

USF CORE INTEGRATIVE COURSES: **DESCRIPTIONS AND EXAMPLES**

Note: The following descriptions of course types were developed by the Core Redesign Task Force; the description of key elements, and sample courses, were then developed by the CRTF tri-chairs with AI assistance, and are not intended to be either final or definitive. We provide them here to begin to flesh out what these integrative Core courses might become.

Transformative Texts & Communication

Students engage with transformative texts (literature, philosophy, theology, art) that address themes like civic engagement, ethics (and possibly San Francisco's cultural history). The course takes an integrated focus on writing, verbal, and visual communication, enabling students to analyze and present their ideas effectively. Students could choose from thematic sections (e.g., "Housing and Identity in SF," "Tech and Ethics," and "Transcendence in Film and Fiction") that align with personal interests.

Key Elements:

1. **Engagement with Transformative Texts** – Students analyze influential works in literature, philosophy, theology, and art that address themes such as civic engagement, ethics, and cultural identity.
2. **Integrated Communication Focus** – Courses develop students' ability to express ideas through writing, verbal discussion, and visual presentation.
3. **Thematic Sections for Student Choice** – Students select courses aligned with their interests (e.g., ethics of technology, social justice, transcendence).
4. **Key Learning Outcomes:**
 - Apply critical thinking to analyze and synthesize transformative texts.
 - Demonstrate ethical reasoning in written and verbal arguments.
 - Develop proficiency in written, verbal, and visual communication.

SAMPLE COURSES

1. Housing and Identity in San Francisco: Stories of Displacement and Belonging

Disciplines: Literature, Sociology, Politics, Environmental Studies

Course Description:

This course examines the relationship between housing, identity, and belonging in San Francisco through literary works, historical documents, and sociological analysis. Students read personal narratives, poetry, and policy texts that explore the experiences of displacement, gentrification, and community resistance. Through writing assignments, oral presentations, and digital storytelling, students engage with the ethical and civic dimensions of housing in the city.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze literary and sociological texts to understand the impact of housing policies on identity and belonging.
2. Develop ethical arguments about urban development and displacement.
3. Communicate findings effectively through written essays, oral debates, and visual storytelling projects.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Excerpts from Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City*, essays on urban displacement, poetry by Bay Area writers.
 - **Writing:** Analytical essays on literature and policy, reflections on personal or family housing histories.
 - **Deliverables:** Digital storytelling project where students map and narrate a housing-related story in SF.
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2. Ethics in the Age of AI: Technology, Power, and Responsibility

Disciplines: Philosophy, Computer Science, Data Science, Media Studies

Course Description:

Artificial intelligence is reshaping society, but who decides what is ethical in its development and use? This course explores philosophical texts on ethics and responsibility, case studies of tech industry decision-making, and media representations of AI. Students engage in ethical debates, write critical essays, and create multimedia projects examining the social and ethical consequences of AI.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Critically evaluate philosophical frameworks on ethics and apply them to technological case studies.
2. Articulate ethical arguments through structured writing and debate.
3. Develop and present a multimedia project analyzing an ethical dilemma in AI.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Kant and virtue ethics, Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism*, case studies on AI bias.
 - **Writing:** Ethical position papers on AI regulation, analyses of sci-fi representations of AI.
 - **Deliverables:** A podcast or video presentation on an ethical dilemma in AI.
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3. Transcendence in Film and Fiction: The Search for Meaning

Disciplines: Theology & Religious Studies, Film Studies, Literature

Course Description:

How do stories help us make sense of the human condition? This course explores themes of transcendence, spirituality, and existential questioning in literature and film. Students examine texts ranging from religious scripture to modern existentialist novels and analyze films that grapple with questions of faith, meaning, and the afterlife.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Compare religious, literary, and cinematic narratives that explore transcendence and existential themes.
2. Develop critical interpretations of texts and films through close reading and visual analysis.
3. Communicate insights through written essays, film critiques, and creative multimedia projects.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, excerpts from Buddhist and Christian texts, philosophical essays on transcendence.
- **Writing:** Comparative essays on religious and secular narratives of transcendence.
- **Deliverables:** A short video essay analyzing a film's portrayal of the search for meaning.

Golden Gateway: City as Classroom

Students participate in an interdisciplinary course that uses San Francisco as a learning environment. Blending experiential learning, research, or creative projects with classroom preparation and reflection, students engage in fieldwork, partnerships with local organizations, and/or project-based learning. Example course themes could include environmental justice, technology and society, public health, or urban inequality.

