

General Education at Penn State

The following text is excerpted from the Guide to Curricular Procedures, Section 1: Baccalaureate Degree Curriculum (see full citation below).

Definition of General Education

General Education encompasses the breadth of knowledge involving the major intellectual and aesthetic skills and achievements of humanity. This must include understanding and appreciation of the pluralistic nature of knowledge epitomized by the natural sciences, quantitative skills, social-behavioral sciences, humanities and arts. To achieve and share such an understanding and appreciation, skills in self-expression, quantitative analysis, information literacy, and collaborative interaction are necessary. General Education aids students in developing intellectual curiosity, strengthened ability to think, and a deeper sense of aesthetic appreciation. General Education, in essence, aims to cultivate a knowledgeable, informed, literate human being. In addition, the University Faculty Senate, at its meeting on December 2, 1997, mandated an integration of key competencies and emphasis on active learning (writing, speaking, quantitative skills, information and computer literacy, problem solving and critical thinking, team-work, and intercultural and international competence), as appropriate, in all General Education courses.

An effective General Education program enables students to:

- 1) acquire knowledge through critical information gathering - including reading and listening, computer-assisted searching, and scientific experimentation and observation;
- 2) analyze and evaluate, where appropriate in a quantitative manner, the acquired knowledge;
- 3) integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and fields;
- 4) make critical judgments in a logical and rational manner;
- 5) develop the skills to maintain health, and understand the factors that impinge upon it;
- 6) communicate effectively, both in writing and orally, and using the accepted methods for presentation, organization and debate particular to their disciplines;
- 7) seek and share knowledge, independently and in collaboration with others;
- 8) gain understanding of international interdependence and cultural diversity, and develop consideration for values, lifestyles, and traditions that may differ from their own;
- 9) comprehend the role of aesthetic and creative activities expressing both imagination and experience.

Note:

The following sections are modified from the original document listing criteria for evaluating course proposals. These criteria were originally framed in terms of what the course should accomplish. Here, they are rephrased as expectations for students' learning.

Criteria for General Education Courses

No one course must achieve every General Education objective, but each proposal must specify clearly which objectives it proposes to meet.

Core Competencies, Activities, and Strategies for Enhanced Learning

Knowledge domain courses must require each student to engage in activities promoting learning course content through practicing, typically, three or more of the following:

- a. writing, speaking and/or other forms of self-expression
- b. information gathering , such as the use of the library, computer/electronic resources, and experimentation or observation
- c. synthesis and analysis in problem solving and critical thinking, including, where appropriate, the application of reasoning and interpretive methods, and quantitative thinking
- d. collaborative learning and teamwork
- e. activities that promote and advance intercultural and/or international understanding
- f. activities that promote the understanding of issues pertaining to social behavior, scholarly conduct, and community responsibility
- g. a significant alternative competency for active learning designed for and appropriate to a specific course

General Objectives of General Education

Students will:

- a. enhance their key competencies for active learning
- b. develop their intercultural and international competence
- c. acquire knowledge through critical reading
- d. acquire information and data through a variety of means (including electronic)
- e. analyze and evaluate, where appropriate in a quantitative manner, the acquired information and knowledge
- f. integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and fields
- g. make critical judgments in a logical manner
- h. communicate effectively

Skills Objectives of General Education

Writing/Speaking Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. organize materials in a logical and clear manner
2. write clearly
3. write proficiently with respect to form and style
4. express ideas orally in a logical and clear manner

Quantification (GQ)

Students will be able to:

1. reason quantitatively
2. measure probabilities
3. apply basic mathematical principles and processes to practical problems of day-to-day living
4. formulate informed judgments based on quantitative reasoning

Knowledge Domains Objectives of General Education

Health and Physical Activity (GHA)

Students will be able to:

1. achieve and maintain good health
2. live an active and healthful lifestyle
3. understand some aspect of healthful living and associated theory
4. develop attitudes, habits, and skills needed to engage in healthful living

Natural Sciences (GN)

Students will:

1. understand general knowledge in the discipline
2. understand the inductive and deductive reasoning processes
3. be able to reason inductively and deductively
4. be able to conduct laboratory work
5. be able to relate the field of study to other fields of the natural sciences

Arts (GA)

Students will:

1. understand creative works of arts and architecture
2. understand historical developments in arts and architecture
3. comprehend the role of arts and architecture as an expression of the cultural values
4. be conversant with the terminology, techniques, and ideas that comprise the Arts Area
5. recognize aesthetic values
6. be able to relate the field of study to other arts disciplines

Humanities (GH)

Students will:

1. have a broad, coherent overview of a major cultural or ideological current throughout history
2. know about important figures, ideas and events which influence the values of different societies
3. have developed a competence in interpretive understanding of the human condition and of the values inherent in it
4. appreciate aesthetic values
5. know techniques for the objective evaluation of readings and formulation of clear and valid responses

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Social and Behavioral Sciences (GS)

Students will:

1. understand knowledge in the discipline
2. understand scientific methodologies of social and behavioral sciences
3. understand the multiple nature of causality in social settings
4. be able to relate the specific field of study, where appropriate, to other areas in the social and behavioral sciences
5. be able to integrate empirical knowledge and theoretical views of the social world

United States Cultures (US) and International Cultures (IL) Objectives

United States Cultures

Students will know about:

1. issues of social identity such as ethnicity, race, class, religion, gender, physical/mental disability, age, or sexual orientation
2. different United States values, traditions, beliefs, and customs
3. a range of United States cultural achievements and human conditions through time
4. United States social identities in relation to one another

International Cultures

Students will know about:

1. similarities and differences among international cultures
2. other nations' cultural values, traditions, beliefs, and customs
3. a range of international cultural achievements and human conditions through time
4. nations and cultures in relation to one another

Students will also achieve three or more of the following:

- a. see nations, cultures, and/or social identities in relation to each other
- b. be aware of the pluralism and diversity within the United States and international cultures
- c. know different cultural values, traditions, beliefs and customs
- d. appreciate the diversity that exists among persons who share a particular social identity
- e. the range of cultural achievements and human conditions through time
- f. recognize and be sensitive to the different ways social identities have been valued
- g. re-examine beliefs and behaviors about social identities (ethnicity, race, class, religion, gender, physical/mental disability, or sexual orientation)
- h. understand the nature of stereotypes and biases of other cultures and other nations
- i. interact successfully with representatives of other nations and with persons of different social groups
- j. locate and evaluate information and gain knowledge about other peoples of the world