, whether you’re an econ or bio major, you have this shared experience learning the so called fundamentals. This is especially true of the HUMA and SOSC sequences, and we’ll get into that more a little later.

But when considering how the Core Curriculum may be impacting students, we also find it useful to also look to Hollins’ conceptualization of curriculum. In her book, *Transforming Curriculum for A Culturally Diverse Society*, published in 2013, she writes, “The school curriculum legitimizes the knowledge, perspective, values, and interactions and relationships between people and institutions”. In this way, a university’s curriculum both reflects its own worldview and serves as a vehicle for fostering that same worldview in students. When you combine these aspects: mandatory coursework that serves as a foundational learning experience to create well-reasoned and well-informed students, questions about racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusivity become more important. A bio major, for example, may choose to never interact with humanities or social sciences - and the big questions that come with them - ever again in their academic careers, but they WILL have gone through the Core.

These two conceptions of the role of curriculum, one from the University and one from Hollins, cover the two branches of the benefits of an inclusive curriculum that have been documented by researchers like McPhee and Scott.

**Faith**

Yes, so with all that in mind we hypothesized that, considering the unique circumstances of UChicago’s Core Curriculum, how instructors (and by instructors, we mean professors and administrators, since they are both involved in course creation and implementation) and students perceive the aims of Core may influence their perceptions of the role of inclusivity within it and the extent to which that role is being fulfilled. Thus, our project approaches the topic of inclusivity in the Core from two directions: theory and practice. First with regard to theory, we ask: what do UChicago instructors, and students believe to be the aims of the Core Curriculum, and what role do they think cultural inclusivity plays in it? Then with regard to practice, we ask: How do UChicago instructors and students perceive the actual state of cultural inclusivity in the Core as a result of the theory?

To answer these questions, we’ve gathered perspectives from administrators, professors, and students about racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusivity in the HUMA and SOSC Core sequences through interviews and surveys. In this podcast, we’ll be sharing some of the perspectives that were shared with us with the hope of providing insights that may help bridge the gap between instructors’ and students’ understanding of inclusivity in the Core as the university continues to take steps to increase inclusivity in the Core sequence curriculums.

***Musical interlude***

# Methods and Definitions

**Shuo**

Now that we’ve given a short introduction, we’d like to share some more details about our methodology. For all of our data, we focussed on HUMA and SOSC classes because racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is most closely relevant to those sequences as compared to the natural sciences, mathematics, or even civilizations since each sequence focuses on a single culture. Also, as Faith mentioned earlier, we gathered qualitative data from administrators, professors, and students in the form of interviews and surveys where we asked some of the questions we’ll be getting into shortly. Although the questions were not exactly the same for each group, the questions were thematically linked so meaningful comparison can still be drawn.

In total, we interviewed one HUMA administrator, two HUMA professors, one SOSC professor, and three students currently enrolled in HUMA and/or SOSC sequences. The interviews, conducted and recorded via zoom typically ran between 30 and 50 minutes. The survey had a total of 26 questions and were a mix of Likert scale (the ones where you present a statement and have the participant rate how much they do or do not agree with it) and short answer questions. We received 31 responses to our student survey. With this in mind, I just want to make it clear that we’re not trying to produce generalizable data. The sample sizes of each set of perspectives are not large enough, and the data was skewed demographically. As Faith mentioned before, what we are aiming to do instead is to emphasize some of the interesting themes and perspectives we found in our qualitative data.

**Faith**

Before we move on, I also want to clarify what we mean by curriculum, since the definition is pretty important for understanding the bounds of the project. When we refer to curriculum in this podcast, we’re talking both about the syllabus of a course as well as the execution of that syllabus. After all, the benefits of having an inclusive syllabus can’t be fully realized if that syllabus is not taught in such a way that students truly understand the texts and their respective historical and cultural contexts. This is a conception we came up with on our own.

 Now that that’s covered, we’re just about ready to dive into the responses. Just to make things a little bit clearer, I will be talking about the perspectives of professors and administrators, and Shuo will be talking about the perspectives of students. Now let’s get to it!

***Musical interlude***

# Questions Related to Theory

**Faith**

Let’s start with the perspectives on theory. These questions addressed what instructors (again, this includes administrators and professors) and students see to be the role of the Core Curriculum, specifically the HUMA and SOSC sequences, as well as what they see to be the role of inclusivity in that context.

## Question 1: Aims of the Core and the Sequences Within

**Faith**

 Here’s the first question: What are the aims of UChicago’s HUMA and/or SOSC Core, and how do the specific sequences involved address those aims?

