

ELEMENTS OF A GENERAL EDUCATION SYLLABUS

For Spring 2012 and Summer 2012 only, we ask that all syllabi for General Education courses include the following text, in addition to the *Elements* described below:

Please note that all students graduating in May or August 2012 must meet the General Education requirements articulated in the university catalog and in the “Expand Your Horizons” brochure, notably those pertaining to levels and clusters. Students graduating in December 2012 and beyond will graduate under the new rules that will come into effect in Fall 2012. Please see your academic advisor if you have questions about your individual situation.

Each course syllabus is an opportunity to communicate with our students about the General Education Program. Although General Education is a requirement for all undergraduates at American University, we should make every effort to convey that these courses are special, that they reflect the intellectual heart, values, and diverse outlooks of our university. Can our syllabi convey the reality that General Education courses are not barriers to an education, but an opportunity? While syllabus design is largely an individual faculty matter, the following outlines elements that should be included on every General Education syllabus.

I. COURSE SELECTION AND COMPLEMENTS TO ADVISING

- **Identify your course as part of the General Education Program.**

E.g.: “CULTURE: THE HUMAN MIRROR is a part of Foundational Area 3, Global and Cross-Cultural Perspectives, in the university’s General Education Program.”

II. GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM GOALS AND VALUES

- **Indicate which of the General Education Program learning outcomes are a central focus of the course.** Although all General Education courses will touch on these program goals to some extent, particular courses will obviously emphasize more than others. The six goals of the General Education Program are:
 - **Aesthetic sensibilities** Critical reflections on the nature and history of beauty and art
 - **Communication skills** Interchanging ideas and information through writing, speech, and visual and digital media
 - **Critical Inquiry** Systematic questioning and analysis of problems, issues, and claims
 - **Diverse perspectives and experiences** Acquiring knowledge and analytical skills to understand a variety of perspectives and experiences, including those that have emerged from the scholarship on age, disability, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social class
 - **Innovative thinking** Venturing beyond established patterns of thought in imaginative and

creative ways

- **Ethical reasoning** Assessing and weighing of moral and political beliefs and practices, and their applications to ethical dilemmas
- **Information literacy** Locating, evaluating, citing, and effectively using information
- **Quantitative literacy and symbolic reasoning** Applying mathematical, statistical, and symbolic reasoning to complex problems and decision making

Example #1: “HIST-120G Imperialism and Revolution articulates important concepts and interpretations in history and international relations, integrates issues of environment and demography, analyzes non-Western civilizations and their modern transformations, and treats the impact of international relations in provoking some consideration of gender.”

Example #2: “In order to develop your ability to read critically, you will write critical essays on two separate pieces of assigned course reading. Critiques should be no more than two pages. Summarize and criticize the reading. Select a reading on which you have some ideas and opinions! Each critique will be graded and handed back for revision.”

Example #3: “This course ventures to reexamine our institutions and personal experiences through an analysis of the recent history of women in the United States. As with other General Education courses, it will explore the interrelations between gender, race, and class in America.”

Example #4: “This course is designed to help you develop skillful and articulate responses to diverse works of literature. Equally, the aim is to teach you as much about process—how to read sensitively, insightfully, and carefully—as about content or context. Thus, the challenge (and the reward) of this course is for you to fine-tune your ear and sharpen your vision to recognize and appreciate the multiple relationships among form, structure, and meaning in different literary forms. Through reading, reflecting, analyzing, discussing, and writing about a variety of literary works, you will learn critical method (i.e., ‘how to’ read thoughtfully) as you increase your sensitivity to literary expression.”

- **Describe the goals for the particular Foundational Area within which the course is located.**

In addition to the overall General Education Program goals, each of the five Foundational Areas in the General Education Program has three goals specific to itself. The most current statement of those goals can be found on the General Education Program website, <http://www.american.edu/gened>. Articulating these goals and including them in your syllabus helps to clarify the aims of the course, both for your students and for yourself.

- **Describe teaching approaches that facilitate interaction with both the material and with other participants in the class.**

E.g.: “Much of our class time will be spent in discussion. It is therefore important that you bring your ideas and questions to class with you and share them with others in the class. I will strive for an atmosphere where every student participates and receives the constructive and respectful response of other students. Through this interaction, you will strengthen your critical skills and heighten your enjoyment of literature. Regular journal entries, periodically shared with the class and with me will

also help make the course interactive.”

III. ELEMENTS OF THE COURSE AND THE HIGH STANDARDS OF THE UNIVERSITY

- **Articulate your grading policy.**

E.g.: “The criteria that will determine your course grade are as follows: -class attendance (10% of your final grade); -level of in-class participation (20% of your final grade); -quality of written work as specified in the course outline (40% of your final grade); -performance on the final examination (30% of your final grade).”

- **Describe the standards for performance evaluation.**

E.g.: “Evaluation of a student's performance in this course as a whole will be guided by the following criteria:

A: demonstration of superior work (written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements; improvement during the semester will be weighed in evaluation.

B: Excellent work (written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements; improvement during the semester will be weighed in evaluation.

C: satisfactory work (written and oral) in fulfillment of course requirements

D: assigned work is not satisfactory or not completed and/or student fails to meet minimum attendance requirements.

F: failure to meet minimum course goals --written assignments, class participation, and other course requirements.”

- **Explain how course assignments relate to the goals of the course.**

E.g.: “In order to develop your ethical sensibilities, we will have a structured class debate about the morality of bioengineered foodstuffs.”

- **Include a statement on Academic Integrity.**

The following text is suggested: “Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.”

Please note: The Student Evaluations of Teaching for all General Education courses ask

students to evaluate whether or not a course met the goals of the General Education Program. Your students will be asked to agree or disagree with the following statements. Please keep these in mind when designing your course and syllabus.

- In this course, I learned to write more effectively through papers, essay exams, journals, lab reports, and other writing assignments.
- This course broadened my understanding of ethical issues.
- I had the opportunity to examine primary materials in this course.
- I had the chance to explore different points of view and offer my opinion in classroom discussion and debate.
- This course strengthened my quantitative and/or computer skills.

Students will also be asked to agree or disagree with three or four statements about the specific Foundational Area goals of a course. Those specific goals of your Foundational Area are articulated on the General Education Program Website <http://www.american.edu/gened>.

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