

Fundamentals Student Handbook

2025–2026

Welcome to the Fundamentals Major!

You have joined an ambitious and talented cohort of students and faculty who are together invested in the careful and thoughtful consideration of history's greatest texts. This is a major dedicated to study that is deeper than it is broad and that perhaps values wisdom more than academic convention. Students shape their own courses of study in conversation with a Fundamentals Faculty Adviser. There are many resources available to help you, and we encourage you to refer to these individuals frequently:

- Fundamentals Faculty Director: Ryan Coyne
- Assistant Instructional Professor: Melih Levi
- Assistant Director, College Programs: Sara Bakerman
- Faculty Adviser: assigned to you by the department, but you can arrange to change advisers at any time. Contact fundamentals@uchicago.edu for details.
- College Adviser*: assigned to you by the College

** Please note that while your College Adviser is well-versed in College rules and regulations, they may not be familiar with all aspects of the Fundamentals major. We will work with them closely, but please feel free to copy fundamentals@uchicago.edu on emails to your adviser or refer them to us when questions arise.*

For more information, refer to the Fundamentals [website](#). Look there for an up-to-date course schedule and downloadable forms you may need throughout the year.

To help you manage your time and anticipate your next steps, we have put together this calendar of major events in your Fundamentals life. You should look it over in its entirety now and refer to it again each quarter. With regard to the particular graduation requirements for Fundamentals, please consult the College Catalog.

We particularly want to encourage you to cultivate your relationship with your Faculty Adviser. They are excited to work with you but be aware that their schedule can be very busy. You should expect to take responsibility for this relationship yourself. Ask for meetings when you need or want them; if you are having difficulty securing the meetings you need, let us know.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

Second Year

I. Autumn Quarter

- A. Students apply to Fundamentals in the Fall Quarter of their second year. The application period usually opens in Week 4 and closes at the end of Week 6. Prospective majors should plan to apply during this window and check the website for exact dates.

II. Winter Quarter

- A. Enroll in the Gateway Course (see Fundamentals [website](#)).
- B. Enroll in a text course. Usually this is a FNDL originating or cross-listed course, but you may occasionally find a suitable course outside the major that has not been cross-listed. If you have questions, contact fundamentals@uchicago.edu.
- C. If you do not already have fluency in a foreign language, begin/continue foreign language work.
 - Remember that you will need to attain proficiency in a language at the 203 level and that you will be required to read at least one of your Fundamentals texts—either wholly or in significant part—in the language you choose. If you are having trouble picking a foreign language, you should speak to your Faculty Adviser and the Instructional Professor.
- D. Early in the quarter, there will be a reception for students and faculty. Look for the email announcement and please plan to attend. It will be a good opportunity to connect with faculty and more advanced Fundamentals students.
- E. Before Week 7, make an appointment to meet with your Faculty Adviser.
 - Your Fundamentals Faculty Adviser was assigned to you when you entered the program.
 - This is an introductory meeting. Be prepared to discuss your Fundamentals question and the kinds of texts you think might help you approach your question. How has your thinking changed since you applied to the program last autumn?
 - Explain how your Fundamentals question relates to other interests and passions in your life. Try to become familiar with your adviser's research interests. Consider telling your adviser about other things you do, on or off campus, and other interests you find animating.

- Discuss with your adviser the kind of relationship you would like to have with each other. How does your adviser understand their role? How would they like to be contacted? How often will you be in touch?
- Note that you do not always have to have a specific question when you arrange to meet with your adviser. Sometimes it is nice just to check in, share what you are working on in your Fundamentals coursework, and discuss your developing interests.

III. Spring Quarter

- A. Enroll in a text course. Keep in mind that you will have to write a Junior Paper next year, almost always focusing on a single text or author. You can only write about a text you have studied in a course at the College (which could include a course on several texts or authors, a Fundamentals course, or an independent study).
 - If you would like to write about a work that is not commonly taught in the College, you should consider taking an independent study course with an appropriate instructor (within or outside of the Fundamentals department) this quarter or next Autumn.
- B. Attend the Power of Books lecture.
- C. By Week 8, meet with your College Adviser. This is required for all second-year students; get in touch with them and set up a meeting.
- D. After Week 6, meet with your Fundamentals Faculty Adviser to discuss your plans for the Junior Paper. You should begin to browse course listings and other resources to ascertain topics and text(s) for your [Junior Paper](#).
 - Summer can be a time of exploration; you and your Faculty Adviser should discuss the range of texts you might consider.
- E. Apply for the Charles M. Gray Summer Research grant for rising 3rd years. This funding can help with language study and research in the U.S. or internationally.
- F. Attend the Fundamentals end-of-year reception.

Third Year

I. Autumn Quarter

- A. Come to our Autumn reception!
- B. In Week 2 or 3, you will have a Review Conference.
 - These meetings are not interrogations! They are designed to give you an opportunity to consider again your Fundamentals question and the way it has changed over the preceding year. It is also an opportunity for the faculty to check on your progress in the major, recommend avenues of exploration, and think with you about your question. You should not be nervous about this meeting, but you should prepare for it.

Before your Review Conference:

- Complete the worksheet available on the Fundamentals [website](#). This will include some consideration of the text courses you intend to take over the course of the year.
 - If you plan to study abroad or anticipate being out of residence in the coming year, be sure to note this on the form.
- Meet with your Faculty Adviser to discuss your Fundamentals question and the insights you may have gleaned from the preceding year's coursework, as well as your plans for the [Junior Paper](#).
- Revisit your Fundamentals question and consider whether it needs to be revised to reflect your evolving intellectual interests and trajectory.

- C. By the end of your third year, you should have completed*:

1. At least four of your required text courses
2. Two of your supporting courses, and
3. The Junior Paper Seminar.

Plan your academic schedule accordingly.

** With the exception of the Junior Paper Seminar, these are not rigid requirements, but rather general benchmarks. Keep in mind that some text courses may be satisfied with Independent Study courses. If you are interested in Independent Study courses, you should speak with your Faculty Adviser and the Instructional Professor. It is a good idea to arrange these well ahead of time.*

- D. Continue foreign language study if you have not yet finished your language training requirement.

- E. In Week 4, there will be a **mandatory** informational meeting about writing the [Junior Paper](#). At this meeting or before, you will receive a clear set of deadlines for the JP.
- Before the end of this quarter, you must have your JP proposal approved by your JP adviser*. Therefore, you should speak with the faculty member with whom you would like to work early in the quarter to determine the text(s) you will engage with in your Junior Paper.
 - If you wish to petition to write your Junior Paper in the Spring Quarter, it is wise to do so soon after the meeting. Be advised that some petitions are not granted—have a backup plan.
 - Read more about the Junior Paper here.
- * ***NB: You do not have to work on the JP with the Faculty Adviser you were assigned when you entered the program. However, it is generally best to work with a Fundamentals faculty member on the JP. If you choose to work with an outside instructor, please let the Faculty Chair know so that they can explain the aims of the JP to your JP adviser.***

II. Winter Quarter

- A. Take the required JP seminar. **Participation in the Junior Paper seminar for credit is a mandatory part of writing the Junior Paper.**
- Remember that you cannot take more than four courses per quarter. You must prioritize the JP Seminar, especially if you are double majoring.
 - Unless you are studying abroad or on a leave of absence, you must enroll in the seminar in the Winter quarter.
- B. Stay on top of deadlines this quarter! Nine weeks pass quickly.
- C. Before Week 8, meet with your College adviser. This is required for 3rd-year students. Get in touch early to set up a meeting.
- D. Week 10: Junior Papers due on Canvas by the end of the reading period.*

III. Spring Quarter

- A. Complete your Junior Paper if you did not do so in the previous quarter.*
- * ***This option is only available if you successfully petitioned in the Autumn Quarter. Late petitions will not be considered. Students writing JPs in the Spring will be given a separate deadline by the Instructional Professor.***
- B. Attend the Power of Books lecture.

- C. After Week 6, meet with your Faculty Adviser to discuss your preparation for the Senior Exam.
 - You won't take the exam until Spring Quarter of your fourth year, but you should look ahead in the schedule and determine how you will satisfy your course requirements.
 - This is also a good time to reflect on your Fundamentals major: What new questions have been opened to you? What would you like to accomplish in your major before the end of next year?
- D. Attend the end-of-year reception. Two years done!

MORE ABOUT THE JUNIOR PAPER:

- ❖ **The Junior Paper (JP) is an exercise in close reading and is usually 22–25 pages long.** It is a focused consideration of how a single text speaks to something related to your Fundamentals question. As a program, we take this assignment quite seriously as your opportunity for rigorous and leisurely consideration of a text. Naturally, it helps if you are excited about the text you write about. Often, it is an occasion for students to exercise their language skills or to write a paper relevant to possible graduate school interests. However, we understand this paper to be a writing exercise, the best example of the kind of work we hope you are doing in every Fundamentals course. Do not feel particular pressure to identify your favorite book; we do not require that this paper represent all of your passions and interests.
 - Sometimes a student will elect to write a comparative paper using two texts. Permission to write on more than one text is determined by your JP adviser and the Fundamentals Director.
- ❖ **You must identify *in advance* the faculty member who will advise your work on the JP.** The natural choice for your JP adviser would be your Fundamentals faculty adviser, but it is not a requirement; the decision should be based on a good working relationship as well as intellectual affinities.
 - If you find you would like to work with an instructor *outside the program*, please discuss this decision with your Faculty Adviser and the Fundamentals Director. Faculty not affiliated with the program are often unaware of its aims, spirit, and methodologies, so if you do choose to work with them, the Fundamentals program directors will need to answer any questions they may have.
- ❖ **Note that a late JP disqualifies you for honors in the major.** Your JP is considered late when the final draft is turned in after the established due date, unless an extension has been arranged in advance with the Fundamentals Director and your JP adviser. No extensions can be arranged after the due date except in dire circumstances.
- ❖ **You should plan to write your paper in the Winter quarter.** If you will be traveling abroad on a University Program in the Autumn or Winter, you must petition the Director for permission to write in the Spring **by week 2 of Autumn quarter**.
 - If you are in residence during the winter quarter, you must enroll in the Junior Paper Writing Seminar *even if you have been granted permission to write in the spring*. The JP Seminar is a workshop that focuses on various aspects of your JP to help develop your ideas and provide a structure for meeting deadlines.

Fourth Year

I. Autumn Quarter

- A. Attend the Autumn reception!
- B. In Week 2 or 3, you will have a second [Review Conference](#). This is nearly identical to your previous conference, so you should know what to expect. You'll prepare in the same manner:
 - Complete the worksheet provided on the [website](#).
 - Meet with your Faculty Adviser to discuss your Fundamentals question and the insights you may have gleaned from the preceding year's coursework. Discuss your remaining coursework and how you think about your Fundamentals question in relation to the texts you have studied.
- C. **By week 8, meet with your College Adviser.** This is required of all fourth-year students. It's important to touch base—this year, you need to finish taking text and supporting courses and have demonstrated language proficiency. Discuss your schedule with your adviser or contact fundamentals@uchicago.edu if you have questions about any extant requirements.

II. Winter Quarter

- A. In Week 1 or 2, attend the meeting about how to prepare for the [Senior Exam](#).
- B. In Week 7, submit your **Senior Exam Form**, including your revised Question Statement and six texts. The form will be shared with your examiners, so its importance cannot be overstated. The exam is ideally prepared with your concerns and questions in mind, giving you meaningful control over the questions you'll be asked.
 - You will be asked to articulate your Fundamentals Question one more time in preparation for the exam. *This Question Statement is your last opportunity to revise your Question in your Fundamentals journey.*
 - This final draft of your Statement should reference your six texts and how each informs your thinking about your question. This Statement will be shared with faculty members who are asked to compose your exam questions. Expect to submit this document to fundamentals@uchicago.edu by the end of Week 7 of Winter quarter.

- In your list of six texts for the exam, indicate with whom you studied the text, the course name, and the quarter taken. You will also be asked to provide a paragraph outlining your interest in each text.
- Remember that your foreign language text must be among the six, and that you may include any text you studied in a course at UChicago. This is a good time to make sure that the office has a record of your completion of the foreign language requirement.
- Very rarely, you may be asked to reconsider your list. This is most likely to happen if we don't think we could identify two readers with sufficient familiarity with one of your chosen texts. Naturally, we do our best to support any course that was offered with a FNDL course number. Consult with your Fundamentals faculty adviser *in advance* if you have questions.

III. Spring Quarter

- A. Enroll in FNDL 29902: the Senior Exam. **You must take this course for credit.**
- B. Attend the Power of Books lecture.
- C. Beginning at 9am on Friday of Week 5*, take the [Senior Exam](#). The exam is due at 9am on Monday of Week 6.
 - * *NB: If the scheduling of the senior exam conflicts with a religious observance or any other emergent reason, email fundamentals@uchicago.edu at the beginning of the quarter so that we can make accommodations for you. **Please note that senior exams turned in late disqualify you for honors in the major.***
- D. Come and celebrate at our end-of-year reception!

Congratulations! Go and do great things, and don't stop reading.

MORE ABOUT THE SENIOR EXAM:

- ❖ This exam marks the culmination of your work in the major. It is your opportunity to consider your Fundamentals question with reference to each text you have studied.
- ❖ Inasmuch as the texts you have studied truly are great for your inquiry, there will be much still to explore in them. However, your exam should demonstrate facility, even mastery, of these texts.
- ❖ Registering for the Senior Examination as a course will help ensure that you will carve out significant time to prepare for your exam. You should guard this time, attend carefully to the materials, and consider working with your peers in preparation.
- ❖ The exam begins at 9am on Friday of the 5th week of Spring Quarter*. It will be emailed to you from fundamentals@uchicago.edu.
 - When you receive the exam, read it **immediately to ensure you understand all the questions**. If anything on the exam requires further explanation, or if you have any other questions, email fundamentals@uchicago.edu right away and we will do our best to help.
- ❖ The exam consists of four questions written by your Faculty Adviser in the program, one being the required “Question question.” You must answer this plus a second question of your choice from among the remaining three on your exam.
- ❖ Each essay answer should be approximately 8–10 pages long. You may, of course, refer to any texts and notes in your writing, but you may not consult with anyone.
- ❖ You will have until 9am on Monday of Week 6 to complete your exam and upload it to Canvas. Your exams are considered late when the final draft is turned in after the established due date. No extensions are possible unless you have a documented need for accommodations*. No extensions may be arranged after the deadline except in dire circumstances. **Senior Exams turned in late disqualify you for honors in the major.**

* *If the scheduling of the senior examination conflicts with a religious observance or any other emergent reason, please contact fundamentals@uchicago.edu at the beginning of the quarter so that we can make accommodations for you.*

FUNDAMENTALS CALENDAR

An easy way to keep track of what you need to do for any particular quarter is to visit the Fundamentals website, which has a general yearly outline for the program (listed below) as well as a more in-depth timeline for the [Junior Paper](#) and the [Senior Exam](#).

Please plan ahead! Things like study abroad, work commitments, and other conflicts may come up, but keep this schedule in mind (and on your calendar) to keep complications to a minimum in your progress toward your degree.

