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The impact of liberal arts education on Egyptian student identity and worldview: a study of the core curriculum of the American University in Cairo

Rami Wasfi Maurice Guindi

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The American University in Cairo

Graduate School of Education (GSE)

**The Impact of Liberal Arts Education on Egyptian Student Identity and
Worldview:
A Study of the Core Curriculum of AUC**

A Thesis Submitted by

Rami Wasfi Maurice Guindi

Submitted to the Department of International & Comparative Education

December 27, 2018

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts
in International & Comparative Education
has been approved by

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The American University in Cairo

Graduate School of Education

The Impact of Liberal Arts Education on Egyptian Student Identity and Worldview:

A Study of the Core Curriculum of AUC

A Thesis Submitted To

The Department of International and Comparative Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

By: Rami W. M. Guindi

January 2019

Dedication

Thank you to all who made this journey possible. With plenty of gratitude to my parents who supported me in every possible way, and to my supervisor Dr. Gihan Osman for her mentorship and relentless effort to guide me as a researcher. Many thanks as well to the many AUC staff and faculty members who pushed this research forward at different stages.

I dedicate this research to all the souls who are keen to break the bonds of darkness, and to celebrate spots of freedom for humanity.

"Most students will be content with what our present considers relevant; others will have a spirit of enthusiasm that subsides as family and ambition provide them with other objects of interest; a small number will spend their lives in an effort to be autonomous. It is for these last, especially, that liberal education exists. They become the models for the use of the noblest human faculties and hence are benefactors to all of us, more for what they are than for what they do. Without their presence, no society - no matter how rich or comfortable, no matter how technically adept or full of tender sentiments - can be called civilized." - (Bloom, 2008).

Abstract

The fundamental promise of Liberal Arts Education is to holistically and profoundly educate the formation of student identities and worldviews. For Egypt and the Middle East, where the study of humanities is in deep crisis, Liberal Arts Education programs present valuable initiatives to challenge the stagnant status quo and offer to students zones of freedom of thought and expression. It thus becomes imperative to ask: to what extent and in which forms do these programs really impact student identity and worldview? As such, this thesis investigates the impact of the core curriculum of the American University in Cairo, as a Liberal Arts Education model, on two essential constructs: student identity and student worldview.

The central research question is: how does the core curriculum of AUC impact student identity and worldview? In its attempt to answer this question, the research treats the core curriculum, not as rigid content, but as a platform across which administrators, faculty and students dynamically interact. The research employs four data collection techniques: document analysis, faculty interviews, student survey and student focus groups. While the documents and the faculty interviews shed lights on the historical, structural, and implementation aspects of the core curriculum, the student survey and focus groups reveal student perceptions of the program and of its impact on their identities and worldviews.

Whereas the research affirmed overall institutional commitment to the values of liberal arts education as well as student belief in its potential, it exposed a gap between the theoretical potential of the program and its actual impact on students. According to the students, faculty readiness is an essential factor to account for this gap. The research opens the door for further questions about what is needed for the program to fulfill its full potential. Also, an identity and worldview instrument is worth producing.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Chapter One: Introduction

The basic tenet of Liberal Arts Education is a solid belief in the primacy of holistic education (Roche, 2010). Liberal Arts Education advocates an enquiry about life at its very fundamental level. In contrast to other forms of higher education, it decidedly delves into the complicated task of engaging with student ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations. Its mandate is to form/alter perceptions of oneself, and of the world (i.e. *identity* and *worldview*) - (Chickering & Reisser, 1993a; Laff, 2005; Roche 2010).

According to the University of Harvard, the central promise of a Liberal Arts Education program is its ability to "disorient ... and reorient" the mind (Harvard University, 2007). The primary goal of a true Liberal Arts Education model thus must be to create a rich and diverse educational experience that allows for such dynamic to unfold. During their education, students develop, or fail to develop, qualities like integrity, diligence, responsibility, service, love of knowledge, a capacity to learn from criticism, and a sense of higher purpose (Roche, 2010). Through designed and purposeful encounters with diverse perspectives, students experience a distancing from their own initial frames of reference and value and belief systems, which can lead to an identity crisis, but such a crisis is also the first condition for a richer and more profound identity (Hösle as cited in Roche, 2010).

Perhaps, no region in the world needs an education that addresses and educates *identities* and *worldviews* like Egypt and the Middle East, where a crisis to adequately deliver such a critical task is deeply rooted (Fahmy, 2017). In the midst of a turbulent socio-political environment, in which the youth are fiercely subjected to the competing forces of globalism, fundamentalism, and nationalism, and to struggles over power

structures, a conflict is evidently created in the minds and hearts of the young populace; two most important outcomes are shaping out of this conflict: *identity*, and *worldview* (Gerson & Neilson, 2014).

Pedagogical frameworks based on Liberal Arts Education offer unique platforms to teach Humanities in such a way that engages profoundly with student identity and worldview development processes. As such, the American University in Cairo (AUC) positions itself as one of the very few Liberal Arts Education institutions in the Middle East. It has a Core Curriculum program that places "identity" and "worldview" as its principal focus. According to the university, the Core Curriculum "strives to familiarize students with a diverse body of knowledge and intellectual tradition, and helps them understand themselves, in addition to their culture, society and place in the world" (The American University in Cairo, 2017).

As such, an evaluation of the unique model presented at AUC is worth investigating, with one central question in mind: *What is the impact of this Liberal Arts Education model - precisely, the Core Curriculum - on student identity and worldview?*

This research aims to evaluate the Core Curriculum program at AUC, in relation to its impact on the *identity* and *worldview* of Egyptian students. In the process, it perceives the program specifically as an initiative of an educational medium across which curriculum planners, faculty and students dynamically interact. In other words, the study treats the Core Curriculum, not as rigid content, but as an organic system subject to complex internal and external influences. The study examines the Core Curriculum's structure, its delivery,

and its outcomes; in doing so, it intends to collect answers from planners and administrators, from teaching faculty and from students.

Due to the complexity of the interactions under study, the research refers to multi-dimensional conceptual models in its literature review, and employs triangulated mixed-methods as its methodology, in order to adequately evaluate a complex student outcome like impact on *identity and worldview*. The proposed research aims to capture the dynamics of the Core Curriculum program among its constituencies, and incorporates four techniques: (1) Document analysis and (2) Qualitative interviews to trace the pedagogical shifts in the program, and comprehend its underlying philosophy and structure, and the centrality of student identity and worldview to it, as well as shed lights on the implementation of the program. (3) A student survey and (4) Focus groups to elicit student perceptions about the program, and its impact on their identities and worldviews.

Finally, this thesis aims to discuss implications of its potential findings about the impact of the Core Curriculum at AUC, as a leading Liberal Arts Education model in Egypt and the Middle East, on student identity and worldview. In so doing, the paper hopes to make a much-needed contribution to Liberal Arts Education in the Middle East, in general, and in Egypt, in specific.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Philosophical and Historical Dimensions of Liberal Arts Education

Philosophers have pondered about education throughout history. A wide spectrum of pedagogies emerged to answer the question of: what should an education look like? (Boning, 2007; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005). Ranging from cognitive idealism to empirical realism, each pedagogical school of thought constructed its own epistemology; each developed its own disciplines of interest and its own preferred modes of enquiry about the world. Over the centuries, the growing body of knowledge and its increasing complication led to an expanding separation among the conceptual frameworks that govern various fields of study. This has eventually led to the emergence of the fragmented subject-based education in its modern form.

While many educational efforts are dedicated to teaching specific expertise and technicality, whether through the transfer of domain-specific knowledge or through the training of a skill, or a vocation, these efforts are naturally bounded by their limited scope, because they focus on perfecting only a specific area of knowledge using one particular mode of thinking (Bloom, 2008; Roche, 2010). By contrast, an alternate approach to education saw the importance of integrating various branches of knowledge, underlined the primacy of advocating for a holistic education, and accentuated the vitality of the role that education has to play in forming an accomplished identity and a harmonious worldview; such was the call of "Liberal Arts Education".

Originating in Classical Greece, Liberal Arts Education was initially rooted in the basic form of *enkuklios paideia* (education in a circle). In Roman times, it took a more

concrete shape and structure, canonically composed of the combined study of seven areas of knowledge: a *Quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, and a *Trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (Godwin, 2013). During the age of renaissance, liberal arts education witnessed a revival placing stronger emphasis on the study of Humanities, under the name of *Studia Humanitatis*. It incorporated the study of seminal Greek and Latin texts as well as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy. Until late 19th century, Liberal Arts Education was largely considered to be the ideal form of Western elite education. With the expansion of mass university education in the 20th century, technical and professional careers took over the public perception for the function of a university (Brint et al., 2005). Coupled with the maturation of democratic societies that allowed a relative freedom of social class mobility, the notion of an elite education dwindled worldwide, and the exceptional status that Liberal Arts Education used to enjoy, as shaper of elite minds and characters, faded with it as well.

The Present State and Landscape of Liberal Arts Education

This section describes the current status of Liberal Arts Education in relevance to four parameters: student demand, institutional culture, technological advancement, and the global debate on moral education.

The present state of Liberal Arts Education is largely shaped by the tension existing between career education and liberal arts education, and the resulting student demand for each (Brint et al., 2005). In an increasingly competitive educational market, student demand is the major factor in control of institutional decision making; resources, funds and policies are aligned according to it. Programs are initiated based on projected student

enrollment, and others are closed based on deficiency in numbers. This market-oriented

dynamic is putting an immediate pressure on Liberal Arts Education. This is partially owing

to the fact that Liberal Education models are very expensive due to limitations on class size

(Becker, 2003), and also because understandably, Liberal Arts Education, by nature, tends

to care for the longer-term character-oriented impact of education, rather than its

immediate materialistic effect in the form of learning a specific skill or a technical vocation

(Logan & Curry, 2015). According to a historical US study, occupational-professional fields

account for 60% of bachelors' degrees in recent years, up from 45% in the 1960s, and

hundreds of institutions award 80% or more of their degrees in these fields (Brint et al.,

2005). A study of US freshmen revealed that the percentage of students who placed

"developing a meaningful philosophy of life" as an essential purpose of education

decreased from 86% in 1967 down to 39% in 2003, but the pattern reversed consistently

back up to 43% in 2006 (Pryor et al., 2007). Pryor et al. suggest that the data indicate that

students seem to be struggling "to bring meaning into their lives at the same time they

encounter strong pressures for economic success" (2007, p. 33). Interestingly, as the

marketplace is globally changing at a fast pace, the set of work skills demanded also rapidly

change, and one study by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U as

cited in Logan & Curry, 2015) found that 80% of employers believed that all students

should acquire broad liberal arts education, and 93% believed that the abilities generally

associated with such education, like critical thinking and communication skills, are more

important than a student's major.

The second parameter affecting the state of Liberal Arts Education is institutional

tradition vis-à-vis educational policy making. By the turn of the third millennium, global

educational policies shifted toward enhancing vocational and technical education (Mundy, & Verger, 2015), approaches in which attention is geared towards achieving advanced proficiency and expertise at one particular area of knowledge. On the other hand, integrative attempts were more directed towards Natural and Applied Sciences and Maths, into what became known as STEM initiatives (Freeman, Marginson, & Tytler, 2014). This trending pedagogical wave seems to have overshadowed the importance of Liberal Arts Education, and of Humanities education in general. Yet, armed with solid roots, a rich history and a supportive culture, Liberal Arts Education in the US has been so far able to hold grounds against the mounting pressures in favor of professional career-oriented education (Becker, 2003; Godwin, 2013). The landscape of Liberal Arts Education remains predominantly American. After all, Liberal Arts Education has its staunch proponents in US top universities; in fact, all US ivy league colleges are committed to one form or another of Liberal Arts Education. A follow-up study by Brint et al. (2005) found that selective institutions with strong academic profiles constitute the core of support for the arts and sciences, while nonselective institutions with weaker academic profiles form the core of support for occupational-professional education.

On the International level, interestingly, Liberal Arts Education is flourishing (Becker, 2003; Godwin, 2013). The reasons for this insurgence are diverse. Godwin (2013) conducted an analytical study of Liberal Arts Education programs worldwide and identified possible interpretations for each geographical area. But, in general, the phenomenon can be attributed to a mix of democratization, promoting active and engaged citizenry, and coping with a fast-changing world, and a job market moving beyond disciplinary structures (Becker, 2003; Godwin, 2013).

The third influential element to look at is technological advancement and how it is effectively reshaping the field of education. Technology brings up challenges and opportunities to Liberal Arts Education. Technology changes the way in which Liberal Arts Education is taking place; it is introducing new delivery techniques, and offering new educational experiences altogether. What is brought up through technology differs a lot from the classical *enkuklios paideia* (education in a circle), in which traditionally students would thoroughly engage in discussions face-to-face. While the essential modes of inquiry adopted by Liberal Arts Education like meditating, reflecting, critiquing, arguing, and debating remain palpable and irreplaceable, technology is redefining how those activities are implemented. In other words, technology is offering creative platforms for pedagogical innovation, rendering it a change to embrace rather than to fight (Logan & Curry, 2015, p. 73). Technology opens up the classroom beyond the physical boundaries of space and time. Through technology, students are able to communicate across the oceans, with all the richness that this brings; moreover, it enables students to flexibly pace their own learning, and more readily connect their education to their own lives.

The fourth issue worth discussing in this section is the global pedagogical debate on moral education, character formation and value indoctrination (Bloom, 2008; Roche 2010). The central argument in favor of Liberal Arts Education is that education has a role to play in the holistic maturity of students. By grappling with life's most fundamental questions, Liberal Arts Education is aiming for students not only to form a coherent view of human knowledge, nor just a deep understanding in its various branches, but also more profoundly to question their own value system. The skeptics argue that moral judgements should be off the table; students should form those on their own outside the educational

system. Education, they argue, should only be concerned with the study of the tools of inquiry, and never be subject to personal preferences. By introducing personal preferences into the content, neutrality is undermined, thus raising issues of bias, and politicization. Faculty, in their own respect, undergo a conflict, being hesitant to address issues that take them beyond their specialization and raise complex questions of ultimate values, yet also rejoicing when they have connected with a student in a deeper and more meaningful way (Roche, 2010). Roche (2010) in his book 'Why choose the Liberal Arts?' responds to the skeptics by arguing that "late adolescence and early adulthood represent a privileged time … for the exploration of new ideas and the formation of personal and social identity" … "These three capacities - understanding moral issues in their complexity, acquiring the formal ability to realize a moral vision, and developing the identity or desire to do so - are best developed by way of a liberal arts education" (Roche, 2010). Without further reference to the views of Socrates, Kant, Hegel, Locke and Benjamin Franklin on the role of education, the argument becomes even more convincing when moral formation, not merely technique, is what students and parents alike expect out of Liberal Arts Education.

The aforementioned discussion confirms the notion that the image of Liberal Arts Education is subject to serious challenges, and that its proponents increasingly find it compelling to spend decent efforts to build up a good case for their cause.