### Professor's view on Aims of the Core

**Faith**

 Before I get into the perspectives of the administrators and professors, I want to introduce them briefly so you have a better idea of where they’re coming from. First I will introduce the administrators and professors associated with the HUMA core. First up is Dr. Valerie Levan. She is currently the Humanities Core Teaching Coordinator, which means she plays a large role in determining how the humanities core sequences are taught. For the purpose of this interview, however, she’s said that she is only representing herself and not the College. Dr. Levan currently teaches Reading Cultures (she has now for eight years) and has also taught Readings in World Literature.

 Next is another Reading Cultures professor who wishes to remain anonymous. We will be referring to them as the Anon Prof. Pretty unoriginal, I know, but it gets the point across. Aside from Reading Cultures, they have also taught Poetry and the Human as well as Language and the Human.

 Finally is an administrator who also wishes to remain anonymous. We will be referring to them as, you guessed it, the Anon Admin.

 Now I will move onto SOSC and introduce the last member of this group. Dr. Marco Garrido is an assistant professor of Sociology who also teaches Self, Culture and Society. He has taught the fall quarter of the sequence for seven years.

**Faith**

 And now for the perspectives. Not unexpectedly, we found that the administrator and professors we interviewed had pretty similar conceptions of the purpose of the HUMA and SOSC cores. This view is perhaps best expressed by the Anon Admin, who said the following of the HUMA core:

“*I think that the humanities and the social sciences core are the purist incarnations, or embodiments of the UChicago core curriculum and its goals…[the humanities core] is not preparatory of a particular major or of any humanities major, but it's supposed to be a broad introduction to some of the issues, the questions, the problems that the humanities, and the disciplines in the humanities, deal with. We're particularly skilled in the humanities to teach... close and critical reading, you know, compelling and clear writing. And just also in general, critical thinking. So what the humanities core does and the social sciences core very much also does is not so much teach students WHAT to think, but HOW to think. And so I would say, in the broadest sense, the way that the humanities core does that is by engaging students with texts of great complexity, enduring significance.*”

Now, the Anon Admin was talking about the HUMA core for most of that, but I believe that their description applies just as well to the SOSC core. The phrase, “teach students not WHAT to think, but HOW to think,” is one we’ve heard a lot through this study, both from professors and students.

 Another theme that came up was the experience of encountering new material and growing from it, or getting rid of preexisting stereotypes. As Dr. Garrido explains, this applies not only to material that is completely new to you, but also to material that you may think you already know a lot about. Here’s a clip from our interview with him.

**Dr. Garrido**

 *There are a lot of simple answers. It's easy to conjure up stereotypes of Marx also of Adam Smith. But the point really, is to look beyond the stereotypes, to look at the reading, look at the text and what they're actually saying, to try to understand. What's at stake and to put it in the context of when the people when both Marx and Smith were writing for instance.*

### Student’s view on Aims of the Core

**Shuo**

 The student perspectives regarding the aims of the Core are actually pretty similar to those of the administrator and professors, but with a twist. The twist is, students often see the Core not only as a class about learning to read, write, or think, but also as a precious opportunity to know the bigger world, to meet other cultures and civilizations, and to learn the humans and humanities from different space and time. This we inferred from their responses to our question about the role of inclusivity in the Core, which we will address next.

## Question 2: The role of inclusivity

***Musical lead in***

**Faith**

 Here’s the second question: What role does inclusivity play in your course/core sequence?

### Professor's view on the role of inclusivity

**Faith**

So once again, I’m here to talk about the perspectives of the administrator and professors. Among those we interviewed, there was a general sense that inclusivity is important for the courses described. However, the professors and administrator were focused on fostering inclusivity as an academic tool.

Dr. Levan actually shared something pretty fascinating about how students of different backgrounds are impacted by diverse texts. Here’s the clip:

**Dr. Levan**

*I'm more of the, of the school that thinks that diversity in terms of like, representation is important. Like, I do want texts from a bunch of different literary traditions. They don't always, you know, what's interesting about that is that they don't always impact students in a in the way that kind of identity politics perspective, would have us predict where it's not always the students who may, you know, in terms of their like ethnic or racial identity, identify with the racial or ethnic identity of a particular author, who are kind of most impacted by that text. So it's not as if we, you know, sort of put things on the syllabus for particular people.*

*But I do think that having like a diversity of voices in the syllabus, especially with reading cultures, where you're looking at an issue, like collection, or travel, and things like that, you can see like, how do a number of different people approach this, and it just shows that there's not you know, one perspective and in a way, it kind of models for us what we should be doing in the classroom and also working with different views to come out of it at the end, not with you know, Valerie, the band, section six reading cultures perspective on a particular topic, but like, each with our own defensible readings of the text, you know, that we might not share, but that are informed by knowing that we've tested them against those of others in the classroom.*

**Faith**

So in this case, the purpose of inclusivity in the curriculum is not necessarily to address the needs of certain people, but rather to model for students how to engage with different perspectives in the classroom.

**Faith**

The Anon Admin, too, emphasized the importance of inclusivity to pedagogy but also maintained that inclusivity can be developed just as well by creating an inclusive syllabus as by creating an inclusive classroom environment. They said:

“*There's various ways to do this. One is is to look at the syllabus and say, are texts included that resonate with students? And that's obviously important, but there are also limits to that. So another way to think about it is that, to think about really the classroom as an inclusive space, that, you know, that is welcoming, and that allows students from, you know, a very diverse set of backgrounds.*”

This mindset comes into play when you consider HUMA courses such as Greece and Rome: Texts, Traditions, Transformations, which by nature will only cover texts from a certain region. In this kind of situation, they say, you can bring the texts closer to the student by, for example, including an adaptation of a Greek tragedy that engages more directly with contemporary issues. According to the Admin:

“*What we need to also make sure is, is that a student who is not conversant, so to say, with a kind of Eurocentric Western Canon and culture still feels that this is a course that is inclusive, in which they have a place and where they can engage, in this case, maybe with a culture not of their own, and to engage with issues that are they theirs in a productive way*.”

**Faith**

Last but not least, Dr. Garrido maintained that for self - and by extension, sociology - inclusivity is necessary to complete the story we’re trying to tell. Here’s the clip:

**Dr. Garrido**

*I think I think I think socio on the one hand, I think sociology needs to be much more global, it needs to take into account global perspectives. At the same time, I also think that the processes that sociology, the major processes that sociology observes the transformation into a market society, right, the development of capitalism, these are indeed global processes. And so there are differences, of course, between what's happening in Phnom Penh, what happened in Manila in the mid 20th century, and what happened in, in England, you know, in the 18th, and 19th century. At the same time, there are incredible similarities in the transformation into a market society. And so I think, while it's important to keep historically what's happening in mind, it's also important to understand that we don't live in separate worlds with different separate processes. We live in one world with a set of processes that are unfolding that encompass all of us.*

*And I look forward to the day when sociology will kind of regain that more global sense. And I worry that it's much more narrow focuses on the stories of this group, or that group or that group, and actually prevent us from seeing the fact that we're all in the same. We all occupy the same world, are subject to the same forces in sociology can give us a sense of how to make sense of these forces. So, so I think framing it simply in that term is too narrow. I do think there's a big story. But that's not. That doesn't mean that we don't take into account cultural differences. In fact, quite the opposite. What it means is you need to understand not just what happened in England, but what's happening in Phnom Penh right now and what happened in in Manila in the 20th century, and to understand how these stories tie in together, how they converge, how they diverge, I think that's what's important. So it's not just about including this group, or that group. The big story includes everyone.*

*But you need to tell it from this from the from the perspective of people in different parts of the world, not just you know... there's a way in which the kind of canonicity framework ends up reproducing a kind of a US centric, kind of American centric way of thinking about things because it is a US centric way of thinking about things. In Phnom Penh it's incredible transformation into a market society in increasing rates of landlessness. I mean, it's just like reading Marx, right? It's incredible the kind of transformations that are happening right now. At the same time, it's also different, it's taking place in the context of climate change, staking, so that means floods, droughts, all these kinds of things. And it's taking place in a context in which the world is different economically and politically, post Cold War, you know, that's also different from Manila. But at the same time, a lot of the processes are similar, so to kind of understand what these are and how they encompass everybody, but also to understand what it means for the farmer in you know, a village outside been up and how that village is changing utterly. How they're losing their land now have to go work in the city and they end up squatting.*

*Right, in some ways, we've seen these stories before, but we haven't seen it quite like this, you know, so it's both new and different. And so it's exciting. And it's, it's- inclusive, it's the wrong word because it has to- you have to kind of we need more people studying these places. Right, rather than, you know, there are a lot of people who kind of you know, it's like curlicues, I think about it, you know, that they're, they're so focused on just what's happening in here, in the United States. But this isn't the extent of our world, the world is big, right? So it's really important to understand how what's happening experiences, what it feels like, what it, you know, these other, and, it's part of the same story, I firmly believe that. So it's not a trade off, I don't say, I think it's the same thing. I think the big story is the more inclusive one. And it's inclusive is the wrong word, it has to encompass the world. That's the only way we become global, you have to stop kind of spinning off variations of our American stories. But understanding what the stories are in different parts of the world and understanding how they, how they kind of construct a bigger story.*