Autumn Quarter

- Week 1–2: Welcome back reception
- Weeks 2–3: Review Conferences for students in their 3rd and 4th years
- Week 4: Review Conference worksheets, signed by faculty adviser, due to IP
- Week 4: Junior Paper orientation for 3rd years
- Week 7: Applications to the Fundamentals major due on Friday
- Before Week 8: 4th years must meet with their College advisers
- Week 10: Junior Paper proposals due

Winter Quarter

- Week 1: FNDL 29901: Junior Paper seminar begins
- Weeks 1–2: Welcome reception for new majors and Senior Exam orientation
- Weeks 4–6: Application period for the Fundamentals major
- Before Week 8: 3rd years must meet with their College advisers
- Week 10: Junior Papers due by the end of the Reading Period

Spring Quarter

- Week 2: Power of Books colloquium
- Week 5: Senior exams administered beginning Friday at 9am
- Before Week 8: 2nd years must meet with their College advisers
- Week 10: End-of-year reception

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do all courses with the FNDL designation count as text/author courses?

Most courses offered with the FNDL designation count as text/author courses, but there may be a few exceptions each year. These exceptions should be fairly obvious in their failure to address just one or two authors or texts. Courses like this are often included because they are taught by Fundamentals faculty and/or likely to work as supporting courses. If you have any questions about whether a specific course will count as a text/author course, contact fundamentals@uchicago.edu.

Help me understand supporting courses.

You are required to take four supporting courses to satisfy the major requirements. The question and texts you choose to study should determine what courses will satisfy the requirement. They may be taken in any department in the University, but you should be prepared to explain their relevance to your particular course of study.

Your Faculty Adviser will require that you identify your supporting courses for them at regular meetings. You are also asked to list your progress in the major, including your supporting courses, in preparation for [Review Conferences](#) in the Fall Quarters of your Junior and Senior years. You may be asked to explain your choices at those conferences.

How and when should I sign up for an Independent Reading Course?

There is no requirement to take an Independent Reading Course. In some instances, however, reading courses can be exciting elements in your work in Fundamentals. They are opportunities for you and/or a small group of students to study with a faculty member a text that is not offered in the course catalog. If there is a particular text that seems important to your Fundamentals question or one that you are particularly excited to read as part of your program, it might make sense to arrange a reading course. You should discuss your interest with your Faculty Adviser and the Instructional Professor. They can help you determine whether a reading course is a good idea and brainstorm faculty members who might be interested and willing to do the course with you.

When you decide that you would like to arrange a reading course:

- ❖ Determine whether you know anyone else who might like to participate. This is not required, but it can often be more compelling to a professor if there are multiple students interested in reading a text together, and the support of peers can be helpful in a course that is less structured than most others.

- ❖ Find a faculty member who is willing to direct the course and meet with them. Determine pragmatic details: What exactly will you read? How often will you meet? What will be the requirements to receive credit? Are they willing to assign you a letter grade for your work? Some professors will recommend that you put these expectations in writing; even if your professor doesn't ask for this, you should consider writing it out and confirming your expectations.
- ❖ When you are comfortable with the details, visit your College Adviser to collect an Independent Reading and Research Form. You will need the signatures of the professor teaching the course and the Fundamentals Faculty Director. Submit this document to the registrar before the end of Week 3 of the quarter.
- ❖ Register for FNDL 29900. Note: you will receive a letter grade for this course.

I'm confused about the language requirement. How do I fulfill it?

The Fundamentals language requirement is designed with the belief that the texts you study in the program should come from diverse cultures and be appreciated in their original language. In many cases, two years of formal language study will provide enough proficiency to analyze a non-Anglophone text in part or whole. However, this is not true of all languages, or all language learners.

The language requirement in Fundamentals must be fulfilled by a course. This course may not be double counted as a text course, supplementary course, or Core course.

There are four possible ways to fulfill the language requirement:

1. Third quarter (usually "203" or equivalent) of a second-year language course
2. An independent study course taken for credit in which the text is studied in the original language
3. A course in which a text is read in its original language
4. A course in which a text is studied in English translation, but, with agreement from the course instructor, the text is read in the original. In this case, the instructor must be fluent in the target language and be able to certify (via short email to fundamentals@uchicago.edu) that you have engaged deeply with the text in its original language. This certification, and whether to allow you to read the text in its original rather than in translation, is at the discretion of the instructor.

Fundamentals cannot retroactively count courses for this requirement without instructor certification and consent. You should be prepared to be examined on your non-Anglophone text in your [Senior Exam](#) and demonstrate proficiency therein by citing passages from the text in its original language.

How are program honors determined?

Every year in spring quarter, the faculty meet to determine program honors. The faculty take into account the following: 1) whether the JP and Senior Exams were submitted on time; 2) comments and evaluation on the JP; 3) comments and evaluation on the senior examination essays from all readers; 4) performance in Fundamentals courses, 5) overall performance in college courses.

While there is no GPA threshold for the program, you are expected to have a “healthy” GPA in order to receive a consensus among the faculty for honors nomination. The JP and Senior Exam have three possible grades: Pass with Honors, Pass, or No Pass. The pass with Honors is roughly equivalent to an A grade, the Pass to a B or C, and the No Pass to a D or F. To reach faculty consensus for honors in the program, the majority of your readers should have assigned you a Pass with Honors grade.

Please note that late JPs and senior exams disqualify you for honors in the major. Your JP or senior exam is considered late when the final draft is turned in after the established due date, unless an extension has been arranged in advance with the Program Chair and/or your JP adviser. No extensions or considerations for honors can be arranged after the due date except in dire circumstances.

NB: Under the aegis of the Humanities Collegiate Division (HCD), we are required to send our nominations to the Master of the HCD. They ultimately determine whether you receive program honors or not, but as of now there is no precedent for the Master to contradict the decision of program faculty.

Can I double major?

It is certainly possible to double major with Fundamentals, and not uncommon. Naturally, we want to encourage you to focus your attention on your work in Fundamentals, and you should take into account that it might be particularly difficult to study for your Senior Exams while also writing a BA Thesis in another department. Sometimes meeting the requirements of multiple departments can unduly constrain your scheduling options and set up a kind of adversarial relationship between your majors.

Most research suggests that you gain very little advantage—if any—in the job market or graduate school applications to list a double major on your transcript. Of course, sometimes double majoring enables you to explore two very complementary courses of study or allows you to pursue different interests.

There is sometimes a secondary question about when coursework can apply to more than one major. In the case of a minor, courses may not apply to both your major and to a minor. In the case of majors, however, the college's current policy is only that a department may determine which courses apply towards its own requirements. A department cannot exclude another department from accepting the same course to satisfy other requirements.

Then there is a question about whether one can write the same paper as a [Junior Paper](#) and as a BA Thesis for another department. Most simply, the answer is no. Usually, this is true for pragmatic reasons. The Fundamentals Junior Paper is written in a different quarter, is usually a different length, and is usually less concerned with research, theory, and critical apparatus than theses written for other departments. One may, however, write a Junior Paper in Fundamentals that prepares you for further work that might be taken up in a subsequent research project. In a situation like this, you may not cut and paste portions of the Junior Paper into the subsequent thesis, but we shouldn't be surprised to find similar ideas emerge among two related projects. You should discuss the incorporation of previous work with your thesis adviser.

FUNDAMENTALS DEGREE OUTLINE

General Education (15 courses)

[See an outline of requirements for The Core on the College website here.](#)

Major (15 courses)

Program Sequence Courses

1. Gateway seminar (to be taken in the quarter following admittance to the major): FNDL _____
2. Junior Paper seminar (to be taken in Winter Quarter of 3rd year): [FNDL 29901](#)
3. Senior Exam course (register in Spring Quarter of 4th year): [FNDL 29902](#)

Text/Author Courses (one must be conducted in a non-Anglophone language)

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. | 2. |
| _____ | _____ |
| 3. | 4. |
| _____ | _____ |
| 5. | 6. |
| _____ | _____ |
| 7. | |
| _____ | |

Supporting Courses

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. | 2. |
| _____ | _____ |
| 3. | 4. |
| _____ | _____ |

Language Courses

[See information in the College catalog here.](#) The foreign language requirement must be met by course completion or petition by the third quarter of 2nd year.

Electives (12 courses)

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
9.	10.
11.	12.

Note: Electives include language courses with exception of 6th quarter required course.