Key Elements:

1. **San Francisco as an Active Learning Space** – Students engage with the city through observation, site visits, and analysis, using it as a living case study.
2. **Experiential**– Courses integrate fieldwork, archival research, independent projects, and creative exploration and may include sustained community-partner collaborations.
3. **Diverse Disciplinary Approaches** – Courses should allow for different modes of engagement, including historical research, creative work, and data analysis.
4. **Key Learning Outcomes:**
 - Apply analytical or creative skills to interpret San Francisco’s social, cultural, or environmental landscape.
 - Develop independent or small-group projects based on fieldwork, research, or creative exploration.
 - Demonstrate critical thinking by synthesizing urban experiences with scholarly perspectives.

SAMPLE COURSES

1. Mapping Environmental Futures: Climate Change and San Francisco

Disciplines: Environmental Studies, Environmental Science, Media Studies

Course Description:

How is climate change reshaping San Francisco? This course examines the city’s vulnerabilities—rising seas, extreme heat, and wildfires—through site visits to coastal areas, historical archives, and city planning documents. Students create a research-based digital atlas that maps San Francisco’s changing environmental future.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze historical and contemporary environmental challenges in SF.
2. Use spatial analysis tools to visualize environmental change.
3. Develop a digital project that synthesizes research and field observations.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Mike Davis’ *Ecology of Fear*, city climate action plans, Indigenous perspectives on land stewardship.

- **Fieldwork:** Site visits to areas affected by climate change (e.g., Embarcadero seawall, wildfire zones).
 - **Deliverables:** A digital environmental history project using ArcGIS or StoryMaps.
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2. The City and the Body: Public Health, Space, and Access

Disciplines: Public Health, Sociology, Biology, Health Studies

Course Description:

How does the built environment shape health and mobility in San Francisco? This course explores how public spaces—from BART stations to parks—enable or restrict movement, access, and well-being. Students conduct observational studies, analyze urban design, and produce research-driven essays on the intersections of space, health, and equity.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Assess the relationship between public space and health equity.
2. Conduct urban observation studies using ethnographic methods.
3. Produce a research-based essay integrating fieldwork and scholarly sources.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Essays from Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City*, studies on urban accessibility.
 - **Fieldwork:** Accessibility audits of public transportation and infrastructure.
 - **Deliverables:** A critical essay or podcast episode analyzing urban space and health.
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3. Creative Cities: Art, Music, and Innovation in the Bay Area

Disciplines: Art History, Music, Psychology, Sociology

Course Description:

San Francisco has long been a hub for artistic and cultural innovation, from the Beat poets to the tech-driven digital arts of today. This course explores how place influences creativity, with visits to museums, street art sites, music venues, and artist studios. Students produce creative or critical projects that reflect on the city's artistic legacy and its current creative landscape.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze the relationship between urban space and artistic movements.
2. Engage with creative works through site visits, research, or personal artistic practice.
3. Develop a project that interprets San Francisco's artistic culture through a creative or analytical lens.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind*, essays on Bay Area punk and tech art.
- **Fieldwork:** Visits to SFMOMA, City Lights Bookstore, and contemporary artist spaces.
- **Deliverables:** A digital photography portfolio, short film, or analytical essay on a Bay Area creative movement.

Enduring Questions

Students engage deeply with fundamental and persistent questions that have shaped human thought, society, and culture across time and place. These interdisciplinary, culminating courses challenge students to explore big ideas—such as justice, freedom, truth, identity, and the nature of a good life—through multiple lenses, including Jesuit theology, philosophy, history, literature, science, and the arts.

Key Elements:

1. **Interdisciplinary Exploration of Timeless Questions** – Courses should engage with broad, foundational ideas across disciplines rather than focusing on contemporary issues alone.
 2. **Text-Driven and Analytical** – Students engage deeply with philosophical, theological, literary, historical, and scientific texts that have shaped human thought.
 3. **Comparative and Contextual** – Courses encourage students to explore how different cultures, eras, and disciplines approach fundamental questions.
 4. **Key Learning Outcomes:**
 - Critically analyze and compare diverse perspectives on enduring human questions.
 - Develop well-supported arguments through close engagement with foundational texts.
 - Articulate connections between historical and contemporary understandings of core concepts.
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SAMPLE COURSES

1. What is Justice? Philosophical and Literary Perspectives

Disciplines: Philosophy, Literature, Politics, Sociology

Course Description:

From Plato's *Republic* to contemporary debates on social justice, this course examines how different traditions define justice. Students read philosophical texts, analyze justice in literature and drama, and apply these frameworks to modern legal and political systems. Through analytical essays and debates, students grapple with the complexities of fairness, power, and moral obligation.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Compare philosophical and literary conceptions of justice across historical periods.
2. Develop analytical arguments about justice using textual evidence.
3. Apply philosophical frameworks to contemporary social and legal issues.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Plato's *Republic*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, essays on restorative justice.
 - **Writing:** A comparative essay on philosophical and literary depictions of justice.
 - **Discussion/Debate:** Case studies on contemporary justice issues using historical frameworks.
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2. What Does It Mean to Be Human? Perspectives from Science and Religion

Disciplines: Theology & Religious Studies, Biology, Anthropology

Course Description:

Are humans unique among animals? What defines human nature—rationality, morality, consciousness, or something else? This course explores perspectives on human identity from evolutionary biology, theological thought, and cultural anthropology, asking how different traditions have sought to explain our place in the world.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze competing theories of human nature across disciplines.
2. Evaluate ethical implications of scientific and theological claims about humanity.
3. Develop a reasoned argument that integrates multiple perspectives on what it means to be human.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Genesis and Augustine on human nature, Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Frans de Waal's *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*.
 - **Writing:** A synthesis paper comparing religious and scientific perspectives on human uniqueness.
 - **Creative Assignment:** A reflective essay imagining how future discoveries (AI, genetic engineering) might change definitions of humanity.
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3. What is a Good Life? Wisdom from Ancient and Modern Thinkers

Disciplines: Theology, Philosophy, History, Psychology

Course Description:

What does it mean to live well? This course examines classical and contemporary perspectives on happiness, virtue, and meaning, from Aristotle and Confucius to modern psychological

studies on well-being. Students reflect on different traditions of ethical living and consider how these ideas can be applied to their own lives.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Compare ethical traditions on the nature of a meaningful life.
2. Critically analyze historical and contemporary texts on happiness and virtue.
3. Articulate a personal philosophy of the good life informed by diverse traditions.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Confucian *Analects*, Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychological studies on happiness.
- **Writing:** A comparative analysis of ethical traditions on flourishing.
- **Project:** A personal reflection paper connecting course themes to lived experience.

Transformative Texts & Enduring Questions

This initial-year course type blends the deep inquiry of *Enduring Questions* with the engagement of *Transformative Texts*. The goal is to explore foundational human questions through close reading, analysis, and communication across multiple modes (written, verbal, and visual). Unlike *Enduring Questions* alone, this version emphasizes not just discussing big ideas but also developing the ability to communicate them effectively.

Key Elements:

1. **Interdisciplinary Inquiry** – Courses explore philosophical, theological, literary, historical, and artistic works to examine fundamental questions.
2. **Text-Centered** – Readings include foundational texts that have shaped human thought and culture.
3. **Communication-Focused** – Students develop writing, speaking, and creative expression skills in response to these works.
4. **Civic and Ethical Engagement** – Encourages reflection on how these texts relate to contemporary ethical and social questions.

Key Learning Outcomes:

- Engage critically with foundational texts and articulate their relevance to contemporary issues.
- Develop well-structured arguments through multiple communication modes (writing, speech, visual analysis).
- Synthesize interdisciplinary perspectives to examine enduring human questions.

SAMPLE COURSES

1. The Search for Justice: Classic Texts and Contemporary Debates

Disciplines: Literature, Philosophy, Politics

Course Description:

How have great thinkers imagined justice? This course explores foundational texts—philosophical, literary, and legal—that have shaped conceptions of justice, power, and morality. Students engage in close reading, persuasive writing, and debates on modern social justice issues, applying historical perspectives to contemporary problems.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze and compare philosophical and literary depictions of justice.
2. Develop written and verbal arguments connecting classic texts to contemporary issues.

3. Communicate ethical arguments through both formal writing and creative storytelling.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Plato's *Republic*, Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*.
 - **Writing:** A persuasive essay arguing how a classic concept of justice applies to a modern legal or social issue.
 - **Speaking:** A structured debate on ethical dilemmas using historical and contemporary frameworks.
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2. Human and Machine: Identity and Consciousness in the Digital Age

Disciplines: Philosophy, Theology, Literature, Media Studies

Course Description:

Are we more than biological machines? As AI and digital culture evolve, this course examines classic and modern texts on human identity, consciousness, and the nature of thought. Readings range from Descartes and Mary Shelley to contemporary debates about AI ethics, with students expressing their ideas through analytical essays, digital storytelling, and public speaking.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Compare philosophical, theological, and literary perspectives on human identity.
2. Evaluate the ethical and existential implications of AI and digital life.
3. Communicate ideas through multimodal projects (writing, speaking, and visual media).

