

CURRICULUM

The Purpose of the Curriculum

A curriculum is often identified with a set of degree requirements: “What do I have to do to receive my degree?” But degree requirements are not themselves sufficient to define appropriate educational goals. One might fulfill all of the College’s degree requirements and yet fail to get a good education. It would also be possible to acquire a good education but neglect to fulfill the degree requirements. Now, we certainly do want you to fulfill all of the degree requirements, and we will work with you to see that this happens. But you are not here fundamentally for the purpose of completing degree requirements. If you think of your education solely in those terms, the result will be dull and unsatisfying.

“Curriculum” comes from the Latin for “course,” in the sense in which one might speak of the course of a journey. The term denotes a means rather than an end, but it suggests better than “degree requirements” what it is to become educated. It denotes a movement from a starting point to a destination, a movement that proceeds along some path. You are not left to your own devices to figure out how to get from here to there. But neither is the path straight and narrow. You will have many choices to make as you negotiate the course of your education, but they will be informed by the experience of the faculty, who in the curriculum offer their considered advice for your educational journey.

The College’s curriculum draws you toward two distinctive goals: toward general education across the wide range of the arts and sciences and toward specialized education in a major. A commitment to holding these two—general and specialized education—together has been the genius of American higher education since the early part of the last century. We continue to believe that these two elements constitute an education best suited to enabling intelligent individuals to live humane, productive and fulfilling lives in the 21st century.

The College of Arts and Sciences curriculum (<https://www.college.upenn.edu/curriculum>) provides you with an academic framework for becoming an educated and successful citizen of the 21st century. Its flexible structure is designed to inspire curiosity and frame opportunities while drawing you toward two distinct goals: general education across the wide range of the arts and sciences and specialized education in a major. With help from academic advisors, you will select from a variety of courses to fulfill each element of the curriculum. You may also choose to expand your academic experience beyond the classroom through options like research or study abroad.

The elements of the College Curriculum are:

- The General Education Curriculum (<http://catalog.upenn.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/curriculum/general-education>)
- The Major (<http://catalog.upenn.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/curriculum/major>)
- Free Electives (<http://catalog.upenn.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/curriculum/free-electives>)

Visit the College website (<https://www.college.upenn.edu/curriculum-policy>) for policies governing the College Curriculum.