Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge

The Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge (SIFK) opened in the fall of 2015 at the University of Chicago as a focal point for scholars to ask, What do we know?

In the current era, this question is more confusing than ever, and answers are hard to come by. We face unreliable news, non-replicable scientific experiments, masses of data, groupthink, cultural relativism, confusion about values, entrenched beliefs, and more.

In such an environment, we seek new methods for asking about the world. At the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge, we aim to understand how factors like history, politics, culture, and religion can shape knowledge—year in and year out, over decades, over centuries. We believe that to understand a phenomenon, one must approach from a number of different fields, and with sensitivity to context. As no area of knowledge arises in a vacuum, we underplay the division of knowledge into departments within the university, offering KNOW courses that bring together perspectives from a number of fields.

About SIFK Courses

Join us for a KNOW course as we try to find new answers to some of the largest and most perennial questions, all bearing on what it means to be human in the 21st century. We offer undergraduates and graduate students team-taught courses that challenge conventional wisdom across the board.

KNOW courses are cross-listed with a variety of departments, so students can enroll in them as a major course with their department’s course number or as an elective with the KNOW course number. We also offer an innovative Experimental Capstone series of courses (XCAP), that brings practice together with theory, inside and outside the classroom—yet another way of broadening academic knowledge and bringing a new dimension to the undergraduate experience.

For up-to-date KNOW course listings, visit sifk.uchicago.edu/courses.

XCAP: The Experimental Capstone

In addition to its KNOW courses, the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge offers XCAP: The Experimental Capstone. Designed for upper-level undergraduate students, and team taught by faculty from different divisions or schools, the program offers three courses a year, one per quarter. These courses are designed to encourage students not only to theorize but to put theory into practice as a way of approaching problems. Students are challenged to build upon their University of Chicago educational experience by adding practice, impact, and influence as important dimensions for undergraduate education.

XCAP courses incorporate a variety of topics and frameworks, but inherent in each of these courses are the following three elements:

• an element of practice, a result in a product, or a measurable impact;
• an appeal to students from all the collegiate divisions for maximal interaction of different points of view; and
• a part of the College experience with particular relevance to post-College life.

The XCAP courses may be taken Pass/Fail or for a quality grade, and students may take one, two, or all three quarters of XCAP, as the courses are not part of a sequence. Each course is taught by a different team of faculty and will provide a distinct perspective on the three core elements above.

To see the full listing of 2020–21 XCAP courses, visit sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap.