Student FAQs

Q: What is the Cardinal Core (also known as the UCC)?
A: The Cardinal Core is an important part of your degree program. It provides an opportunity for you to build your foundational knowledge and portable skills by taking classes from a wide range of topics that complement and extend beyond your major(s).

Q: Why is the Cardinal Core important?
A: These courses provide you with foundational knowledge and the necessary skills you will need not only to thrive at Ball State but also to prepare for fulfilling careers and meaningful lives beyond graduation.

Q: Why does Ball State require a "core curriculum"?
A: The Cardinal Core allows you to explore ways of knowing and strategies for communicating. These programs are a traditional part of the interdisciplinary college education at institutions across the country.

Q: Can I use classes taken at other institutions to satisfy Ball State's Cardinal Core requirements?
A: Yes. We'll work with you to make the transferring of course credits as seamless as possible. For more information about transfer credits, see Ball State's website about Transferring Your Credits. Ball State's 30-credit-hour Cardinal Core is aligned with the Indiana College Core (ICC), allowing for the transfer of ICC credits completed in high school or elsewhere.

Q: If I have completed the full ICC certificate, how do those credits apply to the Ball State UCC?
A: The full ICC certificate fulfills all your Cardinal Core requirements at Ball State. See Ball State's detailed alignment with the ICC here.

Q: When will Ball State's new Cardinal Core take effect?
A: The new UCC will take effect in Fall 2026.

Q: How will the new Cardinal Core impact students who started prior to Fall 2026?
A: If you started at Ball State prior to Fall 2026, you should plan to finish your UCC requirements based on the program under which you began. If you started under the previous UCC and are considering moving to the new Core, talk to your advisor about the implications of making a change.

Q: How many credit hours are in the new Cardinal Core?
A: 30 credit hours. Most baccalaureate degrees require 120 credit hours to graduate, so the Cardinal Core makes up approximately a quarter of your total credit hours.

Q: How are the various components of the Ball State Cardinal Core distinct?
A: Each component (Foundations, Ways of Knowing, Research-based Writing, and Beneficence Themes) builds necessary skills and exposes you to various disciplinary approaches.

Q: How many courses do I need to take in each of these Cardinal Core components?
A: You'll complete a total of 10 Cardinal Core courses:

- Foundational Intellectual Skills: 3 courses (9 cr.)

- Ways of Knowing: 3 courses (9 cr.)
- Research-Based Writing: 1 course (3 cr.)
- Beneficence Themes: 3 courses (9 cr.)

Q: How should I select my Cardinal Core courses?
A: You should work with your advisor to determine your Cardinal Core course options. You'll want to balance Core courses with courses in your degree program. Additionally, some degree programs may suggest some specific Core courses, and your advisor can help you make those choices.

Q: How do I know which Beneficence Theme to choose?
Your Beneficence Theme choice can complement your personal and professional goals. The Beneficence Theme portion of the Cardinal Core offers you an opportunity to approach a topic from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. When choosing which Beneficence Theme to pursue, consider your areas of interest or a topic you would like to explore in more depth—for example, Innovation and Creativity, Global Connections, Social Responsibility, Sustainability, Being Human, Personal and Financial Wellness, or Honors in Practice.

Q: Can I pursue more than one Beneficence Theme?
A: No. You must select one Beneficence Theme to pursue and complete a course in each domain (Scientific, Social and Behavioral, and Humanistic and Artistic/Design) within that Beneficence Theme. However, you can take additional courses tied to the Cardinal Core as electives when your schedule allows.

Q: When should I take my Cardinal Core courses?
A: You should work with your advisor to determine the schedule and timeline for completion of the Cardinal Core. You do not need to complete the Cardinal Core by the end of your first or second year. In fact, you could take one or two Cardinal Core courses each semester throughout your time at Ball State.

Q: Do I need to complete the Cardinal Core before starting my major?
A: No. While some Cardinal Core courses are prerequisites for advanced major courses, most students will complete courses in the Cardinal Core and in their major at the same time.

Q: Can Cardinal Core courses count toward my major or minor?
A: Yes, some Cardinal Core courses might overlap with major or minor requirements, depending on your program of study. You might even choose to add a major or minor because of a course you take as part of the Cardinal Core.

Q: If I am an exploratory major or change my major, will it impact my Cardinal Core credits?
A: No. The four components of the Cardinal Core are required for all bachelor's degree programs at Ball State. These four components remain the same, even if you change your major. The Cardinal Core may help you explore major and minor options.

Q: How often will Cardinal Core courses be offered?
A: All courses will be offered annually. Work with your advisor to identify upcoming courses, as some may be offered only once per academic year while others may be offered every semester.

Q: Are Cardinal Core courses offered online?

A: You'll have plenty of choices no matter how you want to complete your Cardinal Core requirements. Some Cardinal Core courses are available only in-person, while others are available in a variety of modalities and timeframes; in-person, online, hybrid, 15-wks., 7-wks., etc.

Q: What should I expect in terms of textbook costs?
A: Textbook costs vary and are up to the faculty member teaching the course. Many courses in the Cardinal Core are tagged as TABS (Textbook Affordability at Ball State), meaning that the total cost for the course's textbooks is less than $40. Ball State First Day also partners with Barnes & Noble College and the Ball State Bookstore to provide students with all required course material (print and digital) for one flat rate per credit hour.

Q: Do certain majors require specific Cardinal Core courses?
A: Some majors strongly encourage you to select specific Core classes. Please consult with your advisor about major-specific requirements for the Cardinal Core.

Q: How do I satisfy the Cardinal Core requirements if I am enrolled in the Honors College?
A: If you are enrolled as a student in the Honors College, you will be able to complete your Ways of Knowing and Beneficence Theme requirements through learner-directed, high-impact courses that are part of the Cardinal Core. If you are not transferring in the Foundations and Research-Based Writing courses, your Honors College advisor will assist you in enrolling in relevant courses to fulfill those requirements.

Faculty FAQs

Q: What's the difference between the UCC and the Cardinal Core?
A: The Cardinal Core refers to the new core curriculum that goes into effect in Fall 2026. The UCC refers to the core curriculum in effect from fall 2010 through Spring 2026. (https://bsu.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2025-2026/undergraduate-catalog/university-core-curriculum/)

Q: When does the new Cardinal Core take effect?
A: Fall 2026.

Q: How do the new Cardinal Core outcomes align with the existing departmental curriculum and course offerings?
A: Many courses in the current UCC have already been adapted to the structure and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of the new Cardinal Core, which is more directly aligned with the Indiana College Core (ICC) competencies. Departments and Colleges are also welcome to propose new courses to the Advancing Beneficence Themes and Ways of Knowing components of the Cardinal Core. The new Cardinal Core shares with the existing UCC an interest in providing students with foundational knowledge and skills in written communication, speaking and listening, quantitative reasoning as well as humanistic and artistic, scientific, and social and behavioral ways of knowing. In this way, all of Ball State's core courses—whether in the "old" or "new" iterations—introduce students to new areas of interest while complementing the more specialized content and skills gained as part of their major(s).

Q: How will the Cardinal Core ensure students are exposed to a variety of perspectives and critical thinking skills?
A: Ball State's new Core aligns with the ICC student learning outcomes (SLOs) and provides a liberal arts experience for all students, regardless of their programs of study. As with all our curricular and co-curricular experiences at Ball State, the Cardinal Core prepares students for fulfilling careers and meaningful lives.

Q: How will the new Cardinal Core impact students who matriculated prior to Fall 2026?
A: Students who started at Ball State prior to Fall 2026 should plan to finish their UCC requirements based on the program under which they began. If a student who started under the previous UCC wishes to consider the new Cardinal Core, they should consult with their advisor to find out how opting into the Cardinal Core will impact their graduation timeline.

Q: How will units manage the distinct curricular needs of students in the existing UCC and new Cardinal Core?
A: We will continue to offer courses to fulfill the prior UCC requirements through Summer 2031, in line with the university time limit guideline around completion of undergraduate programs (also known as "teaching out" the curriculum). Not all courses offered in the prior UCC must be offered; rather, a reasonable pathway to graduation must continue to be in place for students completing the prior core through Summer 2031.

Q: Where can we access the key learning outcomes for Cardinal Core courses?
A: Glad you asked! Learning outcomes for the new core are available here.

Q: Can courses in the new core have prerequisites?
A: Courses in the Cardinal Core should have no prerequisites and be open to all students in all majors. Some courses do require placements, however. Please consult with the UCC director (dmmix@bsu.edu) for further guidance.

Q: What distinguishes the intellectual aims of a Ways of Knowing course from a Beneficence course?
A: The Ways of Knowing and Beneficence Themes categories include distinct Indiana College Core (ICC) domain SLOs to scaffold learning across the various Cardinal Core components. To learn more about the SLOs for these categories and domains, peruse the UCC instructions or watch this brief video.

Q: Can courses be listed in multiple Beneficence Themes? If so, how many?
A: Courses may be listed in one or two themes. For more on the Beneficence Themes options and proposal instructions, please see these UCC guidelines.

Q: Can a course in the new Cardinal Core have more SLOs than those required by ICC for a particular domain?
A: Yes. A course in the Cardinal Core must include the ICC SLOs for the category and intellectual domain, and there must be at least one course outcome aligned with each of the ICC SLOs. A course can include *additional* course SLOs that are not aligned with those outcomes (i.e. outside the ICC). However, For more guidance on aligning outcomes, please consult with the UCC Director (dmmix@bsu.edu) or the Director of Assessment (cakacius@bsu.edu).

Q: Is it possible that incoming students will have their entire UCC/ICC coursework completed when they arrive at Ball State?
A: Yes. The Indiana College Core (ICC) is a block of 30 credit hours of general education, college-level coursework which is guaranteed to transfer between all Indiana public colleges and universities. We already have students entering Ball State with the ICC completed; starting in fall 2026, these students will not be required to take any further UCC courses.

Q: Given the push toward increasing transfer hours from all sources (dual credit, AP/IB, community college, etc.), how will this impact Ball State in 5-10 years? How will this impact the various components of the Cardinal Core (Foundations, Ways of Knowing, Research-Based Writing, and Beneficence Themes)?
A: Ball State will continue to offer Core courses into the foreseeable future; however, enrollment may drop off over time if an increased number of students enter Ball State with the ICC Certificate completed in high school. There will continue to be students who do not complete the full ICC Certificate, however. Ball State will need to provide opportunities for students to complete any remaining Cardinal Core requirements. Moving forward, there will also be opportunities to consider certificates or minor pathways that begin at the Beneficence Theme level.

Q: How do we promote the "value added" of a particular Beneficence Theme?
A: The seven initial Advancing Beneficence Themes highlight Ball State's core values, goals, and skills and allow students to participate in transdisciplinary conversations that are of interest to them. All courses proposed must fulfill the ICC learning objectives for the Ways of Knowing category selected by the proposing department. See the UCC proposal guidelines for further information.

Q: What will students gain from the constellation of three courses in one theme (versus their own ad hoc collection)?
A: Students will benefit from the transdisciplinary conversations that emerge around a similar topic. For example, a student who selects the Global Connections Beneficence Theme will engage in global issues from the perspectives of social scientists, natural scientists, and humanities and fine arts faculty. They will gain a rich, in-depth understanding of how to approach a global question or concern from a particular disciplinary perspective and across various modes and methods of study.

Q: How do we know if there will be too many or too few courses in a particular Beneficence Theme? Do we have any early, measurable indicators of student interests?
A: The UCC Implementation Task Force is working with departments and the UCC Committee to populate the Beneficence Themes and track their inclusion. See this spreadsheet for updates on our progress. The Implementation Task Force recommends that Beneficence Themes be reviewed every five years to ensure they are continuing to meet the needs of Ball State students.

Q: Does the Cardinal Core include a capstone (Tier 3) experience for students?
A: Capstone experiences are no longer included in Ball State's Core Curriculum. However, our Strategic Plan, Goal 1, Imperative G, stipulates, "Every undergraduate student participates in a culminating experience, such as a capstone course, senior thesis or senior project, clinical experience, internship, or student teaching."

Q: How will assessment in the new core be managed?
A: Our current core has clear assessment practices in place that are working well and can easily be applied to the new core. These Gen Ed assessment practices earned accolades in the 2024 HLC report reaffirming institutional accreditation, so we plan to continue the assessment process that was developed in 2019 and has been in place since then. Learn more about UCC assessment here.

Q: What role, if any, will priorities like Textbook Affordability at Ball State (TABS), High-Impact Practices (HIPs), National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Competencies, and best practices for retention play in the new core?
A: The UCC Implementation Taskforce recommends faculty consider the following:

- Adopt affordable materials, eBooks, reading lists, and OER materials readily available at BSU. These measures can increase student satisfaction, engagement, and retention. A high percentage of students (both nationally and at BSU) report that the cost of educational materials are barriers to enrollment and success. Faculty may request their courses be tagged as TABS through their unit's scheduler.
- Consult with the Director of Immersive Learning and High Impact Practices to better understand how to tag High-Impact Practice courses (HIPs).
- Consult with the Skills Infusion Program to determine how best to integrate NACE competencies into your UCC courses and assessments.
- Consult with the Writing Program, the Writing Center and the Director of Immersive Learning and High Impact Practices to explore best practices in writing and undergraduate research before designing a research-writing course. Consultation with the Writing Program Administrator, Dr. Rory Lee (ralee2@bsu.edu), is required before proposing a research-based writing course.

Q: What is the Indiana Core Transfer Library (ICTL) and how does it align with the UCC?
A: For information about the ICTL, visit: https://transferin.net/earned-credits/core-transfer-library/ Many Cardinal Core courses are included in the ICTL

Q. What potential workload implications will the new core curriculum have for faculty, especially regarding course development and assessment?
A: Faculty support for the new core curriculum is already in place. For example, to create and assess new core courses are now available. Support is also available through your representatives on the UCC Subcommittee and UCC Implementation Taskforce. All approved UCC courses are listed here, and those syllabi can be used as examples when creating new courses. The UCC Director, Debbie Mix (dmmix@bsu.edu), is available and happy to review course proposals and to schedule time to meet with faculty.

Q: Will there be new teaching and learning support available to faculty to facilitate the transition to the new core?
A: Yes, there will continue to be professional development opportunities available. Please look out for these opportunities in the Comm Center announcements. You might also reach out to the UCC Director Deborah Mix (dmmix@bsu.edu) Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Professional Development Linh Littleford (lnlittleford@bsu.edu) for a list of opportunities. In addition, please look for an invitation to a forthcoming Canvas Community page that will serve as a resource hub for the new UCC.

Q: How will course scheduling be adjusted to accommodate the new core requirements?
A: Academic leadership recognizes the need for flexibility with enrollments in order to offer new Core courses. If specific issues arise, please reach out to UCC Director Deborah Mix (dmmix@bsu.edu).

Q. How will the new Cardinal Core impact student enrollment in our departmental courses?
A: Once the new Core is fully implemented and operationalized, we will closely monitor enrollment trends and adjust course offerings accordingly.

Q: How does the new Cardinal Core impact the timing of a student's selection of their major?
A: The timing of students' selection of their major is unlikely to change with the new core.

Q. Are mechanisms in place to identify and support students who may struggle with the new core requirements?
A: Mechanisms are already in place to support student success in all courses. Students may wish to consult with a Student Success Coach and to avail themselves of Learning Center and Writing Center support.

Advisor FAQs

Q: When does the Cardinal Core launch?
A: The Cardinal Core will be in place for students who matriculate at Ball State beginning in August 2026.

Q: Can students who started at Ball State before fall 2026 opt into the Cardinal Core?
A: Yes, but switching catalog years will not be appropriate for most students. Students should consult with their advisors to determine how such a change will affect their time to degree.

Q: How will the new Cardinal Core impact students who matriculated prior to Fall 2026?
A: Students who started at Ball State prior to Fall 2026 should plan to finish their UCC requirements based on the program under which they began. If a student who started under the previous UCC wishes to consider the new Cardinal Core, they should consult with their advisor to find out how opting into the Cardinal Core will impact their graduation timeline. We will continue to offer courses to fulfill the prior UCC requirements through Summer 2031, in line with the university time limit guideline around completion of undergraduate programs (also known as "teaching out" the curriculum). Not all courses offered in the prior UCC must be offered; rather, a reasonable pathway to graduation must continue to be in place for students completing the prior core through Summer 2031.

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Q: Where can I find a list and descriptions of the Beneficence Themes?
A: Here you go.

Q: Do some academic programs recommend specific pathways through the Cardinal Core?
A: Yes, some programs may encourage students to take specific courses in the Cardinal Core.

Q: Can students double count courses between the Core and their majors?
A: Yes, students can double count 6 credits. Some academic programs may petition to double count additional credits.

Q: Can Cardinal Core courses count toward a student's major or minor?
A: Probably, depending on the major or minor. Departments have been encouraged to offer courses that serve as "gateways" to their programs, so students may choose to add an additional credential as a result. Eventually, we hope that the Beneficence Themes will be connected to minors as well.