**Faith**

 So what we’ve found from all of these responses is a conception of inclusivity that is pedagogically focused. The point of inclusivity, in this conception, is to create a learning environment where instructors and learners feel engaged with the material, and the concepts are comprehensive in scope. Thus, it doesn’t matter too much whether this environment manifests through an inclusive syllabus or through inclusive teaching methods, so long as the environment is created. No one can say it better than the Anon Admin. They said,

“*Questions of diversity and inclusion are actually really central to keeping core sequences vibrant, and attractive to faculty to teach as well as for students. So for me, these questions are not just something that are important because the current social and political and cultural moment calls for them, but because it's good pedagogy, and it means that these these students will be excited about and will learn something, and faculty want to teach them and are able to engage their students, productively and critically.*”

**Faith**

Now let us hear what students’ say about the role of inclusivity in the Core Curriculum.

### Students’ view on the role of inclusivity

**Shuo**

From students’ responses to our interview questions and surveys, we learned that besides the academic concern, they also view inclusivity as a very important component of the Core because they believe the Core has to fulfil a certain kind of social responsibility. For example, Jiayi, an international student from China, thinks that the representation of students’ culture is important during the class discussion.

**Jiayi**

*I feel like it's sort of like a boost of like confidence almost to have like yourself represented in a text that you're discussing, in the sense that like, if, if it makes you feel less alienated, and like, because if the course is designed around, including all these different cultures, that it naturally just feels it makes you feel like you're in a more inclusive environment, where you're able to, like, speak about things that you may be more familiar with, as well as things that people like you're less familiar because then it's almost like you have like, everyone has the same treatment almost, if that makes sense. And I feel like just from that, it, it. It almost represents like, I'm including the different students within discussion.*

**Shuo**

This perspective is particularly interesting to us since it points out a different role of inclusivity: one that is not about pedagogy as most of the professors have argued for. In our interview with the Director for Inclusive Teaching. Dr. Richardson, we also learned a similar perspective from a black female student. She used her own experience to theorize the importance of inclusivity in terms of cultural representation. Let us hear her opinion on the diversity in reading list:

**Dr. Richardson**

*Yeah, I'm reading lists could should be diversified. Absolutely should, if I mean, it has impact on every single student, not just students of color, or international students, because what ends up happening is at the University of Chicago is a very intellectual place. This is where you are introduced to the idea, you're introduced to the fact that people have developed ideas about the way the world works. And if the all the people you're reading about are white men who are all dead, then you believe that, you know, I come into a classroom as a black woman, and I have no value. Because when you haven't read my history, you believe my history started with enslavement. And of course, it didn't. And it looks a certain way, you also don't believe I ever produced any good ideas, you know, because you haven't read any of those ideas. So it impacts me in terms of what I believe about myself, but it also impacts you about what you believe about me. So it you know, it impacts the whole cycle of things and what we value. So I do believe it should be diversified.*

**Shuo**

We also received responses from the students who think it is understandable to have less inclusive syllabus due to pedagogical reasons. Some students said that they consider the SOSC courses are introductory courses for the specific study of western society, so they would think it is okay to have a less inclusive syllabus for SOSC than for the HUMA courses. Let’s hear what she said:

**Jiayi**

*I, myself, I am personally like, I'm accepting of the syllabus, because I, like I knew that was what I was going into. And that's also an area of my interest. So I personally, I'm okay with the fact that it's on focus, and we go deeply into this one particular area. But then I feel like I wouldn't, I don't really even know what it would be like to have a culturally diverse set of readings, because I have never been in a course like that. And I think that just goes to show like the type of bias that there exists in courses like this, where it's not representative of different areas. Well, I think your point about supplementary readings, I think that would be actually a pretty good idea, in the sense that like, even if the ideas all come from a specific place in time, I think it will be very interesting and helpful to be able to understand it in multiple contexts in a variety of contexts around the world. But yeah, for me, personally, I'm, I'm okay with the syllabus, because, like, because that's my topic, like area of interest. But then I feel like for students as a whole, if someone wanted to learn about other, like other ideas from other places, they wouldn't be able to do so in empower so far, at least.*

**Shuo**

We have two major takeaways from the students’ perspective. First, it is essential for the students to understand the scope of the course so that they could better prepare to engage with unfamiliar topics. Secondly, we see different perceptions of the Core. The students may consider the social science Core sequence as an introductory to specific study of western society. While we totally understand this impression and the students did nothing wrong, the College might need to reconsider whether it is the message that the Core intends to deliver. A quote from the College website indicates its conception of the role of the Core. It said and I quote:

“*Chicago’s distinctive Core curriculum provides all students with a challenging, common academic foundation before they begin courses specific to their fields of study*.”

