

3.1 Common Curriculum

Students at Yale-NUS College share one powerful intellectual experience at the heart of their education: they complete an ambitious programme of courses known as the Common Curriculum. This linked set of courses stimulates a community of learning that is centred on fundamental questions in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences.

Year 1 Semester 1 - YCC1111 Literature and Humanities 1, YCC1113 Philosophy and Political Thought 1, YCC1121 Comparative Social Inquiry, YCC1122 Quantitative Reasoning and YCC1133 Week 7: Learning Across Boundaries (LAB)

Year 1 Semester 2 - YCC1112 Literature and Humanities 2, YCC1114 Philosophy and Political Thought 2 and YCC1131 Scientific Inquiry 1

Year 2 Semester 1 - YCC2121 Modern Social Thought and YCC2137 Scientific Inquiry 2

Between Year 2 - 4 - 1 Historical Immersion module

By studying these topics together in a structured fashion, students build a common foundation of knowledge that covers many disciplines. They study questions of abiding human interest and of immediate contemporary importance in a deep and sustained manner, and they emerge with a shared set of references, allowing them to fall easily into serious intellectual conversation with one another. In this way, the Common Curriculum creates a lively campus environment of well-informed discussion and debate, which in turn deepens the intellectual development of each student.

Creativity and a sense of wonder are highly prized at Yale-NUS, as are sharp analytic skills and the ability to craft compelling arguments. In each part of the Common Curriculum, students are asked to articulate and defend their positions, beliefs, and assumptions. Through this training, they gain an unusually broad understanding of many fields and a robust confidence in their ability to deploy different modes of thought and analysis. The habits of mind and the intellectual abilities gained through this intense education serve them well as they confront the complex challenges of the 21st century. In addition to the practical benefits that this course of study provides, students often find that a liberal arts and science education offers more personal rewards. It can enrich their inner lives, lead them into friendships different from the ones that they might find elsewhere, and foster their ability to step outside the assumptions of their time and place. The Common Curriculum establishes a broader collegiate environment that helps individuals to cultivate their talents, consider their social responsibilities, and appreciate the humanizing influence of intellectual inquiry.

Teaching and Learning

In most Common Curriculum courses, weekly lectures offer students a sustained analysis of their topic while small seminars encourage more active learning. The seminars are held twice weekly in groups of 18 students. During those sessions the students may plunge into analyzing a data set or discussing the meaning of a challenging text. They may practise different forms of oral argument, from impromptu spoken responses to prepared presentations. The writing they do may consist of creative essays, research papers, or laboratory reports. Students learn to perform quantitative analysis and assess existing scientific evidence; they practice drawing inferences from data and presenting their findings in clear and effective visual formats, cultivating artistic as well as logical skills.

The Common Curriculum contains a degree of intellectual coherence rarely found in higher education today. The courses are coordinated, and each is carefully designed to challenge students from a wide range of academic and individual backgrounds. Students learn to distinguish distinct modes of inquiry and understanding, discover links between disciplines, and connect these insights to diagnosing and resolving problems of contemporary society.

Week 7: Learning Across Boundaries

More popularly known as “Week Seven”, this learning across boundaries course is a distinctive experiential feature of the Common Curriculum’s first year. Conducted mid-semester over a period of one week, students leave the classroom to share insights gained from field observation or meeting with practitioners in different fields and bring them to bear on contemporary problems. Students sometimes travel overseas to collaborate with international partners and experts.

Week 7 faculty lead broad thematic discussions bridging the sciences, social sciences and humanities, and faculty and students share brief but intense learning experiences that cross disciplinary boundaries and encourage creative thought. The week culminates in a day of presentations and performances demonstrating what has been achieved, and students return to the semester’s work refreshed with a renewed sense of purpose.