The Geo-politics of the Middle East and Egypt, and its Relationship to Education

The modern political history of the Middle East can be perceived as the direct outcome of three competing forces: Globalization, Nationalism and Fundamentalism. The

ebbs and flows of these forces, and their interactions with each other, as well as their influences on education are briefly described below.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon to the Middle East. It can be straightly traced back to the Age of Renaissance. As the political dominance over the Old World shifted to Europe by the 16th century, and owing to the Renaissance and, subsequently, to the Industrial Revolution, the Middle East started drastically lagging behind (Romani, 2009). The socio-cultural gap with the Modern World kept widening. The Arabs were no more influential creators of knowledge; they had to import it from Europe in an attempt to catch up. This dynamic was clearly embodied in the form of delegations of scholars sent to Paris and London, starting 1720 by Sultan Ahmet III (Romani, 2009), notably including Tahtawy in 1826. They were also exemplified in the various educational enterprises implemented by the key Colonial powers in the region, especially in the form of missionary schools. With the scientific advancement in communication technology during the 20th century, the world has become ever more interconnected, and the influence of global forces on local settings has tremendously intensified. This wave of globalization has also impacted education in the Middle East and in Egypt, in specific, in the form of the growing usage of international curricula and global standardized assessments.

The increasing effects of global forces on Middle Eastern communities have triggered a reactionary defensive mechanism towards Globalization (Tadros, 2013). As a result, two ideologies have emerged: Nationalism and Fundamentalism.

Nationalist movements in many parts of the Middle East have emerged by the late 18th, early 19th centuries aiming to liberate national territories from the colonial occupiers.

Not only was the aim to liberate them politically, but culturally as well. Interestingly, the nationalist discourse has not resulted in a rejection of foreign education; instead, it resulted in its domestication. In that framework, education would not be given the free hand to challenge long-held perceptions and beliefs. The nationalist march of the nation was based on one central pillar: to build a developed state able to catch up with the world. As such, the Nationalist plan for development is basically to gather all powers and resources in the hands of the state in order to empower it to achieve its Nationalist dream. The Nation to be built is not a new one, and certainly not imported; it is one that supposedly has always been there. In Egypt, that Nation stretches across time as an amalgamation of consecutive identities: Pharaonic, Hellenic, Ptolemaic, Coptic and Islamic. Two important educational consequences emerged out of Nationalism: the first is a failure to provide quality public education and to marginalize private education. This could be largely attributed to the rapidly increasing birth rates, up to the extent that the state on its own became helpless to provide to the growing population (Romani, 2009) . The second consequence is a century-long contention between student movements and political authority, both during colonial rule, and post-national independence. In both eras, university student assemblies formed central foci for state opposition, and the starting points for the ignition of country-wide demonstrations against the country rulers, in many instances (Abdallah, 2008).

The third force in play in the Middle East is **Fundamentalism**. If Nationalism decided that the way to combat Globalization is to go forward, Fundamentalism had a different answer: to go backwards. Fundamentalism rests on a deeply rooted conviction that a nation can only be better if it goes back to its past, to its heritage, and to its traditions – in other words, back to its Golden Age. The Arab civilization offered to the

world some of its finest contributions; the translation of its works to Europe in the 11th

and 12th century were significant for Europe's cultural progression from the Dark Ages.

After all, the Arabs had an empire stretching from Andalusia, Spain to Persia and India

in Central Asia.

Fundamentalism, however, was faced with a huge challenge: how to bridge its past

to its present. The answers presented were either *ethnic* - in the form of Arabism - or

religious - through attempting to bring back the values of true Islam. The most

remarkable fundamentalist initiatives in the region are: Pan-Arabism, Salafism,

Wahhabism, and the Moslem Brotherhood. Fundamentalist ideologies view education

as the important first step to effectuate profound social change. In short, the

Fundamentalist discourse advocates an education based on an ethnic or religious value

system that eventually transforms the Nation into what it has been 'called for' - i.e. into

Arab and/or Islamic global leadership. In Egypt, the impact of Fundamentalism – as

defined above – is clearly found in its National curricula, and more intensely, in the

universally leading Al-Azhar University on top of Azhari schools and informal Kottabs.

The national curricula of history and of Arabic language testify about the glamourous

stories and heroic figures consistently being brought up to form student consciousness.

The state of Humanities and Liberal Arts Education in Egypt, and the Middle East

The Middle East, especially the Gulf, has witnessed a boom in education during the

past 30 years, mainly due to increased private investment, and expanding trans-national

partnerships, in an attempt to close the knowledge gap with the more advanced world

(Altbach & Knight, 2007; Ghabra & Arnold, 2007; Godwin, 2013; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer,

2011; Romani, 2009). At most institutions, however, programs heavily focus on professional occupations rather than on humanities or Liberal Arts (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011). The Humanities, in contrast to the Sciences, are immensely hooked on value systems. They directly clash with personal beliefs, socio-cultural norms, and political structures. A liberal study of Humanities bears on its shoulders the burden to critically perceive, analyze and evaluate ethical, social and political systems. Justifiably thus, the study of Humanities in the Middle East suffers from a deep crisis to adequately deliver such vital task. As Romani (2009, p.5) explains:

The humanities, social sciences, and liberal arts cannot be expected to

develop in highly conservative and authoritarian settings - which explains

the expected focus of the new curricula on the "exact sciences,'' and the

expected "domestication" of the social sciences within a framework of social

engineering. A delicate balance will have to be attained and preserved.

Perhaps the closest form of Liberal Arts Education known to the Arab world is the famed Bayt Al-Hekma (House of Wisdom), founded by Caliph Haroun Al-Rasheed towards the end of the 8th century in Baghdad, Iraq, and which acted as a major intellectual center at the heart of the Arab world and flourished until the 16th century (Romani, 2009, p. 2).

In her global study, Kara Godwin (2013) recorded 183 Liberal Arts Education programs worldwide; 17 of which are located in the Middle East, with AUC being the only institution inside Egypt. The absolute majority of liberal education programs in the Middle East (88%) are private – 15 out of 17 (Godwin, 2013, p. 191). Godwin explains that the recent increase in the number of Liberal Arts programs in the Middle East can be chiefly attributed to institutional-level decisions rather than macro-level initiatives. In other

words, no liberal arts institutions have been formed due to social dynamics, or due to formal state endorsement. American-style education is generally espoused with quality and favorable prospects for employment in the minds of the public; she makes a good point noting that what is actually being branded is quality American-style education, not Liberal Arts Education at its core. As Reilly (2012) denotes, an authentic public debate as to what benefit Liberal Arts education offers to society has not yet emerged in the Middle East; the few voices that advocate Liberal Arts Education in the region mostly belong to expatriates and outsiders.

Challenges to liberal arts education in the Arab world.

Ghabra and Arnold (2007) discussed a list of challenges to Liberal Arts Education in the Arab World; most notably, among which, are: limited academic freedom, stiff student mentality, high faculty workload and low morale, and limited contact with the local and global communities. Censorship comes in many forms, including but not limited to, banning materials and internet sites as well as student activities. Also, students are accustomed to memorization and authoritarian lecturing. And, faculty are burdened with administrative overloads. There is also the issue of unequal access to education; liberal arts institutions in the region are private, and therefore mostly accessible only to the rich, thereby intensifying social inequality.

Liberal arts education in Egypt.

The situation in Egypt is no less dire. Egypt, the most populous country of the Middle East, is suffering from chronic political and economic implications aggravated by rapid birth rates, eventually leading to deteriorating educational quality, and to what has

been eloquently put as: "Dead end for most, brain drain of the best" (Romani, 2009, p.6). The study of humanities in Egypt is suffering too. According to Fahmy (2017), it is suffering from the utilitarian focus on employability, from lack of public advocates, from inadequate funds, from admissions policies that disadvantage the humanities, and from antiquated pedagogies that stifle critical thinking. Furthermore, he argues that even the Arabic equivalent for humanities, *ensaneyyat*, is an elusive term seldom used even in the realm of academia.

In terms of numbers, based on the Ministry of Higher Education Country Background Report of 2008, the humanities, social sciences, arts, law and education sectors are not short of students (35% of total student Higher-Education enrolment); after all, students are forced into these disciplines through the National admission system, often only in the pursuit of the social status that a university certification signifies. Nevertheless, the average repetition and dropout rate for social sciences students in public universities (18%) is the highest compared to other fields of study (OECD, & The World Bank, 2010). Public university student-to-faculty ratios in the Humanities (158), Cultural & Literary (51), and Education sectors (44) are remarkably way higher than the country's public universities average (26). The numbers are telling to the extent that educational quality under those conditions are unthinkable. The only bright spot from the statistics is the contribution of private universities to social sciences education. The above numbers of faculty-to-student ratios drop significantly to (10), (16) and (7) for the Humanities, Cultural & Literary, and Education sectors respectively.

Looking closely at the quality of Humanities education offered, at the type of curricula adopted and at the pedagogies employed, it is easy to note that the study of

humanities in Egypt is basically a fragmented mechanical study, under the generic labels of

Literature 'adaab' or Linguistics 'alson' (Fahmy, 2017). By all means, it is an education that

offers little space, if any, to debate and deliberate integrally about human experience, let

alone to produce anything that remotely resembles sound Liberal Arts Education.

Liberal Arts Education Models

A Liberal Arts Education is not merely an idea acting in vacuum; rather, it is a model

that strikes a particular balance between multiple elements and complex dynamics. Liberal

Arts Education models are initiatives for educational media across which curriculum

planners, faculty and students dynamically interact to create rich and diverse educational

experiences. Each model is unique, responding to its own set of internal and external

influences (Bourke, Bray, & Horton, 2009).

Nevertheless, a careful study of Liberal Arts Education models yields an

understanding of the general patterns followed, and a categorization of the central

approaches adopted. Robert Newton (2000) outlines an excellent – widely-cited –

framework to analyze and categorize Liberal Arts Education models. According to Newton,

Liberal Arts Education models can be analyzed along four layers: perception of knowledge,

student learning, faculty readiness and content.

To start with, perceptions about the nature of knowledge and the role of education

determine how *unified vs. fragmented* the structure of a Liberal Arts Education is. Kimball

(1995) argues that liberal education can be seen as "a longstanding dialectic between the

two classical ideals, one rooted in Ciceronian oratorical dictates and the other in Platonic

philosophical pursuits" (as cited in Logan & Curry, 2015). While the first ideal stresses the

oratory function of Liberal Arts Education to exchange about universal values like freedom, equality, and beauty, the second ideal emphasizes achievement in terms of advancement of knowledge. In other words, there is a tension between a side that views knowledge as one integral whole, of which Liberal Arts Education should seek to make a meaning, and one that views knowledge as professional, specialized, and sharply defined departments of inquiry. Boning (2007) presents a historical overview of how the pendulum has swung back and forth, between unity and fragmentation, especially noting the effects of the demise of *in loco parentis* in the 1960s and the following increased diversity of the student body in US higher education.

Secondly, Liberal Arts Education models are challenged with the question of *breadth vs. depth* of student learning. The most relevant impacting factors are: student demand, enormous increase in knowledge, and faculty interest and readiness (Latzer as cited in Bourke et al., 2009; Logan & Curry, 2015; Newton, 2000).

With respect to student demand, a US study found that: in 1966, 42% of freshmen highly valued "financial success" as a desired outcome of college education; by 2006, that percentage had risen to 73%. Conversely, during the same time period, the percentage of students who highly valued "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" dropped from around 85% to 46% (Pryor et al., 2007). Increasingly, students are favoring specialized programs that lead to an employment opportunity in the competitive economy. Universities as well are tempted to conform, and tailor their programs according to the market.

The enormous increase in the amount of knowledge is also making it more and more difficult to design a meaningfully coherent Liberal Arts Education model. The calls for breadth are countered by arguments for depth. The former team is advocating the importance of integrating knowledge; the latter is defending professionally advanced education.

Thirdly, faculty interest and readiness play a major role in the form and spirit of Liberal Arts Education. Newton notes that "primary identification and loyalty" have shifted from the university to the department. "The most significant reference group has become other members of one's discipline rather than one's university colleagues, and the department has supplanted the university as the primary source of authority and rewards". Departmental hiring measures favor *specialists,* vis-à-vis *generalists* - specialists with only passing interest in knowledge and teaching outside their disciplines (Newton, 2000). With growing focus on personal specialized research, less and less attention is given to equip teachers to the task of educating integrally to students from outside the major. Under these conditions, it is plausible to assume that the mere task of teaching a Liberal Arts course is perceived primarily as a burden, rather than an exciting opportunity.

A note about the tension of *centralization vs. decentralization* is due at this point. As discussed above, there are opposing views regarding the centralization of knowledge between one camp that views knowledge as one whole and therefore endorses a unifying *core curriculum*, and a second camp that views knowledge as situated primarily inside the disciplines and therefore endorses offering professional departmental *distribution courses* instead. This epistemological tension does not stop at the intellectual level; it permeates

the internal political stage at the university level. Opposing camps seek to capture resources and consolidate power in favor of their own agenda; this may show in the form of financial struggles about credit hour production, academic struggles about courses that qualify to count towards the core requirements, or autonomy struggles about faculty allocations to teach these courses.

The fourth layer of analysis of a Liberal Arts Education model is content. In what proportions, which areas of knowledge, and which texts make the cut to the Liberal Arts core curriculum? Which cultural identities are represented/misrepresented? Which views and perceptions about knowledge and about the other does it endorse? A skeptical side would argue that no common body of knowledge can be reached nor should be taught; instead, Liberal Arts education should prepare students to live in a world where an appreciation for diversity, and an understanding of cultural differences is essential (Newton, 2000).

Based on the above layers of analysis, Newton (2000) categorizes Liberal Arts Education into three main models: the Great Books model, the Scholarly Discourse model, and the Effective Citizen model. Each curricular model has its own pedagogical views of knowledge, of student learning, of faculty role, of content, and most importantly, of the aim of education.

The Great Books model as the name implies is based upon introducing students to the finest historical works and pivotal influential ideas of humankind, and instigating a debate about them. By doing so, the model attempts to broaden students' intellectual horizons, and to enable them to formulate profound answers for the fundamental questions

of humanity. The aim of education according to The Great Books model is for students to possess a coherent view of knowledge transcending disciplinary boundaries, one that prepares them to "right living" (Newton, 2000). In this model, the curricular emphasis is on breadth rather than depth, on integration rather than fragmentation. Faculty are expected to possess an interest to teach beyond their specialties, and a readiness to scaffold student attempts to establish inter-disciplinary connections. Content stresses the universality and relevance of the classics, as the jewels in the crown of human civilization. According to Newton, The Great Books Model often flourishes in small liberal arts colleges where specialization and departmentalization are less pronounced.

The Scholarly Discourse model, by contrast, acknowledges that disciplines have different foci of interest, different methods of enquiry, and a different history of progress. The model argues that the scholarly disciplines are "the storehouses of human knowledge and the ways which humanity has developed over the centuries to understand the world" (Newton, 2000). It advocates that it is only through respecting the achievements of each discipline that a meaningful content can be presented. According to the Scholarly Discourse model, the aim of Liberal Arts Education is to intensely educate the students about the advanced contributions, the latest research methods, and the contemporary trends and approaches in a number of disciplines outside the major. Through sophisticated professional immersion into various fields, the model assumes that the task of drawing connections between those fields is left for the students to accomplish on their own. The model views knowledge as departmentalized. Largely controlled by the departments, this usually results in a set of distribution requirements that spreads the general education program across disciplines. The Scholarly Discourse model calls for depth of student

learning instead of breadth. It endorses a faculty caliber that is highly professional, research-oriented, and focused on specific expertise. In terms of content, the model is preoccupied with a technically advanced content, irrespective of cultural sensitivity calculations. According to Newton (2000), the Scholarly Discipline model is at home in large, complex universities committed to research, and implementing hiring and promotion practices that encourage specialization.

The Effective Citizen model is founded on the social function of education, to raise a good citizen. It highly regards values like citizenship, community service, multi-culturalism, social accountability, and democracy. According to this model, the value of education is not *intrinsic* as proposed by the Great Books model, nor *functional* as promoted by the Scholarly Discourse model, but rather *social*. The focus of the Effective Citizen model is on preparing students to live and interact in a modern society. It views knowledge as a tool to address contemporary social issues and practical personal experiences. Student learning is broadly about the implications of disciplines on society. Faculty have an obligation to inform educated citizens, and are expected to exhibit readiness to teach casual overview courses for non-specialists. Content has to observe multi-culturalism. The curriculum is drawn from the disciplines as special offerings about issues of importance to the future citizens of a democratic society. The Effective Citizen model is expected to emerge in institutions with strong social mission inclinations, and since relevancy is emphasized, it must be regularly re-formulated as student or societal needs change (Newton, 2000).

To conclude this framework, it is worth noting that variations of Liberal Arts Education models include aspects from each of the three models presented above. Models

can be intertwined, whether to reach the goals of one model by combining it with another, or to achieve multiple benefits, or to better correspond to the environment and educational mission of the institution. The *de facto* Liberal Arts Education model of any particular institution represents a delicate balance stricken between the complex set of influences discussed above.

Frameworks to Evaluate Liberal Arts Education Models and Student Outcomes

The researcher has identified a clear absence of a robust comprehensive model to evaluate Liberal Arts Education systems. The literature only makes scant suggestions for approaches that could be used to evaluate specific aspects of Liberal Arts Education. Perhaps, the most theoretically coherent approach is the one suggested by Robert Newton, and discussed in detail in the previous section. Newton (2000) proposes to take his categorization of Liberal Arts Education models as a frame of reference against which Liberal Arts Education programs can be analyzed and evaluated (p.181). In general, the approaches employed to research into Liberal Arts Education revolve around 3 central foci: structure, technique, and impact.

The first research direction deals with the structural and administrative aspects related to a Liberal Arts Education program. It recognizes the fact that it is not the stated institutional purposes that count, but rather the curricular intervention strategy implemented (Hollway, 2005, p.239). It researches into institutional-level policy making, financial and administrative models, as well as curricular reform processes. Naturally, structural decisions are influenced by a set of factors including, and not limited to: perception of knowledge, perception of the role of Liberal Arts Education, perception of the

institutional mission, institutional history and culture, the size of the institution, financial

constraints, administrative schemes, intrinsic power balances, departmental structure,

external influences, and student expectations. To note a few researches in this direction,

the following works are relevant: Hersh, 1997; Brint et al., 2005; Pryor et al., 2007; and,

Hachtmann, 2010.

The second research track addresses elements that form the collection of student

experiences of Liberal Arts Education, referred to in this paper in general as: technique.

Those elements include faculty readiness, academic support, and teaching pedagogies.

While some student experiences lie out of the classroom, in the form of extra-curricular

activities, the discussion here will be limited to the factors having direct impact on student

class experiences. The first element, faculty readiness, comprises several components

including, and not limited to, faculty interest, teaching capacity professional development,

faculty perception of knowledge, faculty perception of the role of education, faculty

perception of their own mission, faculty expectations, and faculty-to-student ratio. The

second element, academic support, includes: primary educational resources, secondary

support resources, class size, student advising processes, and staff professional

development. The third element, teaching pedagogies, attempts to answer how aligned

class pedagogies are with the stated objectives of Liberal Arts Education. This strand of

research typically focuses on the use of teaching strategies that promote critical thinking,

profound reflection, discussion, or service learning, and in general, student-faculty and

student-student interactions. To note a few researches in this track, the following works

are relevant: Fry & Kolb, 1979; Astin, 1999; Pascarella, Cruce, Wolniak, & Blaich, 2004;

Seifert, Pascarella, Goodman, Salisbury, & Blaich, 2010; and, Thompson, Eodice, & Tran, 2015.

The third research route is to examine the <u>impact</u> of Liberal Arts Education on students. It aims to evaluate how the structural intervention implemented and the technical experiences generated resonate with the student body. These studies are often encountered with the difficulty of operationalizing the complex student outcomes intended by Liberal Arts Education. King, Brown, Lindsay, & Vanhecke (2007) use an integrated approach to qualitatively evaluate the following 7 student outcomes: integration of learning, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning (cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal), effective reasoning and problem solving, moral character, intercultural effectiveness, leadership and well-being; the approach is conceptually based on Jones & McEwen (2000) model of multiple dimensions of *identity*. Seifert et al. (2008) extended the works of Pascarella et al. (2004) and King et al. (2007) to relate student experiences to student outcomes. Meanwhile, Hollway (2005) examined the impact of Liberal Arts Education on three specific humanitarian outcomes: universalism, benevolence, and security. And, Marra & Palmer (2008) investigated the epistemological constructs of students undergoing Liberal Arts Education.

Belonging essentially to this third research route, but also incorporating elements from the first two routes, this study seeks to address the impact of Liberal Arts Education specifically on: identity and worldview.

Frameworks for Student Identity and Worldview

This section aims to provide an overview of the key theoretical and research underpinnings of *identity* and *worldview* by covering the significant psycho-social and cognitive models related.

Situated in the field of psychology, one cannot attempt to research into *identity* without reference to the psycho-social theory of the pioneer Erik Erikson. According to Erikson, identity represents a conflict stage in which the adolescent struggles to develop a coherent sense of oneself, and one's place in the world. The characteristic feature of this phase is role confusion, in which the adolescent is attempting to adjust to strong internal psychological motives and complex external social forces, and experimenting to reach a balanced relationship between oneself and the world. According to Erikson, "for an identity to be truly viable, it must confer both a sense of uniqueness and, simultaneously, provide a sense of unity or sameness" (Hamman & Hendricks, 2005). Whereas *uniqueness* is a description of *identity*, *unity* or *sameness* is an established alignment with the world, i.e. a *worldview*. By developing a mature identity and a solid worldview, the adolescent, according to Erikson, is rewarded with the quality of *fidelity*, defined as the ability to relate to others genuinely and sincerely.

Building on Erickson, Chickering & Reisser developed a theory of identity development, and tied it to education, in their influential work "Education and Identity" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993a). Their theoretical framework lists seven vectors of student development; a central one of them is "establishing identity". According to Chickering & Reisser, in a fast-changing global society, not anymore conformity to social expectations,

but rather *identity formation* becomes the central continuing task of education (p. 208). "Establishing identity" involves several indicators that include *sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context*, and *clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style* (p. 49). Similar to Erikson, Chickering & Reisser consider that education is essentially the amplification of two developmental processes: *differentiation* and *integration*. *Differentiation* is the analytical ability to recognize layers of complexities, dissimilarities, and interactions between the parts of what was previously perceived as unitary. *Integration* is the synthetical ability to re-construct those parts into one new meaningful whole. Chickering & Reisser also stress the important role of Liberal Education in nurturing those two basic processes (1993a, p. 343).

Apart from the psycho-social frameworks presented, cognitive models were more interested in describing how frames of reference that structure values, beliefs and assumptions evolve. Perry (1970) developed a conceptual model of gradual intellectual and ethical development from a dualistic black and white thinking up to commitment to relativism (as cited in Chickering & Reisser, 1993a, p. 10). Magolda (1992) built an epistemological reflection model consisting of four modes of knowing: absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual. Kohlberg (1969) ranked moral development into six incremental stages, through an interesting study on the "Heinz dilemma" (should penniless Heinz steal the experimental drug for his dying wife?).

The above collection of models suggests that a true Liberal Arts Education should directly relate to student development, in terms of forming an elaborate perception of oneself and of the world (i.e. *identity* and *worldview*). Literature suggests that, in order for

identity to mature, encounters with diverse perspectives that challenge pre-existing

notions, and opportunities to integrate these perspectives into a coherent personal value

system must be presented (Chickering & Reisser, 1993a, p. 365). Throughout these

encounters and opportunities, the student is effectively experimenting with varied roles

and patterns of behavior attempting to relate emerging elements of personal identity to

society at large, a phase that Erikson labels as "Moratorium" (Wright, p.80).

Perhaps, it is important to reiterate at this point the intimate connection between

identity and *worldview* as two sides of the same coin. Researching identity and worldview is

to examine a collection of internal factors such as motives and ambitions, external factors

such as socio-cultural and political structures, as well as relationship formations, and

perceptions about life meaning and role in society. The researcher perceives *identity* as a

unique combination of uniqueness and alignment, and *worldview* as the construct through

which *identity* as a holistic initiative emerges to the world.

The Core Curriculum program at The American University in Cairo (AUC)

The American University in Cairo (AUC), originally established in 1919 by American

missionaries yet quickly turning away from religious affiliation into a non-profit institution

(Ghabra & Arnold, 2007), prides itself as distinctively the only Liberal Arts Education

institution in Egypt. According to its mission statement, AUC is "committed to offer

exceptional liberal arts and professional education in a cross-cultural environment". Not

only is AUC concerned with its specific role inside Egypt but also with its special position as

an oasis of stability and a reliable repository of knowledge and expertise in the region (The

American University in Cairo, 2015). Eloquently elaborating on its global mission in its

centennial strategic plan, "as we bring the world to Egypt as its global university, we must attend deliberately on how we bring Egypt to the world" (The American University in Cairo, 2015). In their typology for offshore higher education institutions, Miller-Idriss & Hanauer (2011) label AUC as an *old turnkey foreign-style independent institution*, referring to its double accreditation in the US by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and in Egypt by the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE). Worth noting, AUC has a unique legal status as a private institution outside the jurisdiction of Act No. 101, the private universities act of 1992 (OECD, & The World Bank, 2010).

The 2014-2019 strategic plan document states that AUC's number one strength is "the fundamental philosophy of its education", which "accounts for the disproportionate success of [its] graduates, many of whom have played leading roles in their communities and nations" (The American University in Cairo, 2015). According to the university website, "throughout its history, AUC has balanced *a strong commitment to liberal arts education* with a concern for *the region's needs for practical applications and professional specializations*" (The American University in Cairo, 2017). As such, AUC has a landmark Core Curriculum program that places *identity* and *worldview* as its principal focus. According to the university, the Core Curriculum "strives to familiarize students with a diverse body of knowledge and intellectual tradition, and helps them understand themselves, in addition to their culture, society and place in the world. .. the Core Curriculum lies at the heart of AUC's commitment to the liberal arts. It is, first and foremost, an education in the fundamentals of learning itself." (The American University in Cairo, 2017).

The current Core Curriculum program of AUC is structured hierarchically into three main levels: freshman, secondary, and capstone. The primary level includes the study of seven courses: two in Rhetoric and Composition, and one in each of Library and Learning Technologies, Scientific and Philosophic Thinking, Freshman Seminar in addition to a choice between a scientific or cultural inquiry course. The secondary level includes four courses open to student choice among the areas of Humanities and Social Sciences, Arab World (2 courses) and Global Studies. The Capstone level is composed of two courses; one of them may be taken from the department of major while the second may count towards the requirements of a minor. Across each level, the program aims for the student to achieve an enhanced proficiency at five target learning outcomes: Critical Reading and Thinking, Written and Oral Communication, Teamwork, Diversity and Inclusion, and Ethics and Civic Engagement (The American University in Cairo, 2017).

In terms of faculty and student characteristics, AUC enjoys an incredible student-to-faculty ratio of 11:1. 55% of the faculty are Egyptian and 23% are American. Faculty hiring policies tend to keep an eye on commitment to Liberal Arts as a key criterion to join the institution through the establishment of a Task Force for that purpose (The American University in Cairo, 2015). In 2017-2018, the numbers of undergraduate and graduate students are 5474 and 979 respectively. The number of student-run organizations is 56. And, the AUC alumni network consists of 38069 active members (The American University in Cairo, 2017). Nevertheless, due to its excessively high tuition fees – the highest in the country, AUC is largely considered as an educational institution for the elite, and has been frequently described as a "privileged island" (as cited in Godwin, 2013).

Indeed, the students at AUC are privileged with relatively larger margins of freedom of thought and expression compared to the open community outside of the university's high walls. Throughout the core curriculum, they are presented with exceptionally precious opportunities to negotiate the meanings of experiences. They are pushed in one form or another to analyze, compare, and evaluate. They are given the tools to sculpt their identities, and to project their own worldviews. What is it that the students are educated into? How are they educated? And, do the students agree that this Liberal Education model impacts their identities and their worldviews? That is exactly the subject of this thesis research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Positionality:

The researcher has about twenty years of experience as a member of the AUC community, first as an undergraduate student, then as a staff member, and finally as a graduate student. This long history translated into a thorough understanding for AUC as an institution, and into a vast network of connections at different institutional levels, which proved to be an instrumental factor at various key points of this research.

The researcher's first encounter with liberal arts education was through undergoing the core curriculum of AUC as an undergraduate student. Coming from a physics major, as a student, he was always excited about core courses and what they typically entailed in terms of readings, reflections and debates. Although he never enrolled into the course, he used to regularly attend the core seminar general lecture held at the JC Auditorium back then. Today, his research on the core curriculum of AUC is one way to express his thankfulness for this life changing educational encounter.

The choice of topic is guided as well by the researcher's perception of the important role that humanities have to play, especially in the Egyptian setting, and of the pioneer role of AUC in particular in advancing the study of humanities in Egypt. The researcher is occupied with expanding spaces for freedom of expression and freedom of belief. He decisively belongs to an intellectual minority that advocates the values of libertarianism. As such, he perceives the core curriculum of AUC as a precious opportunity to initiate and sustain a relatively free zone of genuine and profound human exchange.

The researcher's tight acquaintance with AUC informed his development of research tools, and his access to information. For example, he decided to include senate resolutions

in his document analysis when he found that it was possible for him to access the required documents. He also selected the faculty members to interview, not only based on their long experience with the core curriculum, but also based on his personal knowledge of how pivotal these figures are to AUC. Also, it would not have been possible to send out the student survey without a push from the high-level administration.

In its totality, this research is a reflection of the researcher himself. The research design as a whole is a direct translation of his own perceptions about what liberal arts education is (or should be). In the process, the researcher becomes entangled with his data, and is in constant tension to distance himself from a story that he considers as his own. The research has been carried with so much passion and personal involvement, to the extent that it becomes in essence inseparable from his own self.

Research Problem Statement:

Identity and Worldview are two extremely complex synthesizing human constructs. They tangle fundamentally with epistemological, ontological, and axiological beliefs. Learning outcomes associated with tangible impact on student *identity and worldview* send a clear signal that profound education is taking place. Such an education, founded on the Liberal Arts, is much needed in Egypt and the Middle East.

The study perceives the Core Curriculum program of AUC as an initiative of an educational medium across which planners, faculty and students dynamically interact to refine and educate student identities and worldviews. In doing so, the study aims to treat the core curriculum not as a rigid content but as an organic being composed of three dimensions: 1. Structure, 2. Implementation, and 3. Impact. (Figure 1). The first dimension

(Structure) tackles organizational structure, and course structure. The second dimension (Implementation) looks at faculty readiness, and pedagogy. And, the third dimension (Impact) is concerned with students.

