



# **THE DIALOGUES OF LEARNING**

Lynn University's Core Curriculum for the 21st Century



**LYNN**  
UNIVERSITY



**THE DIALOGUES OF LEARNING**  
**CORE CURRICULUM FOR FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM**

As an institution that excels in interactive learning and innovative pedagogies, Lynn University offers a core curriculum, the *Dialogues of Learning*, that gives students the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge, and perspective essential to their intellectual, personal, and professional education. The *Dialogues* offer an innovative approach to general education that integrates liberal and professional study, knowledge and skills acquisition, and multidisciplinary perspectives and methods within a four-year developmental and outcomes-based curriculum.

The origin of all learning is questioning; thinking, asking, wondering why. Whether talking to ourselves or to others, dialogue is the medium through which we all learn, create, and acquire understanding. At a time when the sheer volume of information is ever increasing, the essential skills of reasoning, analysis, reflection, and the art of discourse remain essential. In the aesthetic dimensions of human imagination and creation, curiosity, wonderment, and inspiration arise from sensory interactions and dialogues of self-expression. In addition, for every known fact or accepted truth, there is always a need to question, to constantly ask why, or else we surrender not only our capacity to think, but also our ability to learn, change, and grow.

In that spirit, Lynn University's Core Curriculum views dialogue, philosophically and pedagogically, as the basis for all learning. Using a thematic approach to the perennial questions and goals of liberal education, the Core centers on three comprehensive domains of human thought, expression, and action:

- *Dialogues of Self and Society*
- *Dialogues of Belief and Reason*
- *Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life*

***Dialogues of Self and Society***

For every individual and society, the most fundamental of all questions is both the simplest and the most profound: who am I, what is my purpose? The desire and need to “know thyself,” as Socrates recognized, is the root of all knowledge, wisdom, and virtue. To seek self-awareness and to acquire self-knowledge requires all of the skills, knowledge, and multiple perspectives expressed in our learning outcomes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individual identity is a social as well as a personal phenomenon. Seminars that will fulfill this requirement will focus on the development of identity and the “situated self” historically and in the contemporary environment from an interdisciplinary perspective.

***Dialogues of Belief and Reason***

From ancient civilizations to the present, the desire to understand the nature of existence and the mysteries of life has inspired human thought, creativity, aesthetics, and artistry while occupying a central place in both religious and secular world views. Transcending any singular discipline or faith tradition, these seminars explore the historical and cross-cultural significance of belief systems and practices focused on the sacred, scientific, and secular explanations of human existence and the physical and natural world. Seminars that fulfill this requirement will also explore ethics as the legitimate domain of both theological and philosophical inquiry.

***Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life***

Pursuant to our educational goals of preparing students to be responsible, informed, and ethical citizens—locally and globally—these seminars focus on the ideas, values, institutions, and practices that have defined civic life within human societies. Civic engagement is impossible unless students acquire the skills, knowledge, and perspective that will allow them to understand political life. As Derek Bok argues in *Our Underachieving Colleges*, we must be deliberate in fulfilling our responsibilities in civic education and offer instruction in bodies of knowledge that have enduring quality: knowledge of American democracy, political philosophy, economics and public policy, and international affairs. These seminars will also examine the

nature of society and “the State” and the concepts of freedom, equality, justice, and power from both an historical and cross-cultural perspective.

Over four years, each student is required to take 12 seminars from these *Dialogues*, one in each of the thematic areas. In their content and pedagogy, the seminars within the *Dialogues of Learning*:

- Engage students in conversations exploring the richness of human thought historically, cross-culturally, and across disciplinary boundaries;
- Create a culture of inquiry, reflection, commitment and action, by requiring that every course be taught in a seminar format utilizing collaborative and interactive pedagogies;
- Foster an understanding of both the United States and Global community from an historical and contemporary perspective;
- Integrate critical thinking and communication skills, information literacy, and technological literacy into every course;
- Structure the acquisition of both skills and knowledge in a four year progressively challenging and sequential schema that includes coursework in the major and general education.

In concert with the *Dialogue* seminars, students are also required to take courses focused in both quantitative reasoning and scientific literacy. The ability to understand and analyze quantitative information and scientific knowledge is essential to engaged and informed citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Dialogues of Learning: Structure and Requirements**

The seminars are structured in three distinct phases reflective of the developmental approach to student learning; *Foundational, Transformational, and Integrative/Capstone*. Student learning outcomes in critical thinking, communication skills, information literacy and technological literacy are defined and measured in ALL Dialogue Seminars based upon institutional-wide rubrics for each skill area that is developmental, requiring increasing levels of competency and ability. Within the 12 courses in the three *Dialogues of Learning* areas, each student must complete 4 courses focused on the American experience and 4 courses designated as Global Studies, one for each area at each level.

#### **A. The Foundational Stage**

The first two years define the *Foundational* period. During this time, the *Dialogues* engage students in common and core principles, ideas, people, concepts, great works, etc. that we believe are essential to a liberal education. In the *Foundational* sequence, the seminars are structured for coherency and interdisciplinary perspectives through a combination of a common curricula and special topics; at least fifty percent of the course will contain common material and the remaining fifty percent will examine how these core principles and knowledge are applied in a diversity of disciplines.

