



Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of Proposals for new General Education Courses

This document is available online at <http://www.gened.american.edu>. Click the link for “faculty.”

Please consult the *University Catalog*, the *Freshman Guide to Academic Programs & Registration, Informed, Effective Minds*, or at <http://www.gened.american.edu>, all of which provide official descriptions of the General Education Program.

In addition, the following information is drawn from the documents that both founded the General Education Program in 1989, and from the documents affirming it in the comprehensive review of the program in 2000-2001.

These sources are especially important for their insights into the content of General Education courses. They discuss courses’ methodological and conceptual components and the emphasis on new perspectives. The University intends that each foundation course contain these components where appropriate and that they be reinforced in second-level courses.

Disciplines

In teaching foundation courses faculty in some way should explicitly inform students how the particular discipline affects the approach to course subject matter (e.g., how an economist, compared to a sociologist, might handle it). It is important to teach the concepts and methods unique to a discipline and to promote explicit understanding of distinctions among and relationships between disciplines. Students in foundation courses, especially, should gain an understanding of how a particular discipline behaves and what forms of inquiry and analysis its practitioners commonly use.

Program Goal: *Written and Oral Communication*

Faculty in all General Education courses are enjoined to provide a writing experience for students whenever appropriate. Faculty in foundation courses are specifically asked to extend basic communication skills and to reinforce what is taught in the College Writing Program. Faculty teaching second-level courses are asked to pay particular attention to developing the oral communications skills of students. Implicit in this is the understanding that oral communication takes on many forms in the classroom: discussion, debate, presentation, group dynamics and exchange. Because second-level courses are typically smaller in enrollment than foundation courses, these sections offer opportunities for interactivity and lend themselves to developing oral skills.

Program Goal: *Critical Thinking and Information Literacy*

We ask students in General Education courses to engage in the forms of critical analysis pertinent to that course *and the discipline* of which it is a part: How do historians arrive at what they consider “true”? How do biologists design experiments analyzing organic change? How do international relations specialists decide whether a crisis situation holds the potential for sliding into all-out war? As students seeking to answer these questions go about using myriad sources of information unforeseen only a few years ago, they are expected to make critical judgments about the validity of authorship of those sources. Mere availability says nothing about intellectual authority in an age of instant self-publication and electronic distribution. What basis should students bring to the decisions about validity of sources of

information? How, furthermore, does this decision-making attach itself to overarching questions of Academic Integrity?

Program Goal: *Ethical Awareness*

In General Education, we ask students to consider the ethical issues imbedded in particular disciplines and the events, activities, or processes they treat. Though “ethics” remains further undefined, the expectation is for instructors to draw students’ attention to issues of morality, justice, fairness, and many other related concepts, including ethical behavior in scholarship and the classroom.

Program Goal: *Aesthetic Sensibility*

General Education courses should be addressing aesthetic issues, not just in Curricular Area 1, but in disciplines normally focused on the “rational,” “scientific,” or quantitative. Creative and aesthetic perspectives are pertinent in all disciplines. What is the role of “art” in trying to make a persuasive argument, whether in chemistry or political science? What is it about scientific proofs that provokes references to “elegance”?

Program Goal: *Diverse Perspectives*

In a global and interdependent world, it is essential to give attention in General Education courses to a variety of perspectives, including as appropriate those perspectives that emerge from new scholarship on gender, race, and class as well as from non-Western cultural traditions. It is important to recall that this mandate derived not from “political correctness” but from a sea of changes in American scholarship, and from the view that we should share the findings of this scholarship with our undergraduate students.

Program Goal: *A Global Point of View*

Likewise, in a global and interdependent world it is crucial that students develop their awareness of the interpenetration of global and local concerns. In this day and age, little or nothing is truly isolated from the wider world; small changes in one geographical region or area of practice have “ripple effects” that circle the planet. The only intellectually honest response to such conditions is a serious, systematic effort to widen and broaden our perspective to encompass the far-reaching impacts of our individual and local actions.

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