UNION
C O L L E G E
FOUNDED 1795

Complex Questions:
Global Challenges & Social Justice

The Complex Questions: Global Challenges & Social Justice curriculum at Union College creates opportunities for students to engage with and develop an understanding of the complexity and global nature of many issues and how different disciplinary perspectives can address and illuminate them.

Areas of Inquiry

Courses may be approved for only one of two Areas of Inquiry: Justice, Equity, and Inclusion (JEID) –or– Global Challenges (GC)

Justice, Equity, Identity, Difference (JEID)

Topics taught in this Area of Inquiry may include, but are not limited to: race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, religion, age, and other forms of identity. Courses that deal with the intersectional nature of these identities are particularly encouraged.

Courses in JEID should allow students to learn how their own experiences shape their perceptions of society and their place in it in terms of diverse forms of identity and how these differences can intersect and influence each other. Students should further recognize that various forms of identity can include, exclude, or disenfranchise a group in relation to various economic, political, and/or social structures, institutions, or systems.

Global Challenges (GC)

In these courses, students will address complex issues and big questions that transcend national boundaries. GC courses will meaningfully focus on global societal issues and encourage students to:

Address the historical origins of the issues and ways the issues uniquely impact different areas of the world

Challenge students' assumptions about their own views of large global issues

Prepare students to confront the challenges of an uncertain world globally and locally

A course that addresses global challenges may be framed around topics taken from the United Nations list of global issues, the World Economic Forum's list of global risks, or other challenges as identified by the faculty member

Perspectives

There is a limit of 3 Perspectives designations for a single course. However, regardless of how many Perspectives a course has been approved for, a student may only count a course toward one Perspective.

Creative Works/Arts & Design (CAD)

A course where students experience and engage critically with the creative arts around an area of inquiry in a historical or contemporary context. This includes cinematography, the art of making films. Such courses enable students to develop and cultivate a sensory and/or experiential literacy that will refine their ability to be active, critical thinkers rather than passive spectators.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the diverse historical contexts that frame the arts/design or develop applied skills in firsthand artistic creation and design
- Assess the quality of the arts in their diverse contexts
- Gain a grounding in the methodology appropriate to at least one art or design

Cultural & Historical Foundations (CHF)

A course where students will learn to recognize change and continuity in patterns of beliefs, practices, and policies in the present and/or over time that inform the organization of communities, societies, and nations, as well as the cultural identities of individuals. Such courses may compare/contrast human experiences around the Areas of Inquiry across and/or within national boundaries.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop an ability to place beliefs and practices in the context of wider social and cultural systems
- Question assumptions and values that may be "taken-for-granted" as truth
- Understand historical and cross-cultural diversity in ways of thinking and living

Data & Quantitative Reasoning (DQR)

A course that introduces students to mathematical, statistical, or computational methods for reasoning with data or quantitative analysis. Students will identify and construct questions, to apply appropriate methods to investigate questions, and to develop skills to engage societal problems or global challenges.

Learning Objectives:

- Model scenarios and interpret data in real world applications
- Set up and solve problems that require multi-step arguments
- Communicate quantitative information visually, numerically, symbolically, or verbally
- Draw inferences and make abstractions from equations, formulas, models, and data

Engineering, Technology & Society (ETS)

A course where students engage with the engineering design or software development practices and ways of thinking to understand how technology is and has been used to address complex problems. Courses consider how technological innovation can both deliberately and accidentally disrupt economies, cultures, politics and relationships, while engaging with difficult moral and ethical questions.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze how a given technological solution is created, works, and interacts with humans, the environment, and other technology
- Critically assess the societal and environmental impacts of technology
- Apply, analyze, or discuss the engineering design process to solve complex problems
- Clearly communicate their understanding of a complex problem and how a technological solution(s) addresses it

Literatures (LIT)

A course where students experience and study literary texts, which can include, but are not limited to, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, and the interpretation and reception of film. Courses explore the relevant imaginative, historical, philosophical, and related aesthetic forms and contexts of literary works.

Learning Objectives:

- Hone critical, close-reading skills
- Build analytical, interpretive arguments about texts and ideas
- Become familiar with terminology associated with literary study
- Explore and interrogate the relationships between literature and culture

Natural & Physical Sciences (NPS)

A course where students will be immersed in hands-on, inquiry-based learning of scientific principles and processes through laboratory or field exercises. Courses will be grounded in the knowledge and understanding of the world around us, how science can shape society, and how natural processes can be perturbed by human influence or activity.

Learning Objectives:

- Experience that science is dynamic and inquiry driven
- Understand that science develops through observation, experimentation, and hypothesis testing and that interpretations are refined based on new data
- Communicate/demonstrate scientific interpretations using specific data and logical arguments orally, in writing, or in other forms
- Evaluate evidence, results, and claims for the purpose of achieving understanding and solving problems

Social Analysis, Politics & Ethics (SPE)

A course where students will learn about the methods and/or theories of social, political, and/or ethical and moral inquiry in order to develop critical thought about and analyze issues of justice, equity, identity, and difference, as well as a myriad of other global challenges faced by society. A course may describe how different perspectives might engage with or help develop new ways of thinking about ethical dilemmas, environmental and social problems, and consider the ramifications of alternative solutions.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand a selection of social scientific and/or moral/political theories and concepts
- Examine social scientific methods and/or ethical principles as applied to specific disciplines
- Demonstrate an understanding of the types of interactions, values, and norms that govern social/political relationships

World Languages (WOL)

A course where students study and use a world language other than English, as systems of communications for expressing aspects of human experience. Courses will afford students experience with and exposure to languages beyond their own to facilitate communication, cultural competency, historical understanding, and meaningful participation in multilingual communities at home and around the world. In order to understand and engage with global questions, we need exposure to languages beyond our own as they offer perspectives that become clear only in the vocabulary, expressions and thought patterns of those languages and the people who use them. Language courses taken abroad would also count for this requirement.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain skills in communicating in more than one world language to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes
- Connect with other disciplines through acquiring information and diverse perspectives
- Develop insight into the nature of language and culture to facilitate communication, cultural competency, historical understanding, and meaningful participation in multilingual communities at home and around the world