- ❖ There will be *Foundational* seminars in each of the three main *Dialogues* offered at the 100 and 200 levels. Students must complete one seminar in each Dialogue at each level by the end of the sophomore year.
- ❖ Every student will be required to take at least two (one at each level) of their *Foundational Dialogues* with a member of the English faculty.
- ❖ Among these six foundational level *Dialogues*, the student must select one at the 100 and one at the 200 level that have an American focus and one at each level that has a Global focus.

## B. The Transformational and Integrative/Capstone Levels

In the third and fourth years, the *Transformational and Integrative/Capstone* levels, the seminars become increasingly integrated with the major fields of study and require higher levels of skills acquisition and application with more in-depth content and focus.

- ❖ Within the *Dialogues*, each student must complete 2 seminars at the 300 and 400 levels, including at least 2 in the major field or college.
- ❖ Within the 6 upper-level *Dialogue* courses, each student must complete 2 courses focused on the American experience and 2 courses in Global Studies at the 300 and/or 400 levels.

## C. Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Literacy Requirements

### 1. Quantitative Reasoning

- ❖ Students must complete two courses in QR during the Foundational period; *QR 100: Why Numbers Matter; Introduction to Quantitative Reasoning*; and *QR 200: Special Topics in Quantitative Reasoning for Explanation and Analysis*. There will be a common text for both courses. While all students will take the same *QR 100* course, in *QR 200*, students can select different sections/courses based upon a specific theme or topic.
- ❖ Students must complete 2 additional QR courses at the 300 and 400 levels that can be taken from within the *Dialogues* or in any course that carries a QR designation, including courses within the major field.

### 2. Scientific Literacy

- ❖ Students must successfully complete 4 courses in *Scientific Literacy*, one at each level; including a Foundational course *SL 100: The Scientific Imagination and Perspectives on the Human Experience*. The remaining three courses can be taken from across the curriculum from courses listed with the *SL* designation; of these courses, at least 2 must be at the 300 or 400 levels.

### ***Dialogues of Innovation: The January Term***

To accentuate and foster the spirit of innovation that distinguishes the Lynn experience, the Core Curriculum includes one additional requirement; a specially designed educational component, ***Dialogues of Innovation***. This entirely new term was created and implemented in January 2009. The purpose is to provide intensive and innovative learning opportunities outside the traditional academic setting. The January Term curriculum consists of a variety of interdisciplinary offerings, at various levels, from introductory to advanced, and also includes opportunities for internships, practicums, and other forms of experiential learning. In each of the four undergraduate years, students will successfully complete one course in the January term that will focus on innovative ideas, topics, pedagogies, and/or experiential learning experiences. During the January term, the University will also offer a *Symposium on Innovation* that will include theorists and practitioners who are actively involved with creating new ideas, approaches, and practices in their respective fields.

Collectively, therefore, the *Dialogues of Learning* represents what the Lynn University community believes is essential to undergraduate education and defines the knowledge, abilities, and habits of heart and mind that will define a graduate of Lynn University.

## **DIALOGUES OF LEARNING SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

### ***DIALOGUES OF SELF AND SOCIETY***

#### **Everything I Know About Myself, I Learned from Dr. Seuss**

This course will explore the student's understanding of themselves through a personal journey beginning with their first memory of their favorite story and culminating in the development of their personal narrative. Readings and related materials will help the student to identify the impact of their family relationships and family roles on the development of their identity. This identity will be manifested through the expression of their personal narrative and their ability to construct and deconstruct these stories.

#### **The Emerging Self in the 1960's**

The overall objective of this course is for students to gain a greater understanding of how the "self" or personal identity is constituted. The course uses a specific historical context in order to do this: America of the 1960's – an era in which the concept of "self" was at its apotheosis. In the course, students will examine the artistic representations of the search for self in literature, fiction and non-fiction, music, theater, film, fashion, and the visual arts and consider them as reflections of the social and cultural changes of the 60's.

#### **The Responsible Citizen: Awareness and Action in Today's Global Society**

"Discover your role in the complex issues facing today's global society including the environment and sustainable development, energy issues, the global food crisis, poverty and international conflicts." This course will present the definitions and theories that determine self, resulting from defining events during the major historical periods to the present day. This course will also further an understanding and define the sense of self in relation to the rest of the world. An introduction to individuals living in other countries and those countries' stances and roles, given these global dilemmas, will be utilized to demonstrate the differences (cultural, resource access and use) for individuals living in other countries.

#### **Naked Masks: The self behind the Image**

"Want to be someone completely different for the whole semester? Find a whole new persona behind the mask and experience the freedom of a totally new you." The objective of this course is to compare and analyze the mask, its historical, social, and psychological development, and how it affects self in society. Students will research and analyze the historical evolution of the mask in a peregrine culture, and compare its influence on that society with that of their own. Students will examine the use of mask and its affect on art, theatre, and society and connect it to ideas and concepts espoused in core and supplemental readings. The construction of a mask, by each student, will challenge them to explore self through an external medium.

### ***DIALOGUES OF BELIEF AND REASON***

#### **Myth, Magic and Morality**

We will explore the concepts of belief and reason through various historical, anthropological and philosophical perspectives. This course will examine the underlying meanings and assumptions behind our focus on belief and reason, especially their cultural and religious implications and their differences with a focus on practice and action. We will focus on the ways belief and reason are manifested in myths; magic, witchcraft and other practical aspects of religion; and morality, especially the justification of violence. Students will explore the nature of religion and the diversity that exists among and within different religious traditions from an academic perspective.

#### **Human Reason in the Age of Unreason: Current Debates, Past Legacies**

This course will provide highlights of the cultural history and dialectical relationship between belief and reason. We will begin with a discussion of how the Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation combined to provide the dominant representation and understanding of reason and rationality in Western Culture. We will explore the dominant understanding of religion as a form of knowledge within the context of medieval theology/philosophy and discuss the role of myths as forms of knowledge in the Ancient World. Throughout the course, we will discuss current debates (Global

Warming, our understanding of Islam, among others) that demonstrate how the ideas of belief and reason continue to inform political and cultural discourse.

### **The Mythological Hero: Warrior, Lover, Saint**

Did you know that John Wayne, the man who defined America's image of masculinity, was actually very much unlike the mythic figure one imagines? This course invites students to look at myth and belief-systems at face value and at the same time examine idealization, pre-conceived ideas, biases and prejudice. Texts such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, George Lucas' *Star Wars* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* form some of the myth hero images that populate our minds and also our movies because the big movie screen may be seen as a medium serving modern mythology.

### **The Quest for Identity**

This course will survey selected readings from many of the primary global, spiritual, mythological, folkloric, and philosophical belief systems, and the rationale(s) that seek to affirm or deny those beliefs. Specifically, this course will address the Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, and African belief systems, and will survey philosophers from Socrates and Confucius to Immanuel Kant and Jean Paul Sartre.

## ***DIALOGUES OF JUSTICE AND CIVIC LIFE***

### **Ethical Decision Making Through the Cinematic Process**

This course will use films to provide students with a foundation for ethical decision making in the contexts of altruistic considerations, idealistic considerations, individual considerations, and pragmatic considerations. Students will explore how others have made decisions in various environmental situations. Ensuing discussion and reflection will provide a basis for forming an opinion as to why the decision was appropriate or not. It is expected that by the end of the course students will have a template for ethical decision making.

### **New Orleans: Restructuring Life & Culture in the Big Easy**

New Orleans was decimated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Government at all levels failed to respond in a swift and sure way so as to assure a just and equitable delivery of resources and aid for the citizens of New Orleans. Despite the virtual bureaucratic collapse, the city of New Orleans has risen. The art, the food, the culture, the music, the people and the history refuse to die. Sheer resilience and optimism brought the city back to life. This course will explore the rebuilding and rebirth of the Big Easy: America's true melting pot.

### **Islam and Israel**

Is there a possibility of long-term peace in the Middle East? Historically, Christian wars to "free" the Holy Land were called Crusades and the religious wars of Muslim radicals were called Jihad or holy wars. Today, these terms are still used in the Middle East, although the context may be different. Israel, since 1948, has occupied land called Palestine, which historically was considered by Muslims as their homeland. Because America is a formal ally of Israel, many Muslim nations around the world regard America as an enemy. The class will become involved in assembling evidence to offer possible solutions to issues such as why the fighting continues in the Middle East, and how social and economic problems might be resolved.

### **Justice and Genocide in Global Context**

Issues of genocide continue to be a part of the global arena into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are hot spots all around the world where genocide is an imminent threat, although violence against certain ethnic groups on a smaller scale occurs virtually everywhere. This course will explore the history and structure of genocidal conflict through the examination of some of the more prominent attempts at ethnic, religious and socio-political extinction. As part of the civic engagement component of this course, students will participate in some of the global efforts to bring awareness of, and participate in, the attempts to end genocidal conflict.

## **DIALOGUES OF INNOVATION: JANUARY TERM**

### **Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles**

Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles will provide a two-and-a-half week snapshot of the connections between humans and their impact on the Atlantic, coastal environments and resident wildlife by tracking trash through ongoing beach clean-ups with monitoring and precise data collection at four designated sites in Central and South Florida. This course offers an opportunity for hands-on learning both in and outside of the classroom through thorough monitoring of marine debris (utilizing detailed data cards), interactions with biologists in the field and continuous analysis of marine debris (what type, how much, where discovered, how it arrived on site and distance traveled).

### **The Dawn of Rock Music: A Cultural Study**

Elvis and The Beatles, Woodstock, Punk and Reggae: Discover the dawn of rock 'n' roll music and learn how rock transformed the world then and how it still does. *The Dawn of Rock Music* examines the key musical artists of rock 'n' roll from around the world in the late 1950s, 60s, and 70s who caused this musical art form to become a dominant form of popular culture. In addition to a close examination of the music and lyrics of key musical artists of these decades, the course will explore the cultural influences that are reflected in the music of the era, as well as the cultural artifacts that it has spawned — the music festival, alternative lifestyle choices, and fashion and music videos among others. Lastly, *The Dawn of Rock Music* will attempt to reach across time and space and establish a global connection between then and now for students through the study of the form and content of the original rock music and the cultural meanings and expressions of the postmodern world.

### **Call of the Mall: The Psychology of Shopping**

Everything you always wanted to know about shopping and why. In this J Term experience, students will investigate the various human behaviors and responses related to shopping in several venues. The selected venues will be located at the Town Center Mall. As well, students will explore the effect of advertising, Mall design, store layout, employee behaviors, and the social psychology of brand loyalty. This will be accomplished through experiential activities. In addition students will also be involved in a research study incorporating naturalistic observation and a cross-sectional descriptive survey. The concept of budgeting in relation to shopping will be examined. Students will gain an understanding of shopping as a mood-altering experience that can lead to addiction.

### **Leadership Development in New Zealand**

Come spend J Term in New Zealand! We will be taking in the breathtaking sights, learning, and having fun. The focus of this course is on leadership development. Learn about different leadership theories, the differences in leadership styles between the United States and New Zealand and also how you can take this information into the real world. We will work on team-building exercises, experience an outdoor adventure course, hear guest lecturers from around Australia and New Zealand as well as learn about the local culture and history.

### **Wonder Woman and Superman: Gender in the Media**

From Cinderella and Prince Charming to Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt: Explore past and present gender representations in the media. Gender in the Media provides students with the theoretical background and critical skills needed to analyze the portrayal of gender in the media. It emphasizes how media reflect, maintain, and influence social and political conceptions of gender. The course will begin with an historical look at gender representations at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and will progress to the present. Texts to be analyzed will range from postcards and print advertisements to radio programs, television, film, and the Internet.

### **Your Entrepreneurial Idea! Your Success!**

This J Term course offers students the opportunity to be creative, innovative and entrepreneurial in conceptualizing and determining societal acceptance of a new product (tangibility, service, or belief). Student teams will interview and assess potential users and seller's perception of their product. The course concludes with a report and critical analysis of their new product findings as to its acceptance.

## AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

Informed and engaged citizenship requires that student understand the history and development of American society. From a historical and interdisciplinary perspective, Dialogues that focus on the American experience will enrich students understanding of the past, present and future of American institutions and values and the role of the nation in world affairs.



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Diversity and global education across the curriculum, is grounded in an integrative learning approach encompassing experiential, informal and formal learning environments focusing on local, regional and global societies and their dynamics. Global education simultaneously recognizes the interconnectedness of an integrating world and the inherent value of the distinctive identity of any culture, county or locale. Seminars with a Global focus create varied educational opportunities for all students to gather knowledge about cultures, histories, languages, politics, societies and economies.



# DIALOGUES OF LEARNING

Lynn University's Core Curriculum for the 21st Century

## STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

### DIALOGUES OF LEARNING STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

- All students must complete 4 courses in the following domains:
  - Dialogues of Self and Society
  - Dialogues of Belief and Reason
  - Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life
  - Dialogues of Innovation
- Students must complete 4 courses in Quantitative Reasoning and 4 courses in Scientific Literacy
- Students must complete 4 courses with a Global Focus and 4 with an American Focus
- Embedded within the four Dialogues are the following core proficiencies and skills: critical thinking and reasoning, written communication, oral communication, information and technological literacy

### DIALOGUES OF SELF AND SOCIETY

For every individual and society, the most fundamental of all questions is both the simplest and the most profound, who am I, what is my purpose? The desire and need to "know myself," as Socrates recognized, is the root of all knowledge, wisdom and virtue. To seek self-awareness and acquire self-knowledge requires all of the skills, knowledge, and multiple perspectives expressed in our learning outcomes for the 21st century. Seminars focus on the development of identity and the "situated self" historically and in the contemporary environment from an interdisciplinary perspective.

### DIALOGUES OF BELIEF AND REASON

From ancient civilizations to the present, the desire to understand the nature of existence and the mysteries of life has inspired human thought, creativity, aesthetics, and artistry while occupying a central place in both religious and secular world views. Transcending any singular discipline or faith tradition, these seminars explore the historical and cross-cultural significance of belief systems and practices focused on the sacred, scientific, and secular explanations of human existence and the physical and natural world.

### DIALOGUES OF JUSTICE AND CIVIC LIFE

Pursuant to our educational goals of preparing students to be responsible, informed, and ethical citizens-locally and globally, these seminars focus on the ideas, values, institutions, and practices that have defined civic life within human societies. These seminars will also examine the nature of society and "The State" and the concepts of freedom, equality, justice, and power from both a historical, American and cross-cultural perspective.

### DIALOGUES OF INNOVATION

To accentuate and foster the spirit of innovation that distinguishes the Lynn experience, the Dialogues include a specially designed educational component, Dialogues of Innovation, Course in January. Term will focus on innovative ideas, topics, pedagogies, and/or experiential learning experiences. A Symposium on Innovation will also be offered and will include theorists and practitioners who are actively involved with creating new ideas, approaches, and practices in their respective fields. The January Term is intended to provide opportunities for Lynn University faculty and staff to design integrative, innovative curricular and co-curricular learning experiences and collaborative programs.