STRUCTURE

IMPLEMENTATION   **IMPACT**
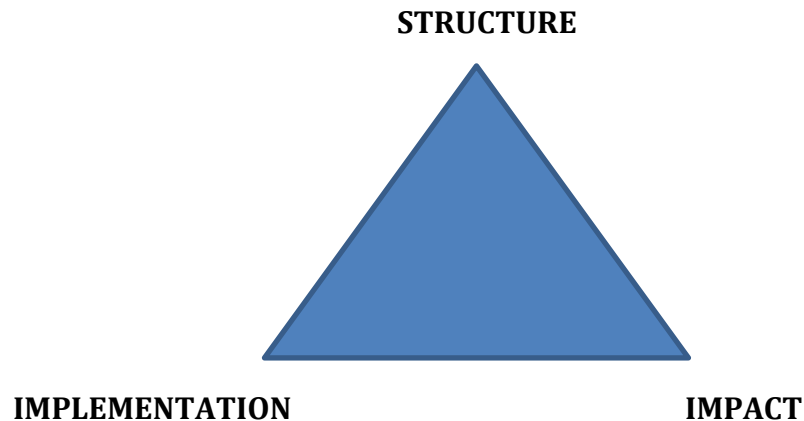
Figure 1 – Core Curriculum Dimensions

The research problem thus becomes:

Given the dynamics between its constituencies, how does the Core Curriculum of AUC impact Egyptian undergraduate students' identities and worldviews?

Evidently, studying the *impact* of the core curriculum also necessitates probing the other two dimensions: *structure* and *implementation*, because simply what is being studied is the impact of a specific structure, and of a certain implementation. Also, since the core curriculum is perceived in this study as a dynamic creation, constantly subject to internal and external fluxes, it would be equally beneficial to study the history of the program, how it evolved, and what the drivers for change were.

Making this specific choice, the researcher recognizes that the program constitutes only one component of the Liberal Arts Education experience at AUC.

Research Aims and Research Questions:

This research aims to study the impact of the Core Curriculum of AUC as a Liberal Arts Education model on two extremely complex target student outcomes: identity and worldview. First, it aims to study the history and structure of the Core Curriculum. This endeavor is pursued using historical document analysis, supplemented with interviews with key planners and administrators of the Core Curriculum. The questions raised are: how did the core curriculum evolve over time? what were the drivers for change? how do administrators perceive Liberal Arts Education? how does the organizational structure correspond to the target outcomes of the program? what is the philosophy behind the current course structure? what can the current setup tell us about the implementation aspects of the program? Second, it aims to investigate how students reflect on the structure of the program, and its implementation, in relation to its impact on their *identities and worldviews.* To this end, a student survey and focus groups are conducted. They attempt to answer questions such as: how do AUC students perceive Liberal Arts Education as an educational philosophy? what do they think of its relation to identity and worldview? what do students look for when they register for the AUC Core Curriculum? what, according to the students, is the impact of the AUC Core Curriculum: overall? on their identities and worldviews in particular? and, relative to the impact of other media? how do students evaluate their core curriculum classroom experiences? what do the students think of the structure of the Core Curriculum program of AUC?

The overall design for this research is outlined in Figure 2.
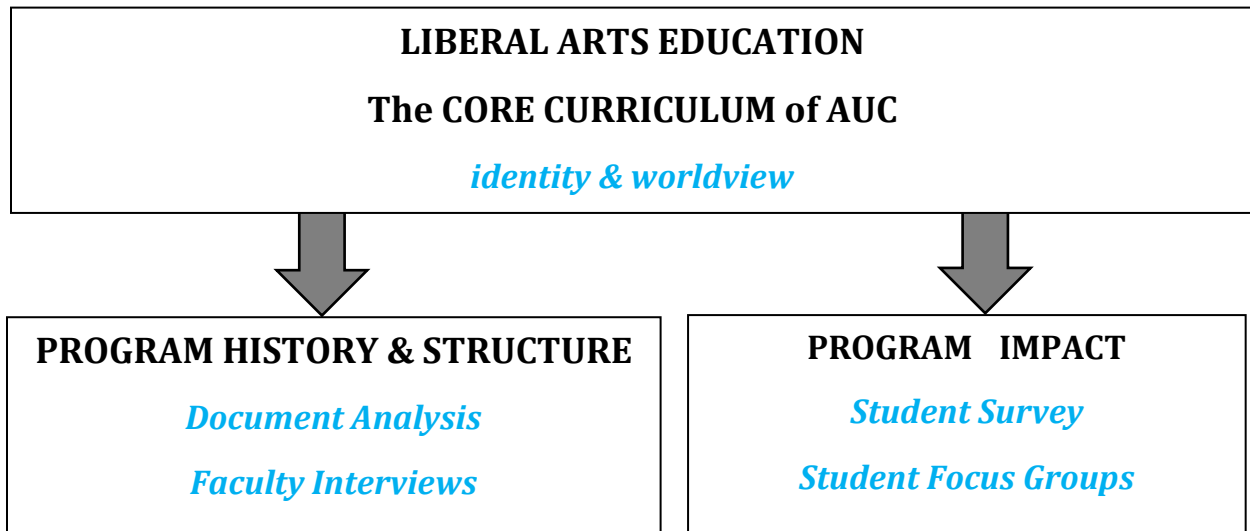
Figure 2 – Research Design

Research Frameworks:

This research refers to the works of Eriksson, and Chickering & Reisser as primary frameworks to understand *identity* and *worldview* (check Literature Review – section 7). In addition, the research refers to Newton's categorization of Liberal Arts Education programs as a suitable frame of reference to position the Core Curriculum model of AUC (check Literature Review – section 5). The global research directions presented in the Literature Review (section 6) directly inform the overarching methodology of this research and the research tools employed. While the philosophical, historical, and current global dimensions of Liberal Arts Education, discussed in the Literature Review (sections 1 and 2), guide the researcher's understanding of the purposes and challenges of Liberal Arts Education in general, the contextual factors impacting the Core Curriculum program of AUC laid out in the Literature Review (sections 3, 4 & 8) guide his understanding for the specific conditions of the program under study.

Research Instruments:

Due to the complexity of the interactions under study, the research refers to multi-dimensional conceptual models, and employs triangulated mixed-methods research to adequately evaluate a complex student outcome like impact on identity and worldview.

The researcher employed four research methods.

1. Document analysis.

The documents investigated fall into four categories, as following:

1. *The core curriculum office records 1989-2004.*

   These records were found at the rare books special collection library of AUC. There were 39 boxes, containing a series of labeled files each. The researcher looked into the files one by one, grasping more and more knowledge as to how the core curriculum was functioning during the years 1989-2004. The researcher was particularly interested in information about the pedagogical philosophy of the program, and in the early attempts to assess its impact.

2. *The core curriculum senate resolutions 1994-2017.*

   These records were accessible through the senate office. The researcher dug through the full list of senate resolutions from 1997 onwards, and pinpointed the resolutions related to the core curriculum. These resolutions, along with the attached memos, were studied sequentially, and they facilitated the construction of a historical timeline for the program. The researcher considered the senate documents as an important source as to what changes were occurring, especially from 2004 onwards, and what the drivers were for these changes.

3. *The AUC oral history records.*

   These records were found at the rare books special collection library of AUC. They are composed of a set of audio records of interviews with key figures of AUC narrating their memoirs about the university. The researcher listened to six particular interviewees. These interviews improved the researcher's understanding of the history of the core curriculum, and filled intervals which were obscure in the rest of the documents, such as the crisis of the core seminar and the turbulent period of the program 2003-2004.

4. *Current program brochures and course syllabi.*

   The current program brochures were found at the office of the core curriculum, and on the university's website. They were investigated thoroughly to comprehend how the program works today, what it is composed of, and how it is implemented. Several course syllabi were collected from the department of rhetoric and composition. These syllabi belong to the set of optional courses offered as part of the freshman level of the program. The syllabi were searched specifically for themes that relate to *identity* and *worldview*.

 2. **Faculty interviews.**

A list of 12 faculty members were interviewed. The interviewees were selected via direct purposeful sampling and, based on the documents, mostly possess a deep and long experience both in teaching and in administering the Core Curriculum (or parts of it). The interviews (Appendix A) were conducted at AUC New Cairo and Tahrir campuses during Spring 2018. The average duration of the interviews was about one hour. They were conducted in English, and audiotaped for subsequent analysis.

Name	Years Serving the Core	Role	Department
Adel	2004	Director	History
Amira	2004	Committee Member	CLT
Carla	2010-2015	Committee Member	RHET
Fouad	2012-present	Coordinator	ENGR
Heba	2004-2010	Associate Director	RHET
James	2004-2010	Director	Egyptology
Mark	2017-present	Associate Director	RHET
Mohamed	2003	Director	Theater
Ronald	1990s-present	Coordinator	RHET
Sama	2017-present	Director	RHET
Steve	2011-2016	Director	Philosophy
Wafaa	2017-2018	Teacher	ALI

Table 1 – List of interviewed faculty members

The interviewees were asked about their definition of liberal arts education. Then, they were asked to reflect on their personal experience with the core curriculum. In the process, they were asked about different aspects of the program. And, finally, they were asked to present their opinions about how they perceive the impact of the core curriculum on student identity and worldview (Appendix A).

3. **Student survey.**

The survey (Appendix B) was sent to the list of seniors and graduating seniors at AUC during Fall 2018. It was designed fully by the researcher, and then administered via survey monkey through the Office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness at AUC. Request to participate in the survey was sent out to the students via e-mail, and a reminder was sent one week later. The survey was open for two full weeks.

The target population was 1562 students, and the number of respondents was 87. The overall response rate was 5.6%. Statistically, with a confidence level of 95%, this response rate leads to an error margin of about 10%. The researcher estimates that this means that fairly reliable conclusions can be reached out of the survey.

Survey validity was ensured before sending the survey through two means. First, a pilot survey was manually presented to AUC students to check with them if there were any problems with the questions. Second, the proposed survey was presented to several faculty and staff members for their feedback; this includes the thesis supervisor, the core curriculum director, and representatives from the Office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness. Survey reliability was not possible to check since the researcher was not granted access to the raw data generated from the survey.

The survey includes 6 sections. The sections aim at drawing the perceptions of senior Egyptian students about the Core Curriculum program of AUC as a Liberal Arts Education model that targets student identity and worldview among its principal learning outcomes.

The six sections are divided as follows: 1. Student demographics (gender, class, and school). 2. Student perceptions of Liberal Arts Education in general. 3. Student Core Curriculum enrollment (student priorities). 4. Student Overall Evaluation of the Core Curriculum program (total value, impact on identity and worldview, and relative influence). 5. Student Reflection on Core Curriculum Class Experiences (class impact, and faculty readiness). 6. Student reflection on the structure of the program (breadth, depth, size, and relevance).

The survey uses specific terminologies to imply specific meanings. So, it uses the term "useful", to describe the core curriculum, to indicate utilitarian importance. And, it uses the term "inspiring" to indicate transformative importance. It also uses the term "valuable", in contrast to the term "a waste of time and money", to indicate the overall value proposition of the program. And, the term "decisively influential", in contrast to the term "marginal and minor", to describe impact relative to other sources of learning.

4. **Focus groups.**

The student survey (described in the section above) mainly aims to collect quantitative data on student perceptions of the program and how it relates to their identities and worldviews. This effort is supplemented by qualitative focus groups

(Appendix C) that target to achieve a thorough and detailed understanding of the complex constructs under study.

Solicitation of focus group participants was made via direct invitation, through classroom visits to the senior-level course sections across the university. E-mails were sent to 40 AUC professors (who were teaching core capstone courses during Fall 2018) to allow for these classroom visits to take place. The students willing to participate in the focus groups were then asked for their e-mails in order to communicate with them the logistics (time and place) of the focus groups.

A total of two focus group discussions (with nine students - two and seven) took place during the assembly hour in classroom Core C121 at the AUC New Cairo Campus. They lasted about 45 minutes each. The focus groups were conducted in English and were videotaped for subsequent analysis.

The students were first asked about their perceptions of liberal arts education, in general. Then, they were asked about how they perceive the core curriculum, and whether they think it has an impact on them, especially on their identities and worldviews. They were also asked about whether they recall outstanding classroom experiences. And, they were asked to reflect on their encounters with core curriculum professors.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were subsequently analyzed as following.

a. The documents, intertwined with the interviews, were dissected thematically. The themes were then presented in order, in the results section.

b. The survey data were presented statistically, in the forms of percentages for each survey answer, and weighted average for the whole population. Also, cross-referencing was used to match and sort the results by school affiliation.

c. The focus groups were recorded, and then examined question by question. The output was presented in sequence, in the results section.

Data Management and Confidentiality:

Data were collected under AUC IRB approval (case no. 2017-2018-81) – Appendix D. All research data were collected at The American University in Cairo, New Cairo and Tahrir Campuses during Spring and Fall 2018. All data are kept confidential, and coded whenever applicable. The names of interviewed faculty members were all replaced with pseudonyms. All data are used solely for research purposes as per AUC research regulations.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter lists thematically the main results for the mixed methods employed in this research: the historical documents, the faculty interviews, the student questionnaire, and the focus groups. First, it addresses faculty perceptions of Liberal Arts Education. Second, it navigates through the history of the core curriculum program, looking for changes happening over the years, and the drivers for these changes, and how these changes are tied to impact on student identities and worldviews. Third, it tackles the current course structure of the core, followed by an overview of its organizational structure. Fourth, implementation elements (faculty readiness, and pedagogy) are exposed. And, finally, fifth, the impact on students is addressed, as per the survey and the focus groups.

Documents and Faculty Interviews:

In this section, the combined data collected from the documents and the faculty interviews are presented together into themes in order.

A. On "Liberal Arts Education".

The American University in Cairo places liberal arts education at the center of its mission. However, whether its faculty members are proponents of Liberal Arts Education is a matter subject to question, and research. In this study, a number of faculty members were interviewed; the selection, nevertheless, should not be taken as a wide representation for the body of faculty members at AUC. The faculty chosen for the interviews were selected primarily based on a record of engagement with the core curriculum. For example, the list

of faculty members interviewed contains only one member from the School of Sciences and Engineering, and no members at all from the School of Business. If this points to anything, it points to the fact that the Core Curriculum is, to a large extent, technically connected to the school of Humanities and Social Sciences, and to the Department of Rhetoric and Composition. In other words, faculty from HUSS and RHET compose the majority of faculty teaching and dealing with the core.

All of the faculty interviewed in this study expressed deep respect and support for Liberal Arts Education. "No professor can claim that liberal arts education is not important. That would be a no no. And, he/she would be in serious trouble with the administration", Amira asserts. Personal definitions reflected diverse interpretations that emphasize the value of this educational philosophy. While Adel favored a definition based on personal experience, rather than on a theoretical basis, Amira put it briefly as "content and process: content is the general education you are getting; it could be history, philosophy, or art; and, process is the skills you get". Carla mentioned "broadening" student outlook, critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. Fouad referred to the ability to integrate thoughts from different fields. Sama again referred to transferable skills such as thinking and communication skills. While Heba and Mohamed referred to the concept of freedom: that education is liberating, James preferred a practical definition as: "to develop the ability to structure a logical argument". On the other hand, Ronald defined Liberal Arts Education as "exposing students to seminal texts" and Wafaa again referred to the "exposure to ideas" from different fields. And, as Mohamed stressed the assumption that knowledge is indivisible, does not come in silos, Steve referred to "setting the mind free from the chains of unexamined assumptions".

However, when asked about the ties between these definitions and the Egyptian context, most of the answers did not succeed to highlight how liberal arts education in essence entangles with the Egyptian socio-political setting; the uniqueness and importance of the model for Egypt in specific was almost never mentioned explicitly. One possible interpretation for the lacking faculty comments on the importance of Liberal Arts Education for Egypt is that faculty choose to refrain from talking into politics.

