GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

KNOW BEFORE YOU WONK
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC
“Become Who You Are.”

So many choices.
We reject the idea that there is any single body of knowledge that constitutes “what all educated people should know.” What we care about are learning outcomes—that is, how your education helps you become who you are. We believe that our graduates should be equipped with certain intellectual skills and resources if they are to understand the complex dynamics of an increasingly connected global environment.

**Why General Education?**

The General Education Program, or GenEd, is American University’s liberal arts requirement. (What some institutions call a core or distribution requirement.) Schools with a core liberal arts program believe that there is a certain body of knowledge that all educated adults should possess. Those with distribution requirements think students should learn about subjects outside their main course of study. We agree with both of those philosophies.

**WELL, SORT OF.**

AT AU WE DO THINGS A BIT DIFFERENTLY.
The creative arts celebrate the human capacity to imagine, create, and transform ideas into expressive forms, like paintings, poems, and symphonies. A rich record of human cultures and values through time, the arts enable us to appreciate and enjoy the experiences of our senses and to sharpen our aesthetic sense—that human quality through which we comprehend beauty. All courses in this area challenge you to understand creativity and the distinctive intellectual process of the human imagination.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Examine the nature of creativity, especially imaginative and intuitive thinking.
- Situate creative works and judgments about those creative works in their appropriate social and historical contexts.
- Develop your own creative and expressive abilities so that you can better understand the qualities that shape an artist’s work.

“LEARNING ABOUT THE LARGER HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO THE GREAT WORKS OF ART THAT WE TAKE FOR GRANTED.”

—TIERNY GORMLEY, ART HISTORY AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
The rich traditions that shape the Western world convey ideas, visions, and cultural practices that are shared, lasting, and tenacious. Some courses in this area examine powerful visions that philosophers, political theorists, historians, religious thinkers, scientists, and social critics have of the Western experience. Others explore competing ideas about human nature, liberty, equality, and the consequences of social change. Through direct engagement with primary texts, you learn to ask questions, debate ideas, and come to understand the ways that the past shapes our present experiences.
Global interdependence is a powerful fact. Through exploring societies around the globe and the connections between them, this foundational area immerses you in diverse cultures and issues, challenging a parochial understanding of the world. You will gain a better understanding of the dimensions and range of experience and belief that distinguish cultures and countries—and the commonalities that bind human experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Explore those habits of thought and feeling that distinguish regions, countries, and cultures from one another.

Discuss, in comparative and cross-cultural perspectives, the concepts, patterns, and trends that characterize contemporary global politics.

Develop your capacity to critically analyze major issues in international and intercultural relations, especially how categories of difference are organized within and across cultures and how they affect political systems.

“EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENTbackgrounds on both personal and professional levels. THIS CLASS ENCOURAGED ME TO PURSUE MY DREAMS — AND MADE ME FEEL CONFIDENT THAT I WOULD BE ABLE TO.”

— GEORGE HAUSMANN, INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Study the institutions, systems, and patterns of governance and of economic and social organization that underlie contemporary societies. Place policy options and their consequences in their appropriate social and political contexts, drawing on classic and contemporary theories of human organization. Develop your capacity to critically reflect on the organization of societies and the relationship between the individual and the society using distinctive methods of inquiry appropriate to the study of social institutions.

Studying the foundations of contemporary society reveals the components of complex social systems, the ways that individuals function in varied social settings, and the root causes of social behavior. Courses in this area, drawn from across the social and behavioral sciences, emphasize how we create knowledge and arrive at understanding. Through these courses you will come to comprehend the rules and mechanisms that govern complex societies, which is essential for influencing institutional processes and shaping our world.

“I THOUGHT I KNEW A LOT ABOUT POLITICS. BUT FROM THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS, I REALIZED HOW MUCH MORE THERE IS TO LEARN.”

- AARON BARRON, INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND FINANCE
Through observation and analysis of the physical and biological worlds, scientists discern basic principles that explain natural phenomena and unravel many mysteries. Regardless of discipline, scientists rely on theory and experimentation to test and refine understanding of our bodies, our complex environment, and the universe. Through hands-on experimentation and systematic exploration of the logical implications of basic concepts, you will learn to think like a scientist and assess the validity of controversial claims.