As we can see, the Core are not designed to introduce the students to specific studies. Then, why would the students above have such an impression about the SOSC courses is the question for the College. When we shared this quote with Jiayi and asked her whether she would consider cultural inclusivity to be more important to SOSC syllabi in this context, this is what she had to say:

**Jiayi**

*I think it's equally important as well for social because like, it's like, understanding society is as broad term as like, understanding human experience. Right? So I think it should be on the same level in terms of the helpfulness of having a variety of like, cultures places represented.*

**Shuo**

When exploring the importance of inclusivity in the syllabus and the inclusivity in the classroom, we heard a lot of responses from the professors saying that, with inclusive pedagogy, they could have an inclusive discussion on any texts. Let us first put aside the discussion of the actual percentage of professors who learn and practice inclusive pedagogy. Do students really think inclusive pedagogy can make up for the lack of inclusivity in the syllabus? One of the answers from the students said no. Here is what they said:

“*UChicago is a PWI [primarily white institution] and it is like a school that is like, very like dominated by like white people who have come from upper middle class backgrounds. I think especially in that kind of that kind of environment, it's important that they hear that if they're not listening to the experiences that their classmates who are lower income or people of color are like really going through, [if they’re] not listening to them, I think having works that talk about the experiences of black and brown people at the very least, on an academic level and on an intellectual level, they have to engage with that if they want to have like a good grade in the class. So I think it's really important that, especially this kind of environment, that those books are front and center.”*

**Shuo**

 So as you can see, there was a slight mismatch between instructors and students about the role of inclusivity in the Core Curriculum, specifically in the HUMA and SOSC curriculums. Instructors tend to have a more pedagogical focus, while students tend to emphasize the social role of inclusivity just as much. For such students, it isn’t enough for classrooms to be inclusive; the curriculum, particularly the syllabus, has to be culturally representative in order to achieve those social goals.

**Shuo**

Now that we’ve covered the perspectives on theory, let’s move on to perspectives on practice.

***Musical interlude***

# Questions Related to Practice

**Faith**

Moving onto questions about practice, these questions addressed how instructors and students perceive the current state of cultural inclusivity in the HUMA and SOSC Core sequences. For instructors, we focused on the process of creating courses and the steps being taken to increase inclusivity. For students, we focused on their evaluation of inclusivity in the Core classes they took this fall.

## The professor experience

**Faith**

 We’ll start with the Instructor experience.

### Question 1: Course creation and alteration

**Faith**

 Here’s the first question we had for the instructors: How are courses created/altered, and what factors come into play during this process?

**Faith**

From our interviews with instructors, we got to learn a lot about what it takes to introduce or alter a core sequence course. Spoiler alert: it takes quite a lot!

The main takeaway we got is that the process is very professor-driven. In both the HUMA and SOSC departments a Core Chair, the person who’s in charge of each particular sequence be it Reading Cultures or Self, makes the final big decisions and may act as a coordinator between professors. But the professors of each sequence (aside from having a degree of flexibility with regard to syllabus within their own classrooms) come together as necessary to discuss possible changes to the fundamental parts of the sequence syllabus. These discussions and debates can take months, during which professors brainstorm and collectively read the proposed texts together to come up with suggestions to bring to the Core Chair.

**Faith**

As for the factors involved, a lot of it has to do with professors’ sense of the academic “usefulness” of a text or pedagogical approach. According to the Anon Prof, “a lot of the discussion is: does it reflect what we think, you know, the range of things that we would like our students to encounter in a class like this at the juncture in history that we're at.” So there’s an element of figuring out the purpose of the course, as well as a sense that this purpose changes or is embellished by the events happening in the background of the class. This element of change over time is where the movement toward inclusivity comes in, which I will discuss more later.

We also asked the instructors about the role of student feedback in conversations about making decisions about course changes. Here’s Dr. Levan again with her answer to this question:

**Dr. Levan**

*So yeah, we do take feedback from students. And that's always the part of discussions when we decide to change the curriculum, you know, people will talk about how students love certain work. That honestly is usually like a less persuasive argument. What is really a good persuasive argument is when people can say like, students have really amazing discussions about this text.*

**Faith**

So again, professors seem to have a sense of what texts work and don’t work in a class, and what is most important is that the students have a great pedagogical experience through discussion about the text.