## EXAMPLES OF DIALOGUE COURSES

- Myth, Magic and Morality
- Ireland: From Paganism to St. Patrick to the Present
- New Orleans: Restructuring Life & Culture in the Big Easy
- Naked Masks: The Self behind the Image
- Ethical Decision Making Through the Chrematic Process
- Everything I know About Myself, I Learned from Dr. Seuss
- The Emerging Self in the 1960's
- The Responsible Citizen: Awareness & Action in Today's Global Society
- Naked Masks: The Self behind the Image
- Karma and Connections in the Age of Reason
- Islam to Israel
- Justice and Genocide in Global Context
- Global Crises: Individual Response and Responsibility
- Oedipus to Oprah

## EXAMPLES OF JANUARY TERM COURSES

- Emerging Democracies and Political Influence in Today's Global Economy
- Cultural Competence and Applied International Research in Action
- Journey of Hope to Jamaica
- Immersion in French and Francophone Cultures
- International Studies in Art and the Humanities: Focus on Ancient Egypt
- "My Mother, Myself": Emerging Feminine Consciousness
- Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles
- Green Literature and Ecosystems in the Sunshine State
- Free At Last: DNA and the Death Penalty
- Wonder Woman and Superman: Gender in the Media

Lynn 2020 Vision:  
Innovative, International and Individualized  
Education for the 21st Century



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## FEATURE: AAC&U MEMBER INNOVATIONS

### What's In a Dialogue? Lynn University's Core Curriculum Explores Big Questions

When Lynn University Vice President for Academic Affairs Cynthia Patterson first launched a committee to extensively redesign the university's general education program, she expected some resistance from the faculty. So did Associate Professor Katrina Carter-Tellison, the university's core curriculum chair. "We basically heard a lot of 'Are you crazy?'" Carter-Tellison remembers. The ambitious new program they were proposing would completely change how Lynn students approached their education, weaving "big questions" of liberal learning into the curriculum from students' very first semester. The program also called for a dialogue format of teaching that was unfamiliar to many. "Lynn isn't a classic liberal arts college, and for us to create this kind of full-fledged expression of liberal education—well, a lot of people were really surprised," Patterson says.

More than three years later, however, the new program, Dialogues of Learning, is gaining accolades from both faculty and students, and has helped revitalize Lynn's mission. Lynn, a private institution of about 2,000 undergraduates located in Boca Raton, Florida, has long focused on professional education, and 95 percent of students are enrolled in programs like management, hospitality, communications, and business. But the institution's strategic plan, Lynn 2020, prioritized restructuring the general education program to provide students with the benefits of a liberal education without losing the professional programs that the school is known for. "Our vision was to create a curriculum in which all our degrees—most of which are professional—are grounded in the liberal arts," Patterson says. "We wanted everyone to be exposed to liberal education for all four years, not just the first two."

#### Planning a New Dialogue

In fall 2006, a task force began exploring the national conversation about liberal education. To introduce what was an entirely new educational paradigm for Lynn, its first goal was to create a common body of knowledge among the faculty about the language of liberal education. The task force members read *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a National Goes to College*, AAC&U's 2002 report that began outlining the essential learning all students need, and later read *College Learning for the New Global Century*, AAC&U's 2007 report from the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative that further clarified these [essential learning outcomes](#). Members determined that they wanted Lynn to have a four-year integrated curriculum in which the majors were defined in relation to the core, rather than the other way around. The new core would also be "innovative, individualized, and international" Patterson says, and would build on national trends in higher education.

Almost 60 percent of Lynn's 110 full-time faculty members participated in committees that discussed in detail each learning outcome and refined it specifically for Lynn, explained Carter-Tellison. "When we created the task force, people realized that we really were going to do this big change, and they rolled up their sleeves and got to work." The committee decided to call the new core curriculum Dialogues of Learning based on a quote from Elie Wiesel in which he described a moral society as one "that is living in dialogue; that is honoring the humanity of every member." Because dialogues happen more effectively within smaller groups, the curriculum would be centered on seminar-style classes in which students would have ample opportunities for discussion.

There are three main thematic areas that make up the core curriculum: Dialogues of Self and Society, Dialogues of Belief and Reason, and Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life. The dialogues are structured in three phases of learning, starting with a Foundational phase in the first and second years, and followed by Transformational and Integrative/Capstone stages in the third and fourth years. All Lynn students are required to take a total of twelve seminars over four years, four in each thematic area, and to move through the phases of learning as they progress. In addition, a fourth thematic area—Dialogues of Innovation—was created specifically for the university's new January term, a required two-week block in which



More than 90 percent of students at Lynn University choose professional majors, such as business or communications.

undergraduates focus on experiential learning projects and courses. The Dialogues core also includes four required scientific literacy courses and four quantitative reasoning courses, also taken across the phases of learning.



Students in Anna Krift's J-Term course collect trash from Boca Raton beaches and compile data about where it might have originated.

### What's In a Dialogue?

A first-year student's academic load looks much different now than it did a few years ago, Patterson explains. Then, a student might have taken English 101, introductory math, public speaking, and a major course during his or her first term. Now, the student will take a Dialogues of Self and Society seminar at the Foundational level, a quantitative reasoning course, and one or more courses in the major. In each Dialogues seminar course, half the content is common among students in other Self and Society seminars, and half is specific to the particular course. The common content comes from a set of course readers, designed by faculty disciplinary committees over a year in 2007 and 2008. The Self and Society foundational dialogue

reader includes thirty-two selections ranging from the ancient world to the twenty-first century—from Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* to Emerson's *Self-Reliance* to essays about reconstructing gender. The specific content varies depending on the course: in Spring 2010, students looking for a foundational-level Self and Society dialogue can choose among American Pop Culture; Where Do I Belong: Emerging Self; and Oedipus to Oprah. "Students get their 101-level writing and their oral communication practice—what used to be public speaking—embedded in this foundational seminar course," Patterson explains.

While many faculty initially expressed concern about having to revamp their existing entry-level courses, most became more supportive of the Dialogues curriculum as they realized the benefit of all entering students using common core material. And many faculty members were excited to be able to focus the seminars on their own areas of interest and expertise in a way that wouldn't have been possible in standard 100-level survey courses. Carter-Tellison, Patterson, and their colleagues also developed an extensive guidebook for faculty about teaching within the new curriculum, and monthly faculty development workshops provide support and assistance in improving Dialogues pedagogy and content.

Students' responses to the new curriculum have also been generally positive, Patterson says. "As a first-year student, you're excited because the courses are not just like what you had in high school," she explains. "Instead of Intro to Biology or a generic science course, you're taking The Scientific Imagination, and the book is Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*." The Scientific Imagination course fulfills one of the four required scientific literacy courses.

### J-Term: Dialogues of Innovation


In Associate Professor Anna Krift's J-Term Course, Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles Take Two, students spent the two-week January term collecting trash—and data—from four different beaches in the Boca Raton area. The students in her class collected trash, studied currents and tides, and tracked turtles and sea birds. The students also studied "sea beans"—plant seed pods that travel with ocean currents—and tracked them back to their most likely place of origin. "We saw Amazon beans that had come up the Amazon river, worked their way into the ocean, and floated up from South American and the Caribbean," Krift explains. Of the twenty-one students in the class, only seven were biology majors, while the rest of the students came from fields like business administration, education, and psychology, and spanned all four class years. The J-Term classes are important because they foster connections in learning, Krift says. "I think the real beauty of the Dialogues of Innovation is that it provides students with an opportunity to really focus on something intensive for a short period of time, and to try something new that they otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to explore. The whole idea of the Dialogues of Learning is to look throughout the curriculum for liberal learning, not just in your major."

At the end of the course, students compile the data they've collected during their trash cleanup and share it with several coastal cleanup groups in the Boca Raton area. Krift's Talking Trash course is one of more than fifty options for on-campus study during J-Term; students also may choose an off-campus experiential course. Recent offerings included The Original Americans: Beliefs, Practices, and Challenges, in which students traveled to Native American territories; Ireland's Tradition through History, Literature, and Religion; and Journey of Hope to Haiti, a service-learning course through the nonprofit Food for the Poor.

The Dialogues of Learning has worked well at Lynn University because of its small size and the faculty's willingness to work hard to transform the curriculum, Patterson says, but that doesn't mean Lynn's methods aren't transferable. "I think that every undergraduate institution can benefit from common reading experiences and integrated learning over four years."

**Special Note:**

*Lynn University J-Term students participating in the Journey of Hope to Haiti were in Port-au-Prince on January 12 when the devastating earthquake struck. AAC&U extends its concern and sympathies to the Lynn community, as well as our admiration for the efforts of Lynn's students and faculty working in Haiti and around the world in the best tradition of liberal learning and international dialogue. See [AAC&U's statement about the Haitian earthquake](#), and for updates and information, visit Lynn University's [earthquake update page](#). To contribute to Lynn's Haiti Crisis Fund, visit its [Web site](#).*



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# LYNN

MAGAZINE

FOR ALUMNI, PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF LYNN UNIVERSITY

## EXAMINING THE BIG QUESTIONS

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# THE DIALOGUES OF LEARNING

## Lynn University's Core Curriculum for the 21st Century

Remember the required courses you took in college—English 101, College Algebra, Biology 101 and the like? Chances are, you got through them by doing a lot of memorization and along the way, you wondered, “Why do I have to take this class? When will I ever use or need it?”

By Liz McKey

In the language of education, these required courses are known by another name—general education. In recent years, the value of this mainstay of undergraduate education has been questioned not just by dubious students (along with parents and employers), but also by leaders in higher education—including those at Lynn University.

Two years ago, Lynn’s leadership developed a strategic plan, titled *Lynn 2020*, to transform the university into “one of the most innovative, international and individualized small universities

in America.” The number one strategic priority for fulfilling this vision was to “recast, partially restructure and intensify the focus of [Lynn’s] academic offerings.”

Answering that challenge was Lynn’s faculty, led by Vice President for Academic Affairs Cynthia M. Patterson. Following 18 months of intensive work, they created a new and distinctive core curriculum titled “The Dialogues of Learning.” Blending liberal arts education with professional study, Lynn’s core is comprised of courses that are interdisciplinary and both

internationally and domestically focused.

The word “dialogues” captures the essence of the new core, Patterson says. “Dialogue, debate, discussion, questioning, multiple perspectives, discernment and reflection are all intrinsic qualities of the educational experience. The new core represents what the Lynn University community believes is essential to undergraduate education and defines the knowledge, abilities and habits of heart and mind that will define a graduate of Lynn University.”

President Kevin M. Ross underscores her thoughts. “The Dialogues are the cornerstone of the Lynn academic experience,” he says. “It is our hope and expectation that our graduates will leave Lynn better prepared than others to write, analyze, speak and participate in a global economy and society.”

While the new core curriculum has been in existence for only one semester, it is already drawing praise—not only from students and faculty at Lynn, but also from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the leading national organization concerned with undergraduate liberal education. Said AAC&U President Carol Schneider, “Lynn’s newly articulated educational vision is inspirational.... Lynn has created a dynamic and coherent design for the college curriculum and for student accomplishment.”

### Asking the ‘big questions’

At the heart of Lynn’s Dialogues of Learning is the idea that learning requires questioning—thinking, asking, wondering why—along with robust discussion. Through the Dialogues, students examine the “big questions”: Who am I, and who are you? What do we believe and why? And what is right, and what creates a just society? Hence, Lynn’s new core centers on three

themes tied to those perennial questions:

- Dialogues of Self and Society
- Dialogues of Belief and Reason
- Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life

For each of the Dialogues, Lynn has published two sets of readings that every student will study and discuss in the first and second years—which Lynn calls the Foundational period. These six volumes, which constitute at least 50 percent of the course content, are the product of a meticulous selection process by the faculty and incorporate important writings from ancient to modern times.

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CAROL SCHNEIDER,  
AAC&U PRESIDENT

Explains sociology assistant professor and Dialogues chair Katrina Carter-Tellison, “We knew that we had to have our own material. An ordinary textbook merely surveys material and has very little depth. Our readers not only support the Dialogue themes, but also provide significant depth, encompassing the fundamental ideas and knowledge that span the ages and are

essential to a liberal arts education.”

For the third and fourth years, which Lynn calls the Transformational and Integrative/Capstone levels, the Dialogue seminars will be offered within students’ majors. This feature points to another distinction of Lynn’s new core: It is built into all four years of the undergraduate experience, not just the first two, as is the case at most colleges and universities.

### Engaged and interactive learning

The Dialogues courses are taught in a seminar format, as opposed to the lecture style, and they are taught by full-time faculty members. Lynn’s small class size is ideal for the kind of interactive learning that goes hand-in-hand with seminar courses.

“Because we are a small university, we are able to maintain a 17:1 student-faculty ratio, which allows our students to get the best-possible experience from the Dialogues,” says President Ross. “You cannot have every student in a large, overcrowded lecture hall participate in an interactive learning experience with a professor. That is why we do not have any large lecture halls at Lynn.”

By design, Lynn’s core is based on a learning-centered community, that is, one where faculty and students are equally important and mutually responsible participants in the learning process. The seminar format and small classes reinforce this responsibility; they demand harder work by both students and professors. Students must read and be prepared to discuss the material in class, and professors must be adept at engaging students in the learning process.

“It requires that professors not only know the material,” Carter-Tellison says, “but that they know how to stimulate and manage discussion in the classroom. That means asking the right

questions so that students get involved in their own learning. It also means being able to inspire students to such an extent that when they leave the classroom, they do the work required to continue the learning process.”

The dialogues/seminar approach also teaches students respect for others, the skills necessary to deepen their perspective and understanding, and the importance of reasoned discourse in making informed judgments.

### Beyond the basics

So, has Lynn tossed out English, math and science? Far from it.

As Carter-Tellison explains, “We haven’t sacrificed the content; we’ve just made it more relevant. The shift is to not less English, math or science, but *more* and in different ways.”

Instead of taking an English 101 composition class, for instance, students in the Dialogues courses read, write, analyze and debate ideas and issues in their readers and other works selected by their professors. One example is English associate professor Gila Aloni’s course, “The Myth(o)logical Hero,” in the Dialogues of Belief and Reason. Her students are exploring the notion of myth, heroes and belief systems through such wide-ranging works as Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, George Lucas’ *Star Wars*, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and the John Wayne movie *El Dorado*.

Along the way, Aloni’s students are learning to read and think critically, to write—individually in the format of essays and journals, and collaboratively in a wiki (a Web page created and edited by a group)—and to deliver an oral presentation using PowerPoint. Throughout, students are becoming proficient in gathering and discerning information and in using technology.

Ultimately, Aloni says, the goal is for students to be able to judge information for themselves and to be able

to engage in a debate—governed not by emotion but by reasoning and logic. “It’s important for students to be aware of the information they receive, to filter it through their own minds and not just accept information because someone said it’s so. In other words, they need to ask, Is it myth or logical?”

Students on the one hand look at myth and belief systems at face value and, at the same time, use reasoning

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PRESIDENT KEVIN M. ROSS

and tools of analysis to examine pre-conceived ideas, biases, prejudice and idealization. “I’m amazed by students’ rich use of rhetoric and depth of ideas,” Aloni says of the resulting discussion.

In total, the Dialogues seminars number more than three dozen and include such intriguing titles as “Everything I Know About Myself I Learned from Dr. Seuss,” “Digital Identity,” “The Journey Toward

Equality in America: From King to Obama,” and “The Emerging Self in the 1960s.”

### Science and math for the rest of us

In the realm of science, Lynn has given serious thought to what students need to know about the subject. Instead of single-focused biology, chemistry or physics, students now take the course “Introduction to Scientific Literacy,” which explores the methods, discoveries and theories of science from an interdisciplinary and historical perspective.

Leading that effort has been biology associate professor Gary Villa. “The truth is, the old watered-down science course for non-majors never really worked well,” he says. “We were just teaching students a lot of interesting facts that didn’t help them understand what science is, how it works or how it affects them.”

So to help students grasp those important concepts, Villa has replaced the old textbook for non-science majors with a book by popular author Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. “The focus isn’t on dry facts; it’s on how did we learn this and why was it important,” Villa says. “We’re covering a couple of chapters a week and discussing them in class. The freshmen are coming up with some fantastic ideas. I’ve been blown away by some of the points they make.”