When asked about the status of Liberal Arts Education at AUC at present, some voices among the interviewees exhibited discontent. Adel recalls that in the seventies, there were no taboos - sex, politics and religion were all discussed. Attacks on the Liberal Arts used to come from the outside, and AUC used to act as a castle and a refuge of freedom, he notes. Since the nineties, the attacks on the Liberal Arts began to come from the inside, from parents and faculty, he asserts. Documents indeed refer to a few cases in which state censorship interfered, by blocking a couple of books, *Muhammed* in 1998, and *Al-Khubz Al-Hafy* in 1999, in addition to *A History of The Modern Middle East* in 2012, and by censoring the theatrical play titled *Bay the Moon*. The trigger for some of these cases were parents who turned the issue into a public debate on Egyptian newspapers. Nevertheless, it must be noted that, in spite of the ebbs and flows over the years, it is certainly undeniable that the margin of freedom at AUC is much larger than elsewhere in Egypt. As Amira confirms: "without Liberal Education, it would not be AUC".

B. The Chronological progress of the program.

It is of outmost importance to understand how the core curriculum evolved over the years. A historical overview is necessary to expose the various factors at play influencing

the program. Understanding the set of complex dynamics taking place offers an adequate

platform to evaluate the core curriculum in its entirety. It also uncovers the pedagogical

intentions of the program at various points in time. The program's chronological progress

can be summarized according to the following timeline:

1970s-1980s The Freshman Tutorial Program

1989-1990 The First Core Curriculum Program

1996-1997 The Liberal Arts Education Year

2000-2004 The Crisis of the Core Seminar Course

2006 The Pyramid Structure of the Core Curriculum

2011-2012 Initiation of the ALA and Freshman Year Program

2015-2016 Revisiting Learning Outcomes to drive Assessment

1970s-1980s   The freshman tutorial program.

Several interviewees reflected on their personal experiences with the core curriculum.

In some cases, as former AUC students in the 70s and 80s, they carry a special appreciation

for the Freshman Tutorial program running back then. The Freshman Tutorial Program

was such an influential program that it led two of the interviewees to change majors, and

Adel to state: "I wish it was never abolished".

The story of the Freshman Tutorial Program cannot be understood in isolation from the

social dynamics of that era. Up till the early 70s, the AUC was viewed as the institution that

delivers in the field of humanities for those students who could not make it to top

universities, as Adel denotes; the number of incoming students was very small (around 50

per semester). This dynamic decisively gave the university the relaxed environment

appropriate to conduct a pedagogy in line with classical Liberal Arts education. Simply, small numbers translated into better quality of education.

The Freshman Tutorial Program was basically an intensive one-year Great Books program. According to Adel, it consisted of a combination of a. general lectures, b. small-scale tutorials, and c. writing classes, all surrounding the same text under study. One text each week; 26 texts over the course of the year. The texts dealt with global human issues; examples of the texts employed include: Plato's *Republic*, *Death in Venice*, Camus' *The Stranger*, Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and *The Egyptian Peasant* by Père Henry Habib Ayrout. Notably, the faculty teaching the program were described by Adel as people with "rich human experience", and who could therefore influence students, by "systemically challenging and deconstructing their linear vision to the world", and giving way to "diversity and relativity", instead of taboos.

By the late-seventies, with the Camp David accords, and the political alignment with the USA, AUC's position significantly changed. In an era where the USA became the model to follow, AUC became the place to go to for those parents who wanted their children to have an American-style education, and foremost, "an English language certificate" (Adel).

This flip in social dynamics had a strong impact on the Freshman Tutorial Program and on Liberal Arts Education at AUC. The utilitarian function of education had come to supersede the inspirational and transformational functions. Education at AUC was becoming only a tool to get a certificate, and to land on the runway to a bright career. Over time, student numbers increased rapidly, and with the introduction of professional programs at AUC, the internal balance of the university changed, continually pushing the humanities and social sciences towards the margin. In terms of numbers, the professional

programs like engineering, and business occupied, and still occupy, the center of what AUC is offering to students.

1989-1990   The first core curriculum program.

As per the university records, in 1984, the university long-range planning committee decided to invest heavily in a back-then new core curriculum; the program was made to replace the original Freshman Tutorial program, and was designed to cater as a requirement for all undergraduate students. It seems that this move was probably triggered by the failure of the old Freshman Tutorial Program to provide to the increasing numbers of students, and by a sense of urgency to introduce a solid alternative to it that places greater weights on the sophomore and junior years. The 40-credit program, started effectively in 1989, and was run administratively by the Core Office, independent from the HUSS school.

As per the core office documents, the structure of the program was composed of: a hard core and a soft core. The hard core was intended to form "an intellectually coherent whole using: a. sequencing, and b. reinforcement", while the soft core was envisioned to encourage "intellectual breadth and choice". In other words, hard core courses were to be sequenced thematically to relate and build upon each other. These courses included scientific thinking, philosophical thinking, and a core seminar, in addition to the English and Arabic language requirements, as well as Middle East history. And, soft core courses were to provide variation on a diversity of topics.

The first attempts to assess and evaluate the core curriculum, started early in the 1990s. The university's historical documents point out to incidents in which communications are made, and committees are set-up to answer whether the program was

effectively doing what it was envisioned to do. Several faculty suggestions included

proposals to make a faculty forum to periodically discuss issues related to the core, to

design faculty workshops for professional development, and to use portfolios as measure of

assessment. However, these suggestions, it seems, have not matured and did not evolve

into actual practice.

The overall impression that the pertaining documents have made on the researcher is

that of a baby crawling to take its first steps. There was a new structure in place, and

various faculty were incorporated in the process of its development. It was organically

growing, and looking for ways to assess itself.

1996-1997   The Liberal Arts Education year.

In 1995, the AUC faculty sent a letter of concern to the president; the concern arose that

[AUC was losing sight of its distinctive mission, even (some said) becoming a "polytechnic",

dominated by highly specialized courses of study on the model of the Egyptian national

universities] (Clark et al., 2018). The result was to announce 1996-1997 as the year for

Liberal Arts. The year included a series of workshops and a retreat event, but no direct

involvement with the core curriculum could be traced.

In 1997, the Provost's commission on Liberal Education invited the Distinguished

Visiting Professor C. Schneider on a two-week visit to investigate Liberal Learning at AUC.

Schneider produced a report that tackled areas of development, and included a section on

the core curriculum. Schneider emphasized the importance of coordination and

collaboration between the faculty members, to the extent that she titled the section on the

Core curriculum as "Let us sit together", to create structural opportunities to compare

syllabi and teaching methods. More importantly, Schneider reflected on the organizational

structure of the core. She called it a self-defeating exercise to attempt to move forward

without handling first the factors that hinder the performance of the core director.

Schneider pinpointed the fact that the director lacked both "a mandate and a structure". It

was not until 2006 that this matter was partially addressed by establishing a Core Advisory

Committee, to advise and coordinate.

2000-2004   The crisis of the core seminar course.

The core seminar course is a unique component of the Core Curriculum. Ronald, who

has been coordinating the course for the past couple of decades stresses how important it

is to "expose students to seminal texts". The format of the course is a combination of great

books lectures, and small-scale tutorials. It must be noted here that the researcher has a

strong bias in favor of the seminar course, having attended its lectures regularly as a

student at the JC auditorium.

The records indicate that the seminar was a subject for a lot of discussions among

faculty members. In the early 1990s, after a series of communications, it was decided that

the course would be most suitable for students at the sophomore level. The argument was

that students must possess solid English language skills, yet also, in order to maximize its

impact, it must not be taken too late close to graduation.

By the late 1990s, the logistical problem emerged. Even though there were around 40

sections offered each term for the seminar course, these were not enough to serve the

increasing number of students. A huge student backlog put an end to the seminar as a

graduation requirement. It was made optional, until it was terminated by the lack of faculty

support to it. Amira describes the logistical deficiency encountering the seminar as

"Achilles heel", its weakness spot. More and more faculty were becoming unenthusiastic

about it and disinterested to teach it, especially as they saw that the students took it lightly, and that the sections were getting more and more crowded, and that the course was not achieving its intended outcomes.

The termination of the seminar did not last for long. First, it was planned in 2004 to revamp the course and make it as a capstone course in a new core structure. But, this idea was not implemented. In fact, later on, the seminar course returned as a light-version optional freshman course. The works being studied include: *I have a Dream*, Mahfouz's *Miramar*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Sophocles's *Antigone*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, *Gilgamesh*, Leonardo Da Vinci, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Aware of the language limitations of the 100-level audience, the texts, translations and editions used were chosen to be user friendly as much as possible. Today, the course runs satisfactorily as such, with about 10 sections of 15 students each, Ronald denotes.

2006   The pyramid structure of the core curriculum.

Driven by logistical requirements, as pointed out in the case of the core seminar, the AUC moved away from the old core and resorted to a pyramid structure composed of primary, secondary and capstone levels. According to a memo from James, the new structure secured the logistical requirements by filling the program with courses, such that a total of about 200 sections was offered each term, up from 70-80 sections only in the old system. The filling of the program necessitated huge communication efforts from the core director, talking to different departments to offer more courses for the core. The process also included designing new courses, supported by a Melon grant.

The Mellon grants.

The Core Curriculum program is supported by two generous grants from the Mellon foundation. The first grant is the "Core Fellows"; it dedicates budget lines to hire faculty members – typically foreign – in order to bring in dedication and expertise with the Liberal Arts. Currently, there are around eight core fellows at AUC. The second grant is the Melon grant for AUC faculty to design Core Courses that are interdisciplinary in nature. The outcomes of this grant have had a large effect on the Core and its progress; especially on the freshman level, it produced several courses that run until today. Among these courses, there are: 1. *who Am I ?* which tackles assumptions about oneself and about the world, perception and consciousness of the mind, personality types, and socio-cultural lenses; 2. *How Do I Know What is True?* which addresses biases and fallacies, judgements and the notion of truth*; and, 3. The Human Quest* which deals with identity, humanity, societies, and one's place in the world*.* Worth noting is that there were also a couple of courses: one on *History* which was discontinued after the course designer left AUC and no one wanted to teach it, and one on *Philosophy* which stopped as no faculty member was willing to pick it up after the designer taught it for one semester and was not willing to teach it anymore.

2011-2012   Initiation of the ALA and freshman year program.

In 2011, an important structural change was implemented: the initiation of the Academy of Liberal Arts. For the first time, the core director had a faculty base that reports to him/her. The core director holds the position of the dean of undergraduate studies as well. The impact of such change is discussed fully in the "organizational structure" section below.

2015-2016   Revisiting Learning Outcomes to drive Assessment.

In 2015, the learning outcomes of the core were re-written to reflect mastery at the three levels of the program (freshman, secondary, and capstone). As per the official website, the current set of learning outcomes includes: critical thinking, oral and written communication, teamwork, critical reading, information literacy, and ethics and civic engagement.

C. The current program structure.

The core curriculum is composed out of 40 credit hours and is structured - as per the figure below – into 3 levels: freshman (22 credit hours), secondary (12 credit hours), and capstone (6 credit hours). The freshman level is covered by what has been branded as The Freshman Year (FYP). It is composed of eight courses: two tandem courses (reading & writing), one research course and one library course, one scientific thinking course and one philosophic thinking course, in addition to one humanities course, and one sciences course.
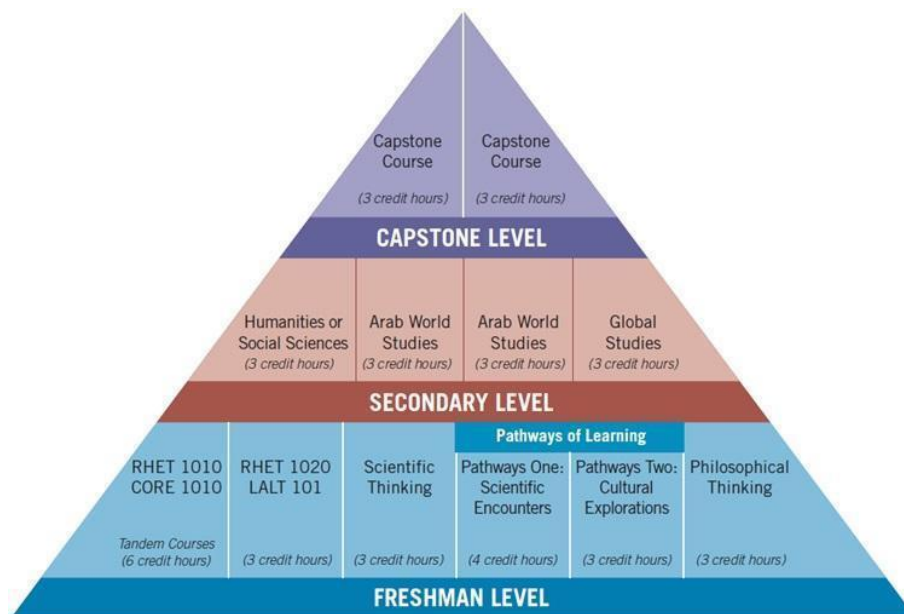

Figure 3 – Core Curriculum Structure (2012-present)

The Secondary level is divided into four courses: one in Humanities and Social Sciences, two about the Arab World, and one on Global Studies. Finally, the capstone level is made up of two courses: one inside the major declared by the student, and one outside it.

D.   Organizational structure.

According to the report of C. Schneider in 1997, the central problem of the core curriculum was that it lacks "a structure and a mandate". In truth, a big part of the struggles of the core was that it remained for so long as an office without an affiliated faculty base, as Amira argues. The core director, as one of the interviewees puts it, goes around begging for faculty to teach the core courses. Steve clearly states: "It is the worst position on campus, with so much responsibility, yet without any authority".

This situation has partly changed with the initiation of the Academy of Liberal Arts in 2012. In such a structure, the Core Director is a Dean that presides over 3 departments: the English Language Institute (ELI), the Arabic Language institute (ALI), and the Rhetoric and Composition department (RHET). Such a setup is directly responsible for the success of the freshman year program. Sama and Mark stress how the aforementioned structure helps to highlight directions, and promote practices, as well as provide supervisory guidance for assessment and enhancement.

Having said this, the secondary and capstone levels remain problematic for many reasons. Amira believes that there is too much choice. It perhaps means that the courses are more like stand-alone, rather than fitting in a specific structure. As far as structure is concerned, various interviewees have expressed the need for more cohesion, and tighter levels of coordination among faculty members. First, there is a need to place a system that

is able to overview and guide how the courses at these levels are conducted. Second, there is a need to share and exchange best practices, and educational resources. And, third, there is a need for reinforcement, i.e. to make use of the skills gained in one course into the other courses - for courses to rely pedagogically over each other's achievements.

In those parts of the Core where a coordinator is placed (like for the Scientific Thinking, and for the optional freshman SEMR course), it seems that things work best, and therefore, it might be a good practice to adopt elsewhere. For example, as a coordinator, Fouad was able to develop a resource database shared among the teaching faculty. He also made sure to embed the learning outcomes of the core curriculum into the syllabi, and is regularly holding meetings to share best practices.

E. Faculty readiness.

If a positive change is envisioned with respect to the secondary and capstone levels, it must include structural changes, but more importantly it must be pedagogically sustained by a "critical mass" of teaching faculty, as Steve outlines. Faculty buy-in has been a chronic problem for the core curriculum. In the year 2000, the core seminar course had to be discontinued due to lack of required faculty support, as has been discussed, among other reasons.