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Descartes' *Meditations*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, recent articles on AI ethics.
 - **Writing:** A critical essay on whether AI challenges traditional notions of selfhood.
 - **Creative Project:** A multimedia reflection on digital identity and its impact on human relationships.
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3. The Good Life: Wisdom from Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts

Disciplines: Philosophy, Theology, Literature, Art & Architecture, Performing Arts

Course Description:

What does it mean to live a good life? This course explores different visions of happiness,

virtue, and meaning across philosophical, literary, and artistic traditions. Students reflect on ancient and modern perspectives while engaging in personal and analytical writing, oral presentations, and creative projects.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze and compare traditions on human flourishing.
2. Articulate a personal philosophy of the good life through writing and speech.
3. Express ethical and philosophical ideas through creative and analytical work.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness, Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, contemporary psychology on happiness.
- **Writing:** A reflective essay connecting philosophical traditions to personal life goals.

Wicked Problems & Solutions Labs

These interdisciplinary, applied problem-solving courses challenge students to analyze and respond to real-world issues through research, innovation, and creative expression. Students integrate multiple perspectives—scientific, ethical, historical, artistic—to develop solutions that are both evidence-based and imaginatively engaging.

Key Elements:

1. **Interdisciplinary Analysis** – Understanding problems from scientific, social, ethical, and creative perspectives.
2. **Applied Research & Innovation** – Designing and testing solutions through iterative methods, including speculative thinking.
3. **Creative & Expressive Approaches** – Incorporating artistic and humanities-based perspectives into problem-solving.
4. **Ethical & Systems Thinking** – Considering the cultural, historical, and ethical dimensions of solutions.

Key Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze complex societal problems using interdisciplinary frameworks.
 - Develop and evaluate evidence-based, ethical, and creative solutions.
 - Communicate findings through diverse mediums, including research, narrative, and visual storytelling.
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SAMPLE COURSES

1. Rethinking the Tech Boom: Innovation, Ethics, and Equity

Disciplines: Business, Philosophy, Theology, Data Science, Computer Science, Media Studies

Course Description:

How can the Bay Area's tech industry balance innovation with ethical responsibility? This course examines the social, economic, and cultural challenges posed by rapid technological expansion, including automation, data privacy, and the changing nature of labor. Students analyze case studies, explore speculative futures, and design creative interventions—such as digital storytelling, interactive media, or speculative policy proposals—that engage the public in thinking critically about the ethics of tech.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Assess the ethical and societal implications of technological innovation.
2. Use data and storytelling to communicate complex tech-related challenges.

3. Propose creative, research-driven interventions for more ethical tech futures.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Excerpts from *Surveillance Capitalism*, speculative fiction on AI, case studies of gig economy labor.
 - **Writing:** A manifesto or speculative essay envisioning ethical tech futures.
 - **Creative Option:** A multimedia project (short film, podcast, digital narrative) exploring the human impact of AI and automation.
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2. Climate Crisis and Urban Futures: Adapting Cities for a Changing World

Disciplines: Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, Public Policy, Urban Agriculture, Visual Arts, Theater

Course Description:

How do we prepare cities for the future in an era of climate uncertainty? This course brings together scientific research, policy analysis, and creative expression to explore adaptation strategies for urban resilience. Students analyze existing climate policies, engage with speculative urban design, and create interactive installations or performance pieces that communicate the stakes of environmental change.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Evaluate climate risks and resilience strategies in urban environments.
2. Apply interdisciplinary approaches to climate adaptation.
3. Communicate climate challenges through creative, research-informed projects.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** IPCC reports, indigenous climate knowledge, speculative design case studies.
 - **Writing:** A policy analysis or speculative climate fiction piece envisioning a future SF.
 - **Creative Option:** A public art installation or immersive theater performance illustrating possible climate futures.
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3. Food (In)Security in an Age of Abundance

Disciplines: Public Health, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, Film

Course Description:

Why does food insecurity persist despite global food abundance? This course explores the economic, cultural, and environmental factors shaping food access and distribution, with a focus

on urban food systems. Students research food deserts, analyze policy interventions, and develop creative projects—such as documentary photography, oral histories, or a speculative community meal experience—to illuminate the lived realities of food insecurity.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Analyze systemic causes of food insecurity through interdisciplinary methods.
2. Conduct research and communicate findings in accessible, impactful ways.
3. Design creative interventions that raise awareness or propose actionable change.

Example Assignments:

- **Reading:** Studies on food justice, historical perspectives on food access, Bay Area food policy reports.
- **Writing:** A policy memo or an ethnographic essay on food insecurity.
- **Creative Option:** A short documentary, a visual storytelling project, or a performance-based meal experience exploring food access issues.