PURPOSE

**UC | Great Beginnings** is the first-year experience curriculum at the University of Cincinnati. The first-year experience curriculum is part of the very fabric of the university, Woven into the General Education Core as a key touchpoint, it promotes the achievement of academic excellence and is student-centered. UC Great Beginnings emphasizes that higher learning extends beyond the walls of the university classroom to incorporate the greater community and workplace while concurrently providing students with a sense of belonging and connectedness to the university, its mission, and its vision for the future.

The UC first-year experience curriculum’s target learning areas aim (1) to help students acquire intellectual and self-management skills needed for success in the university, as well as in life-long learning; (2) to engage students with the cultural life and diversity of this large, urban, research university; (3) to focus students’ attention on what their professional and civic responsibilities to the world might be as educated persons; and (4) to advance students’ capacity to make connections between knowledge gained from multiple sources including the ability to apply their increasingly comprehensive understanding to new questions and situations.

**UC | Great Beginnings** is situated and reinforced through student’ participation in multiple academic and student life experiences that are intentionally structured to address its target learning areas. During students’ first year at the university, defined as starting with students’ confirmation to attend UC and ending with enrollment census day in fall semester of their second year, all matriculated students will experience a similar and comprehensive, well-integrated introduction to higher education at the University of Cincinnati.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- High levels of first-year student engagement, belonging, learning, achievement, and satisfaction
- Progress toward high graduation rates as measured by preliminary indicators of on-time degree completion. Among them:
  - High retention rates from the first to second years of college
  - High rates of earned credit, 30 hours or more, in first year of enrollment
  - High levels of performance as defined by federal financial aid and other regulations related to academic standing and progress
- Clearly articulated and structured first-year experience requirements across all degree programs
- Structured requirements and opportunities for students to become oriented to the university and engaged in a range of student life, career education experiences, and academic activities
- Faculty and staff who teach and support first-year students have opportunities to gain expertise about first-year college student learning, development, and exemplary practices for promoting student engagement and success

STRUCTURE

**UC | Great Beginnings** is the cornerstone upon which each student’s university learning experience is built. Therefore, students’ experiences throughout their first year should reflect UC’s dynamic environment for learning and introduce students to what they are expected to accomplish for graduation. For example, courses and experiences that use active, experiential, or community-based pedagogies—and, that incorporate purposeful and on-going reflection as an integral part of their design are desirable as these are signature features of UC’s
undergraduate experience. Likewise, academic rigor must be maintained to protect the integrity of degree programs.

As part of their General Education, all students are required to enroll in at least one credit-hour or an equivalent learning experience that covers the UC | Great Beginnings’ four target learning areas and related learning outcomes. Course sections identified by their assigned first-year experience (FY) attribute are declared by their offering departments as addressing the four UC | Great Beginnings target learning areas. Academic units may define which FY courses or experiences meet the minimum UC | Great Beginnings General Education requirement for their programs. Commonly used structures include first-year seminars—smaller enrollment courses designed to introduce collegiate level expectations and resources to support student learning; learning communities—an intentionally designed package of courses and experiences in which students are co-enrolled and through which learning may be linked; and introductory-level disciplinary courses that are expanded to include and integrate with other aspects of the first-year experience and curriculum.

Beyond the minimum General Education requirement, courses taught using active-learning or community-engaged pedagogy; activities that foster out-of-class interaction between students, their faculty, and other university mentors; required, regularly-scheduled academic advising; the use of undergraduate teaching assistants or peer mentors for delivering instruction or guidance; intentionally designed programming in the residence halls; first-year student retreats and conferences, clubs and organizations, and other similar programs that foster student participation and leadership in university life contribute to the comprehensive, cohesive, and well-integrated foundation for higher education at the University of Cincinnati that we refer to as UC | Great Beginnings.

EVALUATION

UC | Great Beginnings is intended to be dynamic and responsive to student and university needs. Multiple and varied assessments to improve UC | Great Beginnings and to confirm its effectiveness for eliciting desired processes and outcomes must be a core and regular part of its design and implementation, which follows an ongoing continuous improvement model.

Each unit will evaluate its own UC | Great Beginnings content and structures as part of their regular program review processes. Units will use their data in conjunction with university-wide data to make ongoing enhancements to improve performance.

University-wide assessments will include analysis of aggregate data reflecting such issues as student achievement, retention, and graduation; student engagement as measured by instruments like the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), and other comprehensive measures of outcomes including contributions toward achievement of UC strategic goals.

TARGETED STUDENT LEARNINGS

Areas of emphasis and learning outcomes are listed below.

INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

To advance students’ capacity to make connections between knowledge gained from multiple sources and experiences and to apply their increasingly comprehensive understanding to new questions and situations, students will:

- Recognize how various disciplines, courses, and learning experiences intersect and contribute to mastery of the general education baccalaureate competencies, chosen program of study, career and personal collegiate goals

  - Gain appreciation for the role of a research university and opportunities afforded to students who study there, including understanding how knowledge is created, evaluated, utilized, and shared
- Explore and identify potential academic and professional paths that are consistent with personal values, interests, talents, and goals
- Begin to apply previously acquired skills and knowledge to practice in new and various settings
- Create an educational plan, including attainable short and long-term personal, educational, and career goals, and pursue opportunities that align with those goals

**INTELLECTUAL & SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

To help students acquire intellectual and self-management skills needed for success in the university as well as in life-long learning, students will:

- Gain proficiency in learning and performance skills to effectively manage collegiate-level school, work, and personal demands. Such as:
  - Planning/execution—self-assessment and reflection, goal-setting, decision-making, time-management, project management, use of technology
  - Relationship building/leadership—active-listening, interpersonal interaction, assertiveness and conflict management, professional etiquette, collaboration, teamwork
  - Thinking—writing, oral communication, critical thinking and analysis, reading and information-literacy, note-taking, study and test-taking strategies, problem-solving

- Gain understanding of and exhibit behaviors that contribute to physical and mental health and well-being
  - Learn strategies to successfully manage change and adapt to new situations
  - Learn how to spend time and energy in ways that support a balanced lifestyle

**PROFESSIONAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

To focus students’ attention on what their professional and civic responsibilities to the world might be as educated persons, students will:

- Become familiar with the University of Cincinnati’s expectations for academic integrity, ethical behavior, and personal accountability including those outlined in the Bearcat Bond, Just Community Principles, and Student Code of Conduct
  - Understand and adhere to college and university policies, procedures, and requirements to maintain enrollment including processes for registration, meeting financial obligations, maintaining academic progress, etc.
  - Demonstrate respectful behavior, communication, and etiquette skills to establish collaborative relationships within the university, work, and community settings
  - Engage competently with people different from themselves to establish equitable environments and practices and to work well as a member of a diverse team
  - Develop an appreciation for diversity of thought/opinion

- Explore ways that people can apply skills and knowledge acquired through their college education to serve society and address problems, big and small, to help improve the world

**UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT**

To engage students with the cultural life and diversity of this large urban research university, students will:

- Learn about, locate, and use campus and community resources, governance structures, educational tools, and institutional technology
  - Participate in university sponsored activities outside of class or program requirements, including lectures, workshops, plays, concerts, student organizations, athletic events, etc.