According to the records and to the interviews, it was reported that many faculty members, especially the senior ones, prefer to teach senior classes inside the major. And, those junior faculty who commit to the core, frequently at the expense of their own promotion, do not find the adequate incentives to continue their journeys.

Not only is faculty engagement required, but so is extensive professional development. As expressed by Carla, faculty - outside the RHET department - do not know what learning outcomes are, let alone to make use of them. A culture of outcome-based assessment is completely lacking in the secondary and capstone levels. For instance, Steve reveals that when he asked faculty to relate between their class activities and the learning outcomes set forth by the core office, almost none of the faculty responded. Without outcome-based assessment, one cannot verify how far the courses achieve their desired goals, and cannot tell whether the teaching faculty are putting the target outcomes in consideration while planning for and delivering those courses. As a result, the learning outcomes set forth by the core curriculum for the secondary and capstone levels remain mere ink on paper.

F. Pedagogy.

The pyramid structure of the Core Curriculum is in effect analogous to Bloom's taxonomy, as Carla and Mark remark. On the bottom-tier, the Freshman Year program encases the 100-level courses that introduce the students to the basics of critical thinking, reading & writing. The middle-tier is composed of 200- & 300- level courses that advance student analytical skills. And, the top-tier is envisioned for 400-level students to synthesize and integrate across disciplines.

According to the interviews, the Freshman Year Program is a success story that entails several pedagogical features. First, it is based on an intentional pedagogical model "the university college model" that employs "high-impact practices (HIPs)", such as: writing-intensive coursework, teamwork, community-based learning (CBL), undergraduate research, e-portfolios, and internships. Second, it is designed to have the reading and

writing components as tandem courses for the same cohort of students. This way, the students are more engaged, and higher effectiveness levels are achieved. Third, the research component is coupled with the course on information literacy and the use of library technologies. Fourth, it introduces students in their first year to the essential inquiry modes: philosophical thinking and scientific thinking. Fifth, the program is mainly taught by a coherent faculty base, that possesses a suitable background, from the Rhetoric and Composition department. Sixth, many of the themes employed for reading and writing are interdisciplinary and have been designed based on the KSA (Knowledge-Skills-Attitudes) framework, Carla denotes. Seventh, the learning outcomes are set clear and relevant, "to maximize impact on students", as recommended by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Steve adds. Eighth, various teaching techniques are employed to generate artifacts, including debates, response journals, video making, poems, posters, and critical essays.

By contrast, the interviewees have expressed hesitation as to the secondary and capstone levels. One even argued that no one understands what the capstone course outside the major meant. Another commented that it is now time to review and revamp these two levels.

G. Impact on Students.

Assessing the impact of the core curriculum on students is tricky. Some interviewees would argue that it only takes a graduate to appreciate the core. In fact, some faculty reported that they are often encountered with "thank you"s from alumni years after graduation. Below are some insights based on the faculty interviews.

When it comes to identity and worldview, it would be interesting to measure the effect of specific themes such as: *who am I?* and *The Human Quest* in addition to *The Freshman Seminar*. According to the course syllabi, these are courses that hammer head-on the two constructs under study. And, faculty interviews suggest that students exhibit enthusiasm and high levels of engagement with these courses. In fact, as per enrollment data, these themes are among the most popular amongst students, and this is how they continue to survive, by having secured the number of students required to run the courses.

As to the student body at large, the faculty interviews suggested that about 20% of students are somewhat resistant to the core. A few faculty members proposed that these students are probably from Engineering and Business schools. This suggestion, however, was not confirmed in the student survey of this study. On the contrary, some faculty interviewees mentioned that there was a portion of students that was most affected by the program; it instrumentally helped them to effectively decide on and declare a major.

Overall, the interviewees seem to appreciate the impact of the core curriculum on students. After all, the program represents a unique opportunity for students that in many cases come to college unprepared, as Steve expresses. Amira and Carla call it a "cultural experience" that brings about "diversity, independence, critical thinking, and experiential learning" to "make connections", analyze, and synthesize.

Student Survey

Preceded by a pilot survey to check its validity, a student survey (Appendix B) was sent to 1562 seniors and graduating seniors on September 2018, through the office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness at AUC. 87 students responded, with

a response rate of 5.6%. The survey explicitly excluded non-Egyptians. The respondents were all senior AUC students; 39 were male (45%) and 48 were female (55%). 43% (N=37) and 28% (N=24) belong to the schools of Sciences and Engineering, and of Business, respectively. This demographic distribution probably reflects the diversity of the student body, since these percentages are close (within 5%) to the percentages for the entire AUC population, as published on the university's official website (The American University in Cairo, 2019).

On knowing what Liberal Arts Education is (question 6), the students responded highly positive, with a weighted average of 4.5 out of 5. The majority of students (78%; N=61) regard Liberal Arts Education positively (question 7); but, when asked whether they chose AUC because it offers Liberal Arts Education (question 8), the weighted average response dropped to a 3.2 out of 5. Nevertheless, the data shows that the students, on average, believe in the potential of Liberal Arts Education to develop student identity and worldview, as they scored 3.9 and 4 out of 5 respectively, on questions 9 and 10.

On the factors impacting their core curriculum course registration (question 11), 81% (N=63) of the students prioritized their "interest in the topic". "Class time and schedule" came second with 63% (N=49), while "who the teacher is" and "how easy to get a grade" were also instrumental, and came third and fourth with 49% (N=38) and 45% (N=35) respectively.

Reflecting on the Core Curriculum (question 12), 25% (N=18) of the students found it both useful and inspiring, while 27% (N=20) found it neither useful nor inspiring. 33% (N=24) found it useful only, while 15% (N=11) found it inspiring only (figure 2). The set of questions dealing with how the core curriculum is affecting: perception, inquiry, and

morality, have all yielded average responses between 3 and 3.7 out of 5. The first pair on

"self-perception, and coherent view of the world" showed a higher average for the latter.

The second pair on "inquiry, and engagement" is the highest scoring pair among all three

pairs. The third pair on "morality, and values" is the lowest scoring pair among all three

pairs. And, the overall effect of the core curriculum is slightly higher on the "worldview"

construct than on the "identity" construct (questions 19 and 20).
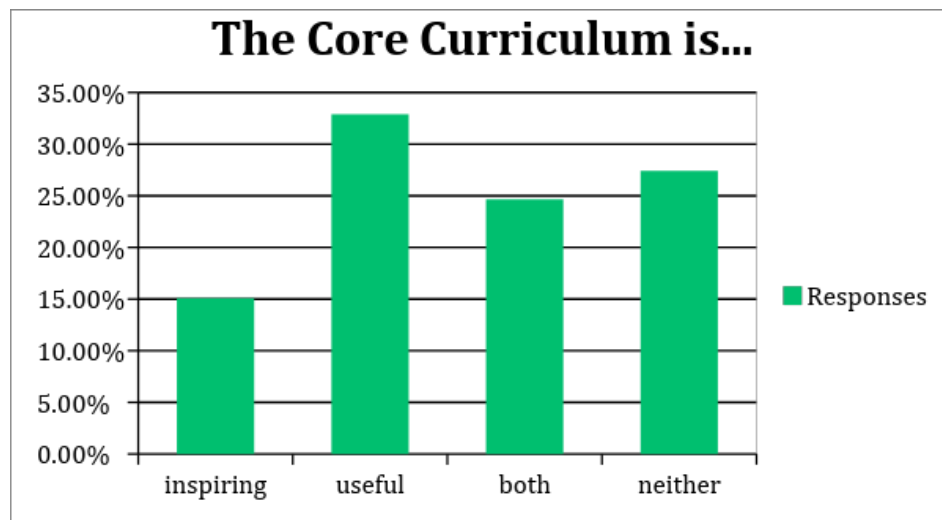
Figure 4 – Student Survey: Question 12

As for question 21 (question 21), 27% (N=20) of the students strongly saw the core

curriculum as a valuable educational opportunity, while 19% (N=14) strongly considered it

as a waste of time and money. This 19% does not belong decisively to a particular school.

The weighted averages for all schools fall more or less within the same range – as per the

figure below (figure 3).

As to the overall impact of the core curriculum in comparison to other media

(question 22), the student response drops to average, 3.1 out of 5, with most of the

responses (34% (N=25) and 30% (N=22)) lying between neutral and slightly influential.

The next set of questions (23-30) revolving around classroom experiences and faculty readiness exhibited average scores between 3.1 and 3.6.

As to the structure of the core curriculum (questions 31 to 34), 40% (N=26) of the students thought that the number of courses should be decreased, while 31% (N=20) said that it is adequate as is, and 14% (N=9) considered that it should be totally cancelled. Again, this 14% does not belong decisively to a particular school – as per the figure below (figure 4). Yet, the two segments that ask most for a decrease in the number of core courses are students of Sciences and Engineering, and Business – which may be understood due to the high number of credits required for graduation from their majors.
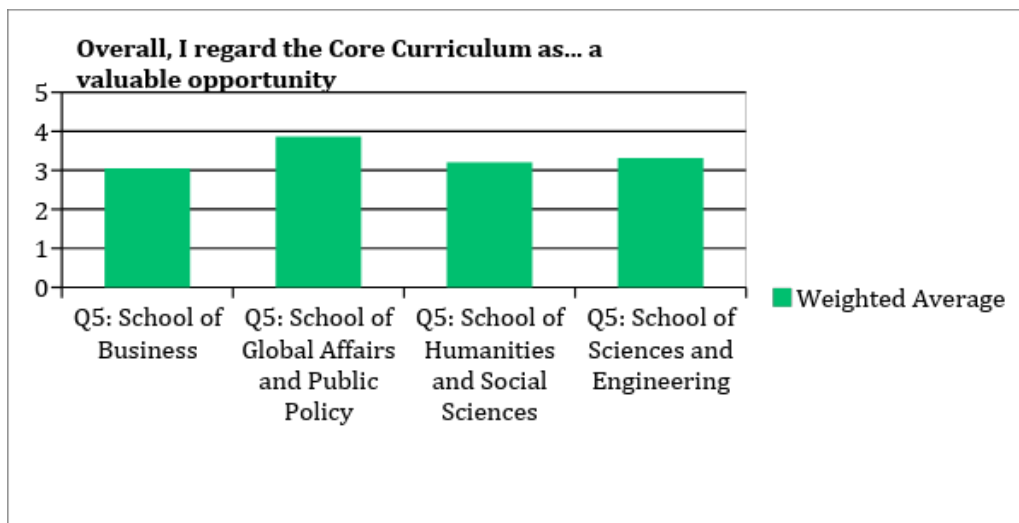
Figure 5 – Student Survey: Question 21 – by School (Q5)

As to the areas covered by the core curriculum, the survey showed that 29% (N=19) of the students favored having more diversity in the courses offered, while 20% (N=13) found the current offerings satisfactory. 49% (N=32) of the respondents want more courses from the school of Business; these students come mostly from Business and Sciences and Engineering (Fig 5). And, 45% (N= 29) of the respondents want more courses from the school of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Figure 6 - Student Survey: Question 31 – by School (Q5)

Figure 7 - Student Survey: Question 33 – by School (Q5)

In a nutshell, the survey affirms, from the part of the students, the importance and potential of Liberal Arts Education, and of the Core Curriculum of AUC. The influence of the Core Curriculum on identity and on worldview is found to be somewhat positive, but not to be considered as a decisive intervention. The pedagogical aspects of the program were surveyed, as well as the structural aspects; both seem to be in good standing as reported by the students overall.
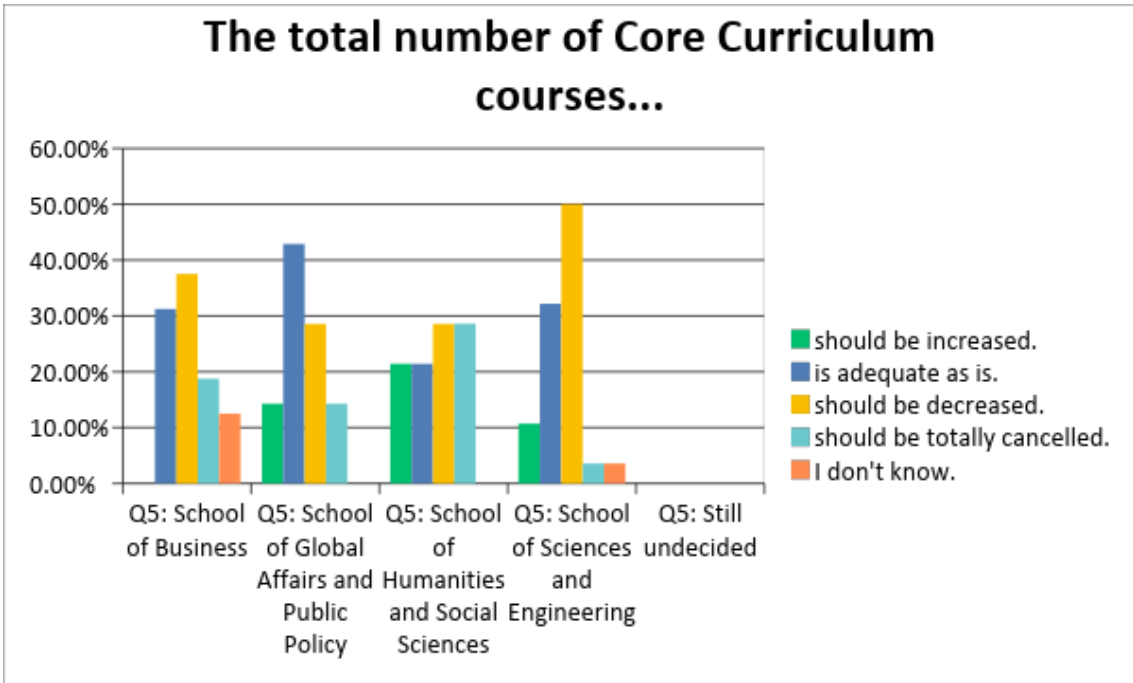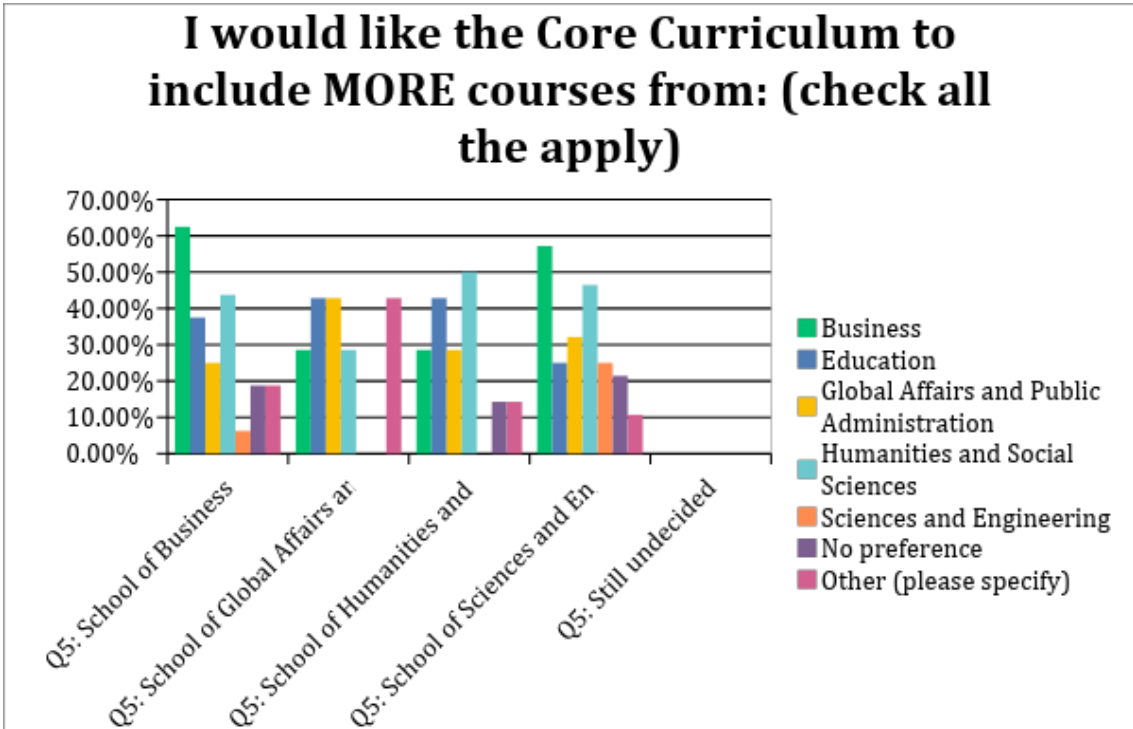
Focus Groups

The focus groups aimed at exploring in depth the dynamics of the core curriculum from the point of view of the students. Two focus groups consisting of a total of nine (two plus seven) senior students were conducted. Five were females and four were males. The students belonged to diverse departments across the university.

First, students were asked about Liberal Arts Education. The absolute majority of the students expressed their support for such an educational philosophy. Some students complained about the burden that courses outside the major pose, but the sweeping argument was in favor of opening up the horizons of learning beyond disciplinary boundaries.

"I think that Liberal Arts courses are a very smart idea, because they help us discover other fields of study. They really benefitted the way I think. Also, it may help in the labor market later, if you know something about everything", Nada elaborated.

"I think Liberal Arts Education is very beneficial. I chose to come to AUC mostly because of this. It sheds light on important things in life. If AUC is catering for the elite, and the people who are expected to be the leaders, then they have to have this background about many things", Nadine added.

Second, students were asked whether their support for the Liberal Arts in principle translated in reality in support for the core curriculum. The objective was to question how successful the core curriculum as a Liberal Arts Education model is, in the eyes of the students. The replies were somewhat hesitant. Most of the student reflections focused on teacher's ability as the cornerstone for success. In other words, the success of the program is highly dependent on the ability of each instructor to turn the class into a rich and engaging educational experience.

"There is a concern with the core curriculum that a lot of the courses are dependent on the professor. If you get a good professor, the experience will be very good. If not, it will be very bad. Some professors as a package are very good; they are passionate about the course, and engage the students with new ideas and activities. Others just read from the slides and do not encourage participation", Ahmed explained.

Students commented that instructors with such qualities are well-known to the students, and upon registration the course sections taught by these professors become full very quickly. Nevertheless, the survey shows that the identity of the professor is not the first thing students look at. Student priorities upon registration include a set of other considerations as well, among which are interest in the topic, class schedule, and easy grading.

Third, students talked about the elements and aspects of the program that matter most to them. Students were occupied with the negative effect of the core courses on their GPAs. Many students complained about inconsistency in grading, especially with the rhetoric course instructors. "I do something and the professor says it's great. In the next draft, I keep it the same, and the instructor does not like it", says Nada. They were also occupied with the fact that the core curriculum meant that they would have to go through too many courses as a requirement for graduation. This was especially relevant to the engineering and business students who are required to take 163 and 127 credit hours respectively to graduate; for these students, the 40 credit hours of the core pose an additional burden, because as Ayten explains, "it then takes more than four years of study to graduate from business and five years to graduate from engineering".

As to students' general attitude towards the program, there seemed to be two contrasting attitudes. The first is one that considers the core as an imposed burden; this is especially the case for the set of courses that are imposed on the students in the freshman level of the program, and which the students have no choice but taking, like the Library course LALT 101. "The core should not be stressful. It is something to enjoy. The more freedom in choosing the courses, the more these courses are likely to have impact on me", Merna commented. Taking an extreme position, Ayten refers to the core as a way for the university to collect more money. The second attitude is one that looks at the core as a series of interesting light-weight courses; this is especially the case for the set of optional courses, which students select among a wide array of offered courses. "For me, core courses are an escape from the major. They give me the opportunity to interact and make

friends with different students on campus, and to have ideas and insights about what other

majors are doing", Ahmed said.

In general, many students felt that the program was giving them important

fundamental skills. And, they found that these skills were transferable – in other words,

they used the gained skills later on in other courses and contexts. This was especially the

case with scientific and philosophical thinking. Also, when asked about which values they

associate with the core curriculum, students mentioned diversity and flexibility. Nadine

further elaborated that she learned how to look at others and at problems differently; she

mentioned specifically that the course of Religions of the World taught her compassion

towards others. She also mentioned the course titled Education Goes to the Movies as one

that made her change her views. While Omar mentioned that the core curriculum in

general makes one globally aware, Merna accentuated that she learned about the

importance of learning, un-learning and re-learning. Ahmed referred to questioning

assumptions and cautiously trusting his own perceptions. And, Judy narrated how the

course on Judaism enabled her to moderate her views.

Among the nine students, there were three cases that found the core curriculum to be

particularly inspiring. One student owes it to the program, that it enabled her to know who

she was and what she wanted to do. As a result, she changed major from architecture to

fashion design, and is getting ready to launch her own brand soon. "I am thankful for the

core curriculum because it helped me discover myself more. It helped me realize what I

really want to do in life and how I want to be remembered, not how my parents want me to

be remembered" Merna affirms. Ahmed, who is an engineering student, described how the

core curriculum helped him change his mindset from a 1+1=2 into one that enjoys knowing about different disciplines, and appreciates diversity.

When asked about the portion of students that viewed the core curriculum as useless, the focus group students, contrary to what was assumed by some of the interviewed faculty members, disagreed with the statement that this portion would be affiliated with engineering and business. The students interpreted that such attitude would probably be due to two things: first, the negative effect of the core courses on students' GPAs, and, second, the burden requirement of taking the 40 credits of the core curriculum to graduate.

As such, the focus groups showed the following. First, they showed student support to the Liberal Arts as an educational philosophy. Second, they showed that the extent of success of the core curriculum of AUC is highly dependent on the caliber of its teaching faculty members, and their ability to generate engaging classroom experiences. Third, they showed that at some instances the program not only teaches transferable skills, but also is - at least partially - capable of guiding student attitudes. Fourth, the focus groups showed some cases in which a profound impact on student identities and worldviews can be traced. This impact was clear in cases where students "found themselves" and changed majors or pursued minors that reflect their true passion. It was also clear in students who altered their ways of thinking from a linear view of the world into one that entails complexity and appreciates multi-disciplinarity. The impact was also clear in cases where student attitudes towards others were altered to embrace diversity and flexibility.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In an attempt to address the research question of "how does the core curriculum of AUC - as a Liberal Arts Education model - affect Egyptian students' identities and worldviews?", this thesis employed four research data collection methods: document analysis, faculty interviews, a student survey and focus groups. Each of the employed methods shed light on a particular aspect of the research question. The document analysis intertwined with faculty interviews uncovered the historical progress of the program under study. It allowed the researcher to see which changes were taking place over time, and what the drivers for these changes were, and how these changes relate to the program's impact on student identity and worldview. Faculty interviews, on their own, bridged the past to the present, and highlighted trending practices among faculty members. They revealed to the researcher faculty commitment towards the liberal arts as well as implementation aspects such as the type of content being delivered, and the pedagogical tools being used in classrooms. Finally, the student survey and the student focus groups sought to bring forward the voices of the students. Students constitute the central element of the educational process under study; as such, the student survey and focus groups gave out important indications on the relationship between the students and the Core Curriculum, and on the impact of the program on student identities and worldviews in specific, and how students perceive Liberal Arts Education, in general.

Egypt is a country witnessing a struggle to open up its socio-political sphere following a couple of revolutions. Its youth are subject to forces that continually reshape their identities and worldviews. The researcher believes that Liberal Arts Education has a

crucial role to play in these settings. It should profoundly guide the processes of identity formation, and worldview development.

The first point to consider in this discussion is the development of the core curriculum. The program, driven by the increase in the number of students, shifted from what Robert Newton (2000) referred to as a central Great Books program, under the name of the Freshman Tutorial Program in the 1970s, to a composite structure that can be described as semi-decentralized. The Freshman Tutorial Program used to impose a unified content, in the form of 26 seminal texts to be studied, discussed, and reflected upon throughout the freshman year. In contrast, the core curriculum today is very different; it is composed of 3 levels, across which faculty members are given much more freedom to form their own courses, with a minimal set of guidelines. This shift comes in agreement with literature. According to Newton (2000), the more complex a university becomes, the more departmentalized it turns out to be, and therefore the more likely it would follow the Scholarly Discourse model characterized with departmental distribution courses, rather than the Great Books model which flourishes more in simpler small-scale universities. This is not to say that the Great Books model and the Effective Citizen model described by Newton are totally dismissed. A closer look at the core curriculum of AUC reveals that the composite pyramid structure makes an attempt to incorporate features from those two models. For example, Great Books are offered in an optional freshman seminar course (SEMR 1023). Also, with reference to the Effective Citizen model, the learning outcomes of the program include a component on Ethics and Civic Engagement. It is important to note here that the inclusion of these pedagogical features has not always been intentional; rather, it has come as the outcome of on-the-ground practical considerations. Perhaps, the

story of the seminar course described in the results chapter serves as a good example for this. Having said so, this does not mean that the program has been lacking direction; in fact, one can easily point out to specific events in which intentional interventions were made. Examples of these interventions are: the initiation of 1989 core curriculum structure, and the establishment of the Academy of Liberal Arts in 2012.

The above mentioned transition in the structure of the program means that there is less emphasis on transformational impact on students in terms of knowledge and attitudes, and most of the emphasis is placed only on the thinking and communication skills. In this framework, student identity and worldview are only partially addressed by the program, which renders any impact achieved on student identity and worldview as unintended.

As pointed above, the development of the core curriculum has been largely driven by the continual growth of the university. Instead of a small-scale institution that mainly teaches the humanities in the 1970s, we have now in hand a complex student body affiliated with 4 schools: sciences and engineering, business, humanities and social sciences, and global affairs and public policy. But the growth has not only been in students; the composure of the faculty base belonging to these schools has also changed. As the university introduced new professional and occupational programs, and hired faculty to teach in those programs, the internal balance has gradually shifted away from the humanities. Perhaps, the most notable tilting point is the letter of concern sent to the university president in 1995 from AUC faculty members. It was felt that the AUC was moving fast towards becoming a *professional* university, much alike other Egyptian universities, and losing sight of its mission as a Liberal Arts institution. This tension

between the professional-occupational tendency, and the Liberal Arts inclination is also found in literature, as a tension between fragmentation and unity of knowledge (Kimball, 1995; Boning 2007), and between depth and breadth of education (Newton, 2000). Faculty support to the core is a key cornerstone. As departmentalization takes place, the core curriculum loses its holistic aspect, and becomes perceived as a set of departmental contributions in the form of introductory courses into the disciplines. This effect is particularly clear in the secondary and capstone levels of the core, in which individual courses are approved by the Core Advisory Committee, and left for faculty at the departmental level to deliver. In this scheme, it is hoped that the students will make the connections between the courses they take for the core on their own. Again, this means that any impact achieved on student identity and worldview is in fact unintended.

The core curriculum structure adopted by AUC is a trademark of the institution. It translates the dynamics taking place across the university. The structure is filled with courses that aim to broaden students' intellectual horizons. Let me put a few examples. The primary level of the program contains two critically important courses: scientific thinking, and philosophical thinking. The two courses introduce the students to the essentials of logical thinking, and are used to expose students to thorny issues such as the theory of evolution, and the proof of God. It is envisioned for these courses to sharpen student critical thinking abilities, and to decompose their linear views of the world. Also, there are at least 3 optional courses that tackle head-on student identity and worldview: *the human quest*, *who am I?*, and *how do we know what is true?*. At the secondary level, 2 courses discuss the Arab World, and one course is dedicated to Global Studies. These courses offer opportunities for the students to grapple with issues of identity, belonging, and

relationship with one's heritage as well as one's place in the world. Finally, the capstone level represents a chance for students to synthesize the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained into a signature project of their own. In terms of pedagogy, the learning outcomes set forth by the Core Curriculum Office include critical thinking, communications skills and teamwork. According to literature, these are surely important skills, not only for students but also for employers (AAC&U as cited in Logan & Curry, 2015). The structure as a whole is analogous to Bloom's taxonomy, and the learning outcomes for each level of the program are set specifically to reflect this graduation. Incremental definitions are used to describe the learning outcomes at each of the three levels. While the structure seems promising in theory, it is important to note here that impact on student identity and worldview is not explicitly part of the learning outcomes, which focus only on skills. This means again that any impact achieved on student identity and worldview quite possibly mostly happens unintentionally.

Faculty readiness remains a very important factor to consider. While AUC is equipped with an excellent supportive infrastructure, in terms of classroom setup, and the presence of a Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) to help faculty members to develop materials and conduct classes, it remains a matter of individual faculty choice and ability, whether one is capable of engendering stimulating classroom experiences. Several of the faculty members interviewed have reported that they use a variety of high-impact practices such as: writing-intensive coursework, teamwork, community-based learning (CBL), undergraduate research, e-portfolios, internships, debates, video-making, poem writing and podcasts. How many faculty members effectively use these techniques is still subject to questioning. In general, the preparation of faculty members to teach into the core so as to

produce a transformational impact is subject to serious doubts. The researcher does not know of any initiative from the part of the core office specifically to equip and prepare faculty members.

It is worth noting that the learning outcomes were brought forward in 2015 as part of a "Knowledge-Skills-Attitudes" framework. Nevertheless, in actuality, the focus is mainly on the skill-based component. The emphasis on a specific body of knowledge, or on attitudes are much less accentuated, thereby allowing a margin of freedom for individual faculty members to tailor their courses as they please. Needless to say, this is a double-edged sword, because if not used wisely, courses risk to become deficient in content, lacking in student appreciation, and disconnected from the rest of the courses.

So, in short, the AUC through its core curriculum is offering to its students unique opportunities to educate themselves in a semi-open environment – a blessing that students from other Egyptian universities would not dream about having, as Fahmy (2017) and Godwin (2013) explain. We may discuss the shortcomings of the program as we may wish, yet the program remains eloquently unique in its Egyptian context, because it offers free space for students to debate and deliberate, profoundly and holistically about life.

In order to answer the research question of whether the core curriculum as a liberal arts education model is impacting identities and worldviews, Egyptian students were asked in a survey to voice out their opinions.

On the questions of whether they believed that Liberal Arts Education can help them develop their identities, and their worldviews (Q9 and Q10), the responses were positive at averages of 3.9 and 4.0 out of 5.0, respectively. This clearly means that the students saw

potential in Liberal Arts Education, as a pedagogical intervention that targets the development of their identities and worldviews. From their responses, it seems evident that the students have established a fairly positive relationship between Liberal Arts Education and their identities and worldviews.

On the questions on the actual overall impact of the core curriculum on identity and worldview (Q19 & Q20), the answers came with averages of 3.2 and 3.4 out of 5.0, respectively. If we compare these averages with the above averages obtained from Q9 and Q10 on whether they believed Liberal Arts Education can help students develop identities and worldviews, we shall find a drop from 3.9 and 4.0 to 3.2 and 3.4 respectively. The researcher perceives that this gap is what accounts for the *relative efficiency* of the program in achieving its target outcomes on identity and worldview. In other words, it can be assumed that the relative efficiency of the program in impacting identities and worldviews is respectively 3.2/3.9 (82%) and 3.4/4.0 (85%). What these numbers mean is that almost an 80% fraction of the full potential of Liberal Arts Education is achieved through the core curriculum program, and the rest (almost 20%) is lost during program implementation. Student focus groups indicate that this gap is mostly due to the quality of classroom experiences engendered throughout the core curriculum program. It takes a good teacher to ignite student interest and engagement.

On the question of what students thought of the core curriculum in specific (Q12), the sample was divided between the available options, as follows: "inspiring" (15%), "useful" (33%), "both" (25%) and "neither" (27%). Notably, the option "useful" (33%) mostly came from the schools of business, and sciences and engineering. Also, in the

answer to a question on whether they chose to study at AUC because it offers Liberal Arts Education (Q8), students from these 2 schools scored the lowest, with averages of 2.8 and 3.2 out of 5.0 respectively. These data might indicate that students at these two schools, by virtue of affiliation, adopt a specific definition of education that elevates its *utilitarian* function over its *transformative* function. In other words, it seems that a portion of the students at business and at sciences and engineering tend to look at the practical usefulness of the core curriculum, rather than look at it as a source of inspiration and transformational change. In this sense, these students are limiting their interaction with the core curriculum, and inhibiting its effect on their identities and worldviews. Student focus groups, however, could not confirm the veracity of this hypothesis.

On the overall impact of the program compared to the effect of other media, the average response was 3.1 out of 5.0 indicating how penetrant the effect of media is on the lives of Egyptian students. This data shows that students consider the program as a potentially valuable intervention, but not up to the point that it competes with the impact of other media.

To summarize, the survey shows that Egyptian students indeed believe in the theoretical potential of Liberal Arts Education in forming identities and shaping worldviews. Yet, in actuality, the core curriculum is successful only partially to make such desired impact. While some students shared true stories of profound inspiration, others by virtue of affiliation to a practical professional major prefer to take the core curriculum for its superficial usefulness, rather than for its transformative potential to profoundly engage with identities and worldviews. On the overall, when compared to the impact of other

media, the core curriculum, according to the students, is a potentially valuable intervention, but not up to competition with other sources of knowledge and learning.

Finally, it must be noted that the total results of this study are somewhat promising. The records, the interviews, the survey and the focus groups confirm that some sort of Liberal Arts Education is taking place in Egypt. And, this unique sort of education is full of potential to develop Egyptian students' identities and worldviews. The collected data indicate how difficult it is to offer quality Liberal Arts Education. It takes visionary administration, capable teaching faculty, and willing students to interact and produce what Liberal Arts Education truly is about.

Commentary: Liberal Arts Education vis-à-vis the Professional Disciplines

As clear from the timeline of the program, any structure in place is in fact the overall result of striking a particular balance among a mixture of factors. One factor is of special importance. Several interviewees reflected extensively on the detrimental effect of the growing influence of the Engineering and Business schools. There are two direct consequences for this growth.

First, as Engineering and Business require - by nature - a complex structure of courses running sequentially from the first year up to graduation for the major, the slots left for the core curriculum are marginal (one course per term), which means that the core curriculum office has to structure its courses such that it precisely fills the slots left for it. Planning otherwise means that the student would have to defer graduation to fulfill the core curriculum requirement, which is not a practical suggestion. This means effectively that the

core curriculum is not sequenced based on a pedagogical structure but rather to fulfill a logistic requirement imposed by the professional departments.

The above-mentioned logistic requirement was the central issue during the rough years of the program (2003-4). After a couple of resignations, James was appointed as the Core Director and his first priority was to structure the core curriculum such as to resolve clashes between departmental offerings and core requirements.

Second, since Liberal Arts Education is classically housed mostly in the Humanities, the growing faculty base in sciences and engineering and in business starts to seem as strangers to this culture. In effect, some interviewees felt that there is a growing number of faculty who do not support the idea of Liberal Arts Education. Whether there is a number of professors who look down on Liberal Arts Education as an irrelevant supplement, as noted by some interviewees, is not clear for the researcher - after all, as explained before, the faculty interviewed do not adequately represent the variety of the faculty base at AUC. Nevertheless, a growing base in Engineering and Business means that: first, senate resolutions about the core have to depend more and more on broad consensus, and therefore, are more difficult to adopt. Business and Engineering schools have an interest in the core, for accreditation purposes, but they would be quite reluctant to present concessions in that respect. In fact, these schools were quite happy when a change that counts the thesis in the major as a part of the 40 credits of the core was adopted. Secondly, and more importantly, it means that there is a growing number of faculty who cannot – by virtue of affiliation – add to the core; they are unable to teach core courses, which in its turn threatens the sustainability of the program, since the survival of the core is highly dependent on offering a huge number of sections to cater for all undergraduate students.

According to the researcher, the tension between the liberal arts and the professional disciplines is a university-wide representation for the old same classical clash between breadth and depth. Liberal Arts Education calls for breadth beyond the boundaries of a narrow major, while the professional disciplines call for the exact opposite, i.e. for specialization. At this point, the character of the university emerges – whether it can maintain a balance between the two, or swing towards one side on the expense of the other. If AUC is serious about Liberal Arts Education, it must commit to dedicating resources to the core office, to providing courses that transcend disciplinary boundaries, to supplying faculty who are willing and capable to teach beyond specialization, and to erecting pedagogical structures that optimize holistic education.

Chapter Six: Limitations and Further Research

A. **Limitations.**

This research is subject to a series of limitations.

First, the documents investigated lacked continuity. Most of the documents were office correspondences; this meant that it was always a possibility that an important historical document was missing or misplaced within the pile of 39 boxes of documents.

Second, the selection of faculty members for interview was based on their previous record of being attached to the core curriculum, mostly administratively. This means that the faculty selected cannot be taken as a fair representation for the wide faculty base that teaches the core curriculum. In fact, in the current setup of the core, each faculty member can only represent him/herself, since there is no structure in place that binds the faculty members teaching the core together. So, the only way to reach a fair representation for the core curriculum as whole is to interview the largest number of faculty members. In this study, there were only 12 of them, and in no way they can represent the core faculty.

Third, it was assumed at the start of this project that there was an overarching philosophy for the core curriculum, and that investigating the history of the core would lead to a better understanding of how this philosophy developed over time. However, it was found that in many instances that the drivers for change were logistical considerations rather than explicit pedagogically-based intentions. Nevertheless, investigating the history and progress of the program resulted in the identification of at least two instances at which intentional pedagogical changes were made. The first is in 1989 when a new core curriculum was presented. It contained the courses of scientific thinking, philosophical

thinking, seminar and Middle East history. The researcher finds that this initiative is one that was set to make an intentional impact on student identity and worldview, since these courses tackle contrasting modes of thinking, and discussion and debate. The second instance is in the setting of skill-based student learning outcomes. The set of transferable skills such as communication skills, critical thinking and teamwork, also can be considered to relate to the processes of identity and worldview formation.

Fourth, the lack of an explicit philosophy to guide the core meant that there was a missing link between the direction of the program and its faculty implementation. There are guidelines and there are criteria to count courses as part of the core. But, still, the contact between the core office and the teaching faculty is minimal. This meant that it was not possible for the researcher to find a concrete link that relates between the core structure and its implementation. It became impossible for the researcher to claim that certain class practices are implemented based on a concrete direction from the core office. Class practices are in fact only influenced by the character of the teacher alone. This also meant variation in practice between different teachers, even for the same course. As such, it became futile for the researcher to sketch a concrete picture of how core courses are conducted.

Fifth, the research does not measure impact on identities and worldviews per se; it only measures student perceptions of impact on identities and worldviews. It is also important to note that it is not clear how students interpret these two constructs, and whether their interpretations match those of the researcher.

Sixth, the results of this research were influenced by the response rate of the student survey: a 5.6% response rate with a total of 87 respondents out of 1562 senior students. The researcher thinks that the response rate is suitable to draw fairly reliable conclusions. It is balanced enough, with respect to gender, and with respect to school affiliation, to reflect the desired population.

Seventh, the solicitation for the student focus groups was also a limitation to this research. A total number of 9 students is not enough to reflect the diversity of the student body. Moreover, the students who attended the focus groups were more likely those who were affected by the core curriculum and wanted to share their experiences. As such, results from the focus groups shed lights on important issues, but should be taken cautiously within context.

B. Further Research.

The current research opens the floor for a new area of research: evaluating the impact of core curricula and/or of Liberal Arts Education models. It sets an example using triangulated mixed methods to investigate the dynamics of the program among its constituencies: planners and administrators, faculty, and students.

The research also introduces the constructs of identity and worldview as ones that qualify as markers of profound tertiary education. The constructs can be further defined and elaborated upon in subsequent research. As well, an instrument for identity and worldview is worth producing. It is not sufficient to merely ask the students explicitly about the impact on their identity and worldview; it is even more important to ask them what their identities and their worldviews are.

In practice, the research constitutes an opportunity for AUC to look at its core curriculum program and re-evaluate it based on the findings of the study.

C. Implication.

This research serves as a documentation for how the core curriculum of AUC works as a Liberal Arts Education model in Egypt. It hopes to serve as an example to examine, and an encouragement for other Liberal Arts Education institutions to emerge in Egypt and the region.

Appendix A: Faculty Interview Questions

1. How do you define Liberal Arts Education?

2. How important is Liberal Arts Education to Egypt?

3. You possess a long experience with core curriculum. Would you please reflect on it?

4. How do you perceive the structure of the core curriculum?

5. How do you perceive the implementation of the program?

6. Do you think the core curriculum has an impact on students? Student identity? And, student worldview?

Appendix B: Online Student Survey

Welcome!

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to study the impact of the Core Curriculum of AUC on Egyptian undergraduate students' identity and worldview. The findings may be published or presented. The data (feedback) from this survey might inform future core-curriculum offerings and strategies.

The expected duration of your participation is no more than 5-7 minutes. The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. Your AUC email address will be recorded when you submit this form for further reference. There will be no risks or discomforts associated with this research.

This survey is developed in cooperation with the Office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness.

Questions about the research, are the rights of Rami W. M. Guindi- Project Principal Investigator. Any research-related injuries should be directed to Rami W. M. Guindi at rwmice@aucegypt.edu

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

<u>By clicking Next, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey.</u>

Thank you very much for your time and support.
The Office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness

_____

I am an undergraduate Egyptian AUC student:

o   Yes

o   No

Section 1: Demographics

This section aims to know more about your status as an AUC student.

3. I am a …

- o   Male

- o   Female

4. I am currently a …

- o   Senior

- o   Graduating Senior

5. My (intended) major belongs to the school of …

- o   Business

- o   Global Affairs and Public Policy

- o   Humanities and Social Sciences

- o   Sciences and Engineering

- o   still undecided

Section 2: Perceptions of Liberal Arts Education

This section aims to know more about your perception of Liberal Arts Education in general.

6. I know what Liberal Arts Education is.

7. I regard Liberal Arts Education …

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Negatively	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Positively

8. I chose to study at AUC because it offers a Liberal Arts Education.

9. I believe that a Liberal Arts Education can help me to develop my identity.

10. I believe that a Liberal Arts Education can help me to develop my worldview.

Section 3: Core Curriculum Enrollment

This section aims to know more about your experience with the Core Curriculum.

11. I choose the courses that fulfill the Core Curriculum requirements based on:

(select 2 at most)

- class time and schedule

- how closely related to my major they are

- how easy it is to get a good grade

- my interest in the topic

- who the teacher is

Section 4: Core Curriculum Value

This section aims to know what you think the value of the Core Curriculum is.

According to my experience so far …

12. The Core Curriculum is …

- inspiring

- useful

- both

- neither

13. The Core Curriculum is effectively helping me develop a clear identity for myself.

14. The Core Curriculum is effectively helping me develop a coherent view of the world.

15. The Core Curriculum is giving me useful tools to think, inquire, discuss and reflect.

16. The Core Curriculum is giving me useful tools to explore and engage with the world.

17. The Core Curriculum is effectively enabling me to examine my moral commitments.

18. The Core Curriculum is effectively enabling me to examine moral values around the world.

19. Overall, the Core Curriculum is effectively helping me to develop my identity.

20. Overall, the Core Curriculum is effectively helping me to develop my worldview.

21. Overall, I regard the Core Curriculum as …

	1	2	3	4	5	
a waste of time and money	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	a valuable educational opportunity

22. In comparison to the influence of other media in general, the contribution of the Core Curriculum to my personal learning and development is …

	1	2	3	4	5	
marginal and minor	○	○	○	○	○	decisively influential

Section 5: Core Curriculum Class Experience

This section aims to know more about your Core Curriculum class experiences.

According to my experience so far ...

23. Core Curriculum classes expand my intellectual horizons.

24. Core Curriculum classes push me to think critically.

25. Core Curriculum courses engender interesting debates and discussions.

26. Core Curriculum classes allow me to be creative.

27. Core Curriculum classes refine my ability to take moral positions.

28. I recall having outstanding Core Curriculum classroom experiences.

29. Overall, Core Curriculum teachers are adequately qualified.

30. Overall, Core Curriculum teachers teach the courses with interest.

Section 6: Core Curriculum Structure

This section aims to know more about what you think of the course structure of the Core Curriculum.

31 The total number of Core Curriculum courses ...

- o should be increased.

- o is adequate as is.

- o should be decreased.

- o should be totally omitted.

- o I don't know.

32. The areas covered by the Core Curriculum ...

- o are not diverse enough - there should be more course options available.
- o are covered superficially - the courses should be more profound.
- o are both: not diverse enough and covered superficially.
- o are adequate as they are.
- o should be totally omitted.
- o I don't know.

33. I would like the Core Curriculum to include MORE courses in:

- o Business

- o Global Affairs and Public Policy

- o Humanities and Social Sciences

- o Sciences and Engineering

- o No preference

- o Other

34. I would like the Core Curriculum to include LESS courses in:

- o Business

- o Global Affairs and Public Policy

- o Humanities and Social Sciences

- o Sciences and Engineering

- o No preference

- o Other

35. Please provide any further comments that we should consider.

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

1. How do you perceive Liberal Arts Education, in general?

2. In your opinion, is Liberal Arts Education important for Egypt?

3. How do you find the core curriculum of AUC, in general?

4. How do you find the structure of the core curriculum?

5. How do you find the professors?

6. How do you find the teaching pedagogies employed?

7. Can you recall courses and/or classroom experiences that had an impact on you?

8. For those who took it, how do you find the Great Books seminar course?

9. What are the set of values that you would associate with the core curriculum, if any?

10. What in your opinion is the impact of the core curriculum on your worldview, if any?

11. What in your opinion is the impact of the core curriculum on your identity, if any?

12. Why do some students perceive the core curriculum as totally useless?

Appendix D: AUC IRB Approval

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

To: Rami Guindi

Cc: Dena Riad and Salma Serry

From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB

Date: Jan 18 , 2018

Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "**The Impact of Liberal Arts Education on Egyptian Student Identity and Worldview: a Study of the Core Curriculum of the American University in Cairo**" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Ashraf Hatem. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

Dr. Atta Gebril
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