### Question 2: Changes in pursuit of inclusivity

***Musical lead in***

**Faith**

 For our second instructor question, we asked: What changes have been made or are being made to the HUMA and SOSC Core courses in recent years to make them more inclusive?

**Faith**

We got a lot of responses about this, especially from our HUMA instructors, as the HUMA sequences seem to undergo a lot more changes in general. Some prominent examples include the addition of Reading Cultures and Poetry and the Human to the HUMA Core sequence options, as well as the addition of Global Society to the SOSC Core sequence options. These courses, as their names suggest, were specifically designed to be more globally oriented both in terms of the syllabus and the focus of the course themes.

I personally took reading cultures for this reason two years ago, and I found myself to have really enjoyed the course. As promised, we read a very diverse set of texts and focused on topics such as the influence of translation on someone’s understanding of text, the impact travelers have on the places they travel to, etc. Expanding on the latter example, we started winter quarter by reading the *Odyssey*, which is an Ancient Greek epic about the “hero’s journey” of a conquering warrior King during his perilous journey home from war, and talked about how some of the things he did that were glorified were actually pretty terrible. Later in the quarter, we read *A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid, where she addressed the impact of colonialism on her home country, Antigua, and talked about how the people of Antigua are affected by neo-colonialism in the form of tourism today. Dr. Levan shared with us a potential change that they’re considering making in the future regarding these texts. Here’s the clip:

**Dr. Levan**

*I think we might, we were talking about starting with that, rather than starting with the Odyssey. So like, starting with a small place, and then having that frame the whole quarter, and then doing the Odyssey. So that's another way that I guess we're thinking about trying to increase, increase the inclusivity of the course. Because there's really no reason I mean, we have just done things in chronological order, because that seems like the way you should do things. But one of our ideas is like, well, what happens if you let you make a Kincaid sort of speak to students first, like how does that reshape them? The way that we see the whole quarter? And does it make it easier to look at, you know, a deceased, for example, is like a protocol inist when he goes and looks at the Cyclops cave and is like, wow, this would be a really great place to settle too bad. They're barbarians, you know, and just kind of like seeing that in a, you know, kind of long line of thinking about others in the world*.

**Faith**

Language and the Human has recently undergone a change in focus, according to the Anon Prof. Sort of in line with what Jiayi said about potentially making SOSC courses less like intros to specific social sciences and more like general fundamentals courses, the change aimed to make Language and the Human less like an intro to linguistics course and more aligned with the humanities core aims. In their description, they said, “So before students would read studies, and they would learn all sorts of facts about language and languages that they know, which is also important. But there would be less texts that they could spend, some good time with and form arguments about. So we wanted more of that. [Before,] the focus was much less on social, cultural and political issues. We wanted to increase that.” Here again, we see that the emphasized motivation for change is student engagement.

Human Being and Citizen may also be undergoing a drastic change soon, according to the Anon Admin. The course has had a very Western focus, which always confused me personally since different cultures all have their own conceptions of what it means to be a human being and citizen. Evidently, the division has taken note and is considering making some changes. Here’s what the Admin had to say about it.

*“It's no longer really up to date. Sometimes it's, I think, for students not always legible, why it's titled Human Being and Citizen when they look at the texts. And when we talk about human beings and citizens, it's important not only to look at Plato... Reading the Republic is a great text and a great way to get into these questions. But you also need to talk about contemporary issues of citizenship, of how we define being a human...gender, race, etc, and that wasn't always legible when you started out with the Republic, taught the Iliad, got to Genesis, you see what I mean. And so I think we're in the process of, in some sense, revising it, and thereby being able to engage students more directly on the issues that, of course, all of us are at the moment engaged in and that are really pressing*.*”*

**Faith**

Of course, we don’t have time to outline everything, but I’d say that these are all great steps. Now, let’s move onto the student perspectives.

## The student experience

***Musical lead in***

**Shuo**

While the professors’ experience and perspectives on inclusivity are quite similar to each other, we found that the students’ experiences are dramatically different from each other. We argue that while cultural differences do contribute to such a difference in classroom experience, students also tend to attribute their current feeling not to their past experiences, but to the current situations.

The sample of our survey is relatively small in size and skewed in composition. However, we don’t consider it worrisome since we are not statistically investigating the “average feeling” of all students; rather, we are interested in hearing and articulating the complaints from those students in minority. In the survey, we found that while most of the students think the cultural inclusivity in syllabus is important, a significant portion of the students do not agree that they have an inclusive syllabus for their Core courses. Especially, the international students tend to observe an America- or Euro- centric lens during the classroom discussion.

Besides, we observe that international students are more vulnerable to the lack of inclusivity in syllabus, citing their difficulty in understanding culturally unfamiliar topics. We argue that it would be hard for students who are not familiar with the dominant culture in the States to relate when the default perspective is an American one. We can see it from an anecdote of an Chinese international students who is taking a HUMA course, Media Aesthetics:

*“The syllabus does include a racially and culturally diverse set of topics. But I think every discussion relates back to mainstream American society, and the class often involves discussions on, for example, psychosexual perceptions on the topic based on some childhood experience or tv shows. As someone who did not grow up in the US, I find it really hard to relate to.*

*I remember there's one time when we discussed Rashomon, a Japanese film. Given my knowledge of East Asian culture, I had a lot to say, but the whole class was really negative about the film and the professor basically encouraged this attitude by not responding to their confusions directly. I was unable to contribute to the discussion when basically everyone around me was mocking my culture.”*

We argue that cases like this are not singular to the international students; rather, the design of the Core Curriculum would systematically lead to upsetting learning experiences for some students. This idea seems to be shared by most students, as even those who themselves feel like their classes were inclusive called for more inclusive curriculums in the name of making the diverse student body comfortable in the classroom.

Our analysis of student respondents clearly shows that the Core Curriculum failed many students in their expectation of a more culturally inclusive class. Moreover, a pattern of conflict between the instructors’ perspective and students’ perspective reveal itself in the course of research. It appears to us that there is a distinction between intellectual inclusivity and cultural inclusivity. An inclusivity as a means for pedagogical goal and an inclusivity as an end itself for social justice. An inclusivity that professors emphasis and an inclusivity students still urge for. **I**n the following paragraphs, we attempt to explain such systematic failure and address possible solutions.

***Musical interlude***

# Discussion

**Faith**

 Our findings are interesting considering the literature. As I mentioned before, literature about inclusive curriculums indicates both academic and social benefits, but we found a slight mismatch between instructors and students regarding what they viewed as the primary purpose of inclusivity, with instructors emphasizing the academic more and students emphasizing the social.

UChicago has been adopting various strategies to ensure inclusivity in course design and inclusivity in classroom dynamics. These steps have been largely positive and succeed in their goal to increase inclusivity (as they see it) in the Core courses, make courses more relevant to modern discussions, and further engage students in discussion. However, due to a mismatch in how instructors and students view the role of inclusivity in the Core Curriculum, some students have found their wish for an inclusive syllabus in pursuit of social good to be unfulfilled. We think that the university should open the discussion with students regarding this in order to bridge the gap and promote a more reconciled view on inclusivity.

# Suggestions

**Shuo**

So, after learning the different perspectives of the administrator, professors, and students, we also ask them for suggestions to improve the inclusivity of Core Curriculum. We got some really interesting ideas; and to be frank, these suggestions made us want to say: hey, UChicago, you can really do better!

Here we collect the ideas that could make the Core Curriculum experience better for all. In the long run, we wish the Core Currcuriclum could improve both its intellectual inclusivity and cultural inclusivity through changes to Course syllabi. However, we acknowledge that the process will take time. So, we also want to offer suggestions that could act as a stopgap in the meantime by increasing transparency about the courses and managing student expectations.

 First, we hope the College could provide better course descriptions. As suggested by some students, it is extremely important for them to know the course better before enrolling in the class. I guess students do want to know what they will get from the courses; indeed, even for classes like Core Curriculum that aim to introduce the students into a bigger world, students sometimes complain that they are not learning what they expected to from a supposedly general fundamentals course.

**Shuo**

The following is a quote from one of the student survey responses: “Yes, it is (important for UChicago core classes, particularly HUMA and/or SOSC classes to have racially, ethnically, and culturally inclusive syllabi). But as long as it’s clear in the course's description that the course is not aiming for cultural and racial diversity, I don’t mind taking courses with western ideals.”

So, we would like to suggest that besides making a clearer course description, the College or the instructors could also provide a copy of syllabus from past courses. This way, students would know the scope of the reading lists and have a better understanding of the aims of the course.

A bonus of this practice is that it would reduce the impact of societal inequality among students. Some students who have connections with upper class friends could acquire more information about the class and choose the courses according to their academic interests. Whereas students who don’t have such connections may only get limited information from the course description and the course evaluation. If the College could actively reduce such information barriers, it would give the students who may be expecting a more general fundamentals course a better understanding of the bounds of the syllabus material.