And in place of College Algebra, Lynn students are learning math for the real world through an “Introduction to Quantitative Reasoning.” This course is all about how data, statistics and other mathematical information impact everyday life, or as mathematics assistant professor Michael Grigelis puts it, “becoming a better-informed consumer of quantitative information.” Students are gaining an understanding of loan agreements, the credit and mortgage industry, and other challenging and useful concepts. It does not get any more “real” than that.



Dialogues of Learning Steering Committee members (back row, from left) Lizbeth Keiley, Marcheta Wright, Rebecca André, Cynthia M. Patterson, Valerie Fabj, Shaun Exsteen, Gila Aloni, Joseph Hall, (front row, from left) Anna Krift, Gary Villa, Katrina Carter-Tellison and Maureen Goldstein

Lynn's new core requires four years of both Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Literacy. After the first year, students can fulfill these requirements by selecting from courses within the Dialogues or in their major.

#### The 4th Dialogue...the J-Term

Lynn has left no stone unturned in its new core curriculum—including the 2-1/2 week period between the fall and spring semesters. Formally titled the Dialogues of Innovation, but more commonly known as the January Term, or J-Term, this mini-term is all about creative learning through special proj-

ects, study abroad and internships. While every student in the day undergraduate program must take a J-Term course each year, they have a vast array of choices—74 to be exact.

Leading the faculty collaboration behind all those courses have been Anna Krift, assistant professor of international relations, and Shaun Exsteen, associate dean of the Institute for Achievement and Learning.

Says Krift, “We asked faculty, ‘What is your passion? Maybe you design a course around that. Or, if you want to teach within your field, how would you do it differently?’ ”

“This was a time for faculty to think outside the box,” Exsteen adds, “and they amazed us with their ideas.”

From those ideas sprang such imaginative classes as performing an off-Broadway production in New York City; studying and attending the presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C.; and interning with the ESPN X Games in Aspen, Colo. Others, like Krift's course, “Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles,” were closer to home but no less impressive. In her environmentally focused class, students collected and analyzed trash from local beaches and met with biologists at

wildlife centers to learn about turtle migration, nesting sites and humans' impact on beaches.

Exsteen, a native of South Africa, taught an international relations course with scholar in residence Daniel Silke, a noted political analyst specializing in South African politics and global issues. Silke was one of three experts presenting their ideas in a Dialogues of Innovation Speaker Series. Futurist Andrew Zolli launched the series on Dec. 2, discussing "Excellence and Innovation: Exploring the Road Ahead," and Melissa Harris-Lacewell, associate professor of politics and African American studies at Princeton University, spoke Jan. 12 on "The Significance of Race in U.S. Politics."

Ideas for J-Term courses also came from Lynn students themselves. Says Dialogues Chair Carter-Tellison, "In an open forum with students last spring, we said, 'This is your J-Term, too. What kinds of things are you interested in?'" Among the courses resulting from students' input was a seminar on DNA evidence and the death penalty.

Beyond the fascinating topics, the J-Term offers something else—an exceptional level of focus and interaction, say Krift and Exsteen.

"It's a wonderful opportunity," says Krift, who benefitted from a J-Term in her own undergraduate education. "How often do you get the chance to immerse yourself in one topic or to study with a scholar in residence for an extended period?"

Adds Exsteen, "The interaction is so different from that in an ordinary class. Faculty learn so much more about the students and the students learn much more about each other."



"The truth is, the old watered-down science course for non-majors never really worked well; we were just teaching students a lot of interesting facts that didn't help them understand what science is, how it works or how it affects them."

GARY VILLA, BIOLOGY  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

### Measuring the learning

With any credible endeavor, there must be measurable results—and Lynn's new core curriculum is no exception. What are students learning, and how do we know they are learning? Here is yet another distinction of the Dialogues: progressive and measurable student learning outcomes.

"We can't simply proclaim everything is great and the core is working," says Carter-Tellison. "We have to go in with measurable components so that in every course, at every level, we can gauge students' learning."

And so, built into the design of every Dialogue seminar are specific criteria, or rubrics, by which each skill set—critical thinking, communication, and information and technological literacy—is measured. And especially noteworthy, these rubrics are developmental, meaning they require increasing levels of competency and ability, from the freshman through the senior year.

### The work continues

Lynn's new core curriculum is remarkable in another aspect: it was written and implemented in just 18 months—a blink of an eye at academic institutions.

Says Carter-Tellison, "The officials at the AAC&U told us the places where this process [restructuring the core] works best are the places where leaders say, 'we're going to do this' and then they do it, rather than spend five years talking about it."

But, she is quick to add, Lynn's important work is continuing in refining The Dialogues of Learning. "This is an ongoing process. There is no end. Curriculum is living and breathing. It's constantly evolving."

Much like learning itself. [LYNN](#)



The January Term, or J-Term, was a time for creative learning at its best. Among the offerings were (clockwise) "ESPN Winter X Games," a course exploring the world's premier extreme winter sporting event in Aspen, Colo.; "Talking Trash and Tracking Turtles," a Florida coastal environmental course; scholar in residence and noted South African political analyst Daniel Silke; and "Witness to History: The 2009 Presidential Inauguration," an academic seminar in Washington, D.C.





## A VISION FOR LYNN UNIVERSITY

*Lynn's vision is to be recognized as one of the most innovative, international, and individualized small universities in America.*

The Dialogues of Learning:  
A Lynn 2020 Strategic Initiative