Frequently Asked Questions

These are a list of frequently asked questions about the program. If you do not see an answer to your question(s), please email sas-academic-affairs@sas.upenn.edu with your question.

Program Structure

How long is the program? Are the four courses of the curriculum each a semester, or are they year-long courses? Do the four courses need to be taken in any particular order?

Foundations happens during the first year at the College. Students who participate in Foundations will be assigned either the Kite or Key course in the Fall and then swap in the Spring. Foundations students receive priority registration for the Kite/Key sections of their choice. Foundations students also take one Writing Seminar of their choice and one First-Year Seminar of their choice at some point during the first year. Foundations students have a special registration process to enroll in one of their top choices of First-Year Seminars.

How large are the Key and Kite classes?

The Kite classes have a maximum enrollment of 15 students and will include a seminar plus a lab. The Key classes have a maximum enrollment of 60 students for the lecture with a 15 student hands-on lab.

What are the Key and Kite classes like?

The Kite classes are small seminars organized around a series of themes designed to engage ideas, debates, and concepts through literature, art, poetry, music, and other forms of expression across many different cultures and time periods. The Kite class encourages instructors and students to explore and discover new types of knowledge being generated through humanistic and qualitative social science methods. The lab sections are used for hands-on reading, creative writing, group projects, and advancing the projects required for the Kite course. The Key classes are a larger lecture format designed to unpack scientific concepts used by researchers to explore and discover new types of knowledge in the natural and quantitative social sciences. The Key course invites students to practice and reflect on the role of quantitative data and methods.The lab sections are used for hands-on experiments and activities, testing hypotheses, and completing the homework required for the Key course.

What type and amount of work can I expect in these courses?

The Kite and Key courses each have a 3-hour hands-on lab that is a space for advancing the homework required in the course. We expect that students may need to spend another 3-4 hours outside of class further preparing for each week's seminar or lecture time. This is consistent with the standard Penn expectation that students will spend 3 hours outside of class for every hour spent inside of class (for a typical 1 CU course, that would be 9 hours of preparatory work total).

Are there different Key and Kite classes focused around different fields? Or will the classes all teach the same content?

The Key courses have one syllabus and the Kite courses have one syllabus. So regardless of which section of Key or Kite you are enrolled in it will be the same content.

In looking at the first year seminars, I am extremely interested in a specific class, but it looks like only one seat is available. Will priority registration help me get that spot or will it also be offered in the spring?

The College Foundations will help students get to choose from a First Year Seminar of their choice in addition to the Kite and Key courses for the given term. It does not guarantee any other course.

Can I take the College Foundations courses pass/fail?

No, all courses within the Foundations program must be taken for a grade and cannot be made pass/fail.

Major/Minor/Pre-Professional Tracks

Will the program keep a student from completing the requirements for their major, or from taking the courses that are best taken in the first year?

Participating in this program should not prevent students from completing the requirements for any of the majors. Once a student is matched with their pre-major advisor they can discuss in-depth their goals and plans for study.

How does the program align with first-year study requirements in terms of course credits, course intensity, and the breadth requirements it fulfills within the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)?

The four courses together fulfill 6 of the requirements that all College of Arts and Sciences students need to fulfill. The course is not meant to be more intense than other College courses, rather they are designed to be a thoughtful introduction to a liberal arts

education that is transparent about the expectations of how to study and prepare for classes here at Penn.

Will a student's participation in the program restrict in any way the range of other courses that they may select?

Participating in the program would only restrict a student as much as choosing to enroll in any other course. Course times are set and certain classes may conflict given the quantity of classes offered within the College.

Does this program benefit a student and align with a pre-medical track?

Participation in this program should not prevent students from completing the requirements for the pre-med track. Once a student is matched with their pre-major advisor they can discuss in-depth their goals and plans for study. Medical schools are also interested in students having both writing seminars, first year seminars, and exposure to the humanities. The College Foundations will be a good start for those thinking of medical school.

Would this curriculum limit a student's ability to take more typical introductory courses that other first year students may be taking as a prerequisite for their current majors of interest?

Participating in this program should not prevent students from completing the requirements for any of the majors. Once a student is matched with their pre-major advisor they can discuss in-depth their goals and plans for study. Participating in the program would only limit you as much as choosing to enroll in any other course. Course times are set and certain classes may conflict given the quantity of classes offered within the College.

Are there any potential tradeoffs to following this curriculum compared to the conventional first year program?

The College Foundations program will ensure that participants are getting general education courses at the beginning of their time at Penn rather than the conventional first year program where students could choose to delay starting their general education course work. The program designers believe that taking these general education topics early on will benefit students' engagement with their majors in the future.