

The General Education Program at American University

Update on Implementation

A. Recommendation: Overall Organization of the General Education Program

The General Education Program incorporates three interrelated components – Ways of Thinking and Learning; Ways of Knowing; and Integrative Learning.

1. Intellectual Resources – Ways of Thinking and Learning

These modes of thinking and learning help undergraduates to cultivate intellectual resources. The current General Education Program lists a set of overall program goals that include (a) competence in written and oral communication, (b) critical thinking, including information literacy, (c) ethical awareness, (d) aesthetic sensibility, (e) diverse perspectives, including race, class, culture, gender, and academic discipline, and (f) a global point of view. The task force builds on these programmatic goals, but redefines them as intellectual resources developed through American University's General Education curriculum. The task force recommends that each General Education course should focus on at least **two** of the following interrelated ways of thinking and learning.

- **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

2. Foundational Areas - Ways of Knowing (10 courses – a minimum of 31 credits)

Corresponding to the “Curricular Areas” in the current General Education program, the Foundational Areas introduce undergraduates to different modes of inquiry and approaches to knowledge. **The task force recommends that undergraduates complete two courses in each of the foundational areas.**

FA1. Creative Arts
FA2. Traditions that Shape the Western World
FA3. Global and Cross-Cultural Perspectives
FA4. Social Institutions and Behavior
FA5. Natural Sciences and Mathematics – one of the courses in FA5 must include a lab

3. Integrative Learning

The General Education program would incorporate options that introduce undergraduates to approaches to learning and knowledge beyond traditional classroom and disciplinary boundaries.

Options would include:

- An interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary Sophomore Seminar – Distinct from the more common “first semester” or “freshman seminar” topics model at many liberal arts and research universities, the Sophomore Seminar would provide undergraduates with opportunities to integrate approaches and methods from two or more disciplines. Students would be exposed to multiple modes of thinking about subjects, concepts, and problems, and would engage in evaluating complementary and competing ways of knowing.
- Courses offered through learning communities – current options include University Honors, University College, and Learning Communities.
- Interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary courses
- Linked and sequential thematic course clusters
- Courses with experiential components such as community-based research and learning
- Education/Study Abroad as appropriate

B. Recommended changes to the current General Education program:

- Clusters and tiers within the current curricular areas would be phased out. Prerequisites for individual General Education courses would be determined by the faculty in each of the teaching units and foundational areas in coordination with the General Education program.
- Up to one Sophomore Seminar would meet one foundational area requirement. Appropriate Honors colloquia, currently at the 300 level, would be included in this category. This is an option, not a requirement.
- Up to one *intermediate or advanced* level foreign language course, as appropriate, and specifically designed to meet learning goals in foundational area 2 or 3. This is an option, not a requirement.
- Up to one pre-approved study abroad course may apply