Investigate the natural world and the living forms that inhabit it by studying the systems and processes that occur at scales from the atomic to the cosmic levels.

Develop problem-solving skills and utilize the scientific method to describe, explain, and predict natural phenomena through laboratory experiences.

Analyze the role of science in public discourse and in addressing societal problems.

“MY PHYSICS GENIUS INSPIRED ME TO TAKE HIGHER LEVEL SCIENCE POLICY ELECTIVES, WHICH HAVE BEEN AN ASSET IN MY JOB SEARCH AFTER GRADUATION. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN A LITTLE EXPERTISE IN AN AREA COMPLETELY SEPARATE FROM YOUR MAJOR WILL COME IN HANDY.”

SARAH CAFFEY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
WILDCARDS are original and timely courses based on faculty research and current events. Many popular GenEds started as Wildcards and have since become part of the permanent curriculum.

SOPHOMORE SEMINARS are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary courses that are listed under two or more foundational areas; students specify the area to which credit should be assigned.

All Wildcards and Sophomore Seminar course numbers are designated by a GNED prefix. For current offerings, visit american.edu/gened.

PROFESSORS HARSHMAN AND SHA TAUGHT AU’S FIRST SOPHOMORE SEMINAR, DRAWING ON THEIR RESPECTIVE DISCiPLINES TO TACKLE LIFE’S BIG QUESTIONS.

“ANYTHING THAT IS IMPORTANT WILL ALSO BE INTERDISCIPLINARY. WHAT IS LIFE? WHAT IS THE NOOD? WHAT IS REALITY? THEOREM PROVIDES PERSPECTIVE ON THESE QUESTIONS” - NATHAN HARSHMAN, PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS

“THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST INVESTIGATIVE TEACHING EXPERIENCES I HAVE HAD TO DATE.” - TsooShan Tsao, PROFESSOR OF LITERATURES
Amazing Classes
Aesthetic Sensibilities

Complex Societies

Innovative Thinking
Celebrates the Human Imagination

Complex Dynamics

Communication Skills

Understanding the Universe

Intuitive Thinking

Aesthetic Sensibilities

Ethical Reasoning
Who must take General Education courses at American University?
All AU undergraduate students.

How many GenEd courses must I take?
Two courses in each of the five foundational areas, including a lab science (total 10 courses and 31 credit hours).

Can I count a course for both General Education and my major?
Of course!

Can I take a GenEd course as pass-fail?
No.

Is there a limit on the number of courses I can take in a single academic discipline?
Yes. No more than two courses with the same prefix (except GNED—you can take as many of those as you want).

What is the minimum grade that merits GenEd credit in a course?
D or better. (That’s D, not D-minus.)

How long does it take to finish the General Education Program?
The program is designed to be completed in your first two years. You should try to finish your GenEd requirements as soon as possible, as they provide a necessary foundation for advanced work in your chosen course of study.

May I take GenEd courses at another school?
Due to the unique nature of GenEd courses, how they’re taught, and their connection to the learning objectives and values of the university, you must complete all remaining GenEd courses here after you have enrolled at AU.

May I take GenEd courses during the summer?
Definitely. Many GenEd courses, including online, are offered during the summer.

Do advanced placement examinations count for General Education credit?
Yes. Your academic advisor is your best resource on this. There is also information at american.edu/gened.

If I am a transfer student, do I get General Education credit for courses I have taken before coming to American University?
While transfer students must fulfill the 31 hours of General Education, academic advisors will match courses taken prior to entering AU with GenEd courses to determine whether they qualify for credit in the program.

Do you grant exceptions to General Education policy?
Only under extraordinary circumstances.

Where can I find the list of GenEd classes?
The current listing of GenEd classes is online at american.edu/gened. Your academic advisor is also a great resource.
For information regarding the accreditation and licensing of American University, please visit american.edu/academics.

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