**Faith**

We also learned from Dr. Richardson that the Chicago Teaching Center has great resources to help increase inclusivity within the classroom.

While she admits that the Chicago Center for Teaching can’t give suggestions to the syllabus, as those are decided by faculty, she argues that many things besides the reading lists could be done to improve the inclusivity of the classroom. One of the major practices is inclusive pedagogy. Let us hear how she explains the importance of inclusive pedagogy:

**Dr. Richardson**

*“Now, the second part in terms of “inclusivity inclusivity,” means that you're trying to make sure every student in the classroom can thrive. And there are historical and there social reasons why students of color, often women students, sometimes international students, students who have different kinds of gender identities, or sexuality, you know, who have different sexual preferences or you know, sexual sexuality, feel alienated in the classroom or feel excluded.*

*Sometimes it comes from what we're reading, you know, we're reading something, and we're like, oh, there's nothing in here that says, someone who looks like me can be a scholar, someone like me has, has lived before and has has come up with some really interesting ideas about how the world works. So sometimes we're excluded because of things like that. Sometimes, just because of the way we teach. So we teach in a way that is like, Oh, I'm only gonna call on all the ones who look like boys, because they tend to have best answers, or because they tend to shout more. And those are the ones I'm going to pay attention to. Or, you know, I'm going to avoid that student over there. Because, you know, they have kind of an accent and, and maybe everyone's not going to understand them, or, you know, that sort of a thing.”*

**Shuo**

We also learned that Chicago Center for Teaching is holding inclusive pedagogy workshops for instructors. Since the workshop is optional and the College currently has no plans to make it mandatory, we would suggest that at least there should be more promotion of such a great opportunity for the instructors to learn inclusive pedagogy. Professors, if you are looking to learn more about inclusive pedagogy, you could contact Dr. Richardson and the Teaching Center’s amazing website, “inclusivepedagogy.uchicago.edu” and attend the free workshop.

***Musical interlude***

# Conclusion

**Faith**

Thank you all for sticking with us this far, and I hope that the perspectives and suggestions we shared provided some insights into inclusivity in the Core Curriculum. Now before we end, I just want to share part of our interview with Dr. Garrido. It doesn’t really answer any of the questions we were addressing in our project, but we wanted to include it because he raises an interesting question of whether inclusivity is the right term for what we’re all aiming for after all. Here’s the clip:

**Faith Sanchez**

*You say that inclusive is the wrong word and you prefer encompass. Can you just elaborate on the nuance of difference between those two things?*

**Dr. Garrido**

*Let me try because I'm kind of just coming up, you know, kind of just thinking through how I would respond to that question. So inclusive, maybe suggests that you kind of sitting in a body of knowledge. And you want to take the perspective here and bringing it in, and kind of bring it in, I think, encompass from I think that's the wrong way of thinking about I think in complex means that you're sitting in on one body of knowledge, but everybody around you is sitting in their own body of knowledge in their own experience. So you want to be able to step back, think about your, your own perspective, with humility, understand its limits, its limitedness. And understand that people have something, they can tell part of the story. In fact, you don't have a whole story until you understand how they're seeing it from their part of the world. And that's not let me bring you in, let me include you into what I have. But to understand that what you have and what you're sitting on is small and limited and partial. And what in fact, there's a kind of it's a kind of arrogance and saying, Let me include you into into work. Why should you include me where you're sitting, you have your own, you know, you're just as much human beings who are experiencing the world. In fact, you know, we should wish, our scope, the way we see things should include all of these different perspectives.*

*And I know a lot of them, there's tension, a lot of them, they're different. But that's part of that's part of what thinking is not necessarily to reconcile everything. Tensions are fine. contradictions are fine differences, fine. It's to be able to hold things together that are different and to understand that the world can encompass all these kinds of things. It's not to get everybody into my agenda, particularly a moral agenda that it has to look like this. Some people can see the world in a radically different way. But to hold it along with your views. What's important. I mean, that's what it means to think in a more sophisticated way, not just to say that you have to think like me. So so I think that that kind of gets at the difference in my mind inclusive always sounds like, you know, we've solved that coming here, we'll put we'll include you, look, we'll include you into our little you know, but there's no including you everybody's got everybody's is somewhere. Right. And so you need to understand all those things together.*

**[pause]**

**Faith**

Alright, I think that just about does it for us. We learned a lot from this project, and we hope this podcast was enlightening and helpful to you, too. Once again, I’m Faith.

**Shuo**

And I am Shuo.

**Faith**

And thank you for listening!

***Closing music***