



Elements of a General Education Syllabus

Each course syllabus is an opportunity to communicate with our students about the General Education Program. General Education is a requirement for all undergraduates at American University, and we should make every effort to convey why these courses are important and how they reflect the intellectual values of the University.

Why is This Guidance Needed?

For at least 10 years, and probably longer, there has been an *Elements of a General Education Syllabus* document, but the document was so lengthy and detailed that it was consistently ignored. So it seemed time to make revisions, especially since the General Education Program office has received many requests from faculty (especially adjuncts and new hires) for useful guidance. Therefore, as a service to new members of our academic community, we have pared down the guidelines to the essentials. This streamlining should have the added benefit of helping our students understand the connection between the tasks they are asked to perform and the overall goals of the General Education

program.

There is a set of elements that should appear in all General Education syllabi. These elements aid in (i) helping students navigate the requirements of the General Education Program; (ii) making clear how the course fits within the General Education Program, and; (iii) evaluating how well the Learning Outcomes of the General Education Program are being met (i.e., [Middle States Accreditation Review](#)).

The Three Key Elements

While syllabus design is, of course, largely an individual faculty matter, the following three elements must be included in some form on every General Education syllabus. Where appropriate, we have provided some language that you can use or adapt.

Element I: Course Selection and Complements to Advising

Here, you should identify your course and its part in the General Education Program.

ANTH-110 Culture and Human Experience is a course in Foundational Area 3, The Global and Cross-Cultural Experience, in the University's General Education Program.

Element II: General Education Learning Outcomes and Area Objectives

The General Education Program highlights eight Learning Outcomes:

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.

Although many General Education courses tend to touch on many of these learning outcomes, **each course must highlight at least two (but certainly not all) in substantive ways and in keeping with the specific area goals.** Each of the highlighted outcomes must also be linked to specific assessment tools (tests, assignments, performances, exhibits, etc.) that are articulated clearly in the syllabus.

You are strongly encouraged to develop and make available to the students the evaluation rubric for assessment tools you will be using.

In addition to General Education Program Learning Outcomes, each of the five Foundational Areas has identified three **Area-specific Objectives**. The most current statement of those goals can be found on the General Education Program website, <http://www.american.edu/gened>. Articulating these objectives, including them in your syllabus, and noting specific assessment tools used to measure them, will help to further clarify the aims of the course, both for your students and for yourself.

In order to develop your ability to read critically, you will write critical essays on two separate pieces of assigned 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.

In order to develop your ethical sensibilities, we will have a structured class debate about the morality of bioengineered foodstuffs. Your contribution in these debates will be graded on clarity, soundness of logic, and relevance.

Effective communication plays a particularly critical role in environmental science. This outcome will be evaluated in an end-of-semester presentation of group projects. A part of the grade is based on how effectively the student conveys their research and ideas.

ELEMENT III: Standards & Expectations

- Articulate your grading policy and describe the standards for performance evaluation.

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).

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.

- 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.

Additional 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.

- The syllabus reflected the content of the course.
- The course addressed the Learning Outcomes stated in the syllabus.
- This course helped me to think more critically about an issue.
- I had opportunities to explore different points of view.
- This course provided me with ideas and tools that were (or will be) useful in other courses or activities or, I anticipate, will make experiences later in life more meaningful.

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>; in our booklet, *Know Before You Work*; in the University Catalog; and in the Freshman Guide to Academic Programs & Registration.

Questions? E-mail gened@american.edu