The Foundations of the Liberal Arts (FLA) program is built around a cluster of four common seminars informed by diverse individual experiences with the liberal arts encountered through a series of “foundation” courses. The curriculum emphasizes integration between disciplinary courses and thematically-linked seminars, incorporates a writing focus into the seminar and breadth requirements, is scaffolded to progress from beginning to advanced learning outcomes, requires active reflection on the liberal arts at multiple stages, offers an inclusive structure that encourages participation from faculty in all disciplines, and is a distinctive expression of the CSB/SJU mission and culture. The incorporation of high-impact practices in the model is central to its design. By retaining the emphasis on existing institutional strengths such as experiential learning, study abroad, and departmental capstone experiences, and incorporating new investments in common intellectual experiences, integrative seminars, and expanded attention to writing, the model reflects best practices as identified in the relevant literature in a way unique to CSB/SJU.
The four Common Seminars establish the theme of “Our Place in the World,” beginning with a seminar for incoming first-year students (CSEM 100: Finding Home), and continuing through a sophomore seminar (CSEM 200: Creating Communities) built around a research project, a junior seminar (CSEM 300: Facing Global Challenges) emphasizing oral communication and collaboration, and a capstone seminar for seniors (CSEM 400: Building a Better World) that emphasizes the application of knowledge, problem solving, and self-reflection. The four seminars collectively serve as points of integration across the liberal arts curriculum, guide students in developing their writing skills, and provide a shared intellectual experience distinctive to CSB/SJU. The shared content shifts progressively from a focus on the individual through a consideration of the concept of home, through an exploration of the diversity of communities, to an assessment of global challenges. The seminars culminate in a forward-looking course in which students apply their liberal arts skills and knowledge to the question of how to build a better world, informed in part by reflection on electronic portfolios of materials collected throughout their journey through the liberal arts curriculum.

The seminars are supported by a series of five disciplinary or interdisciplinary Foundation courses drawn from across the curriculum that will emphasize specific learning goals while also lending depth of perspective, methods, and materials to the student’s liberal education. These courses are divided into five designations to reflect the varied learning goals upon which they are based.

- **FG: gender** is a course emphasizing the role of gender as a component of individual identity and social systems.
- **FI: intercultural** is a course emphasizing cultural diversity and intercultural knowledge.
- **FC: common good** is a course examining moral understanding and concepts of the common good.
- **FN: natural systems** is a course exploring the natural world and the means by which scholars investigate it.
- **FS: social systems** is a course examining human institutions and social structures.

Any two Foundations courses must be taken before enrolling in CSEM 200, and all five must be completed before enrolling in CSEM 300.

These five electives, plus the four seminars, are further supplemented by three Core Skills requirements that address the remaining learning goals long considered central to being liberally educated.

- **SQ: Quantitative reasoning** is a course emphasizing the intermediate and advanced quantitative literacy outcome of the communicate goal.
- **SA: Artistic expression and appreciation** is a course emphasizing the intermediate and advanced nonverbal literacy outcomes of the communicate goal.
- **SL: Second language** are courses emphasizing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to learn a second language.

All three Core Skills must be completed before enrolling in CSEM 400.
As a package the Foundations of the Liberal Arts proposal comprises 12 requirements for a maximum total of 52 credits for students placing into an introductory-level foreign language course. It is likely that almost every student will experience some overlap between their major/minor and the Foundation and/or Core Skills courses, which would reduce the total credits required. Students with advanced language placement may need fewer total courses as well. In practice we expect most students would end up taking somewhere between 9 and 12 courses (36-48 credits) to complete the program, depending on overlaps with their major or minor, language proficiency, and any external credits they may already have earned. While this appears on paper to reflect a slight decrease from the Common Curriculum status quo, in practice we believe the total credits required for a typical student will be similar to our current general education program once the limitations placed on overlaps, double-counting, and external credits (which may not replace any of the common seminars) are considered.

The Foundations model is close to being resource-neutral in terms of the FTEs required to teach it. The FLA proposes four Common Seminars, each capped at 20 students, replacing the current 2-semester FYS (capped at 18) and the Ethics Seminar (ES) (typically capped at 20). The current combination of FYS and ES requires approximately 24 FTE. Using the same enrollment assumptions, the four common seminars would require a combined 29 FTE. This increase in staffing would be offset by a reduction in requirements for supporting courses as compared to the current Common Curriculum. It is assumed that the need for a large majority of Foundation and Core Skills courses will be fulfilled by existing departmental courses. Significant investments in faculty development will be required initially to create the common seminars, identify and adapt existing courses to the new Foundations and Core Skills requirements, and develop new Foundations and Core Skills courses where necessary. It is also assumed that resources will be allocated to support a new position of director of the liberal arts curriculum and that professional staff will be available to coordinate assessment of the overall program.

The model integrates with majors through the Foundation and Core Skills courses, which will encourage students to explore areas with which they may be unfamiliar. In practice up to two Foundation or Core Skills course may be located within a student’s major, but a majority will be taken from other departments. The emphasis on writing in the Common Seminars will be reinforced by a disciplinary writing requirement incorporated into each major. The Common Seminars themselves will require students to integrate knowledge and skills from their majors into collaborative projects, written work, and reflection on the breadth of their liberal arts experience.

The distinctive institutional emphases on gender, pursuit of the common good, and the Catholic and Benedictine traditions receive particular attention in Foundations of the Liberal Arts. Specific Foundation courses (FG and FC) are built around the exploration of issues related to gender and the common good. Rather than restricting the discussion of the Catholic and Benedictine traditions to a single class, it is instead integrated into three of the common seminars (CSEM 100, 200, and 400) and the Common Good Foundations course. We envision that the faculty development programs needed to implement these initiatives will encourage the enrichment of other courses with elements of the Catholic and Benedictine traditions as well. Further, it is hoped that early and frequent exposure of students to the Catholic and Benedictine traditions will encourage them to seek out additional related curricular and co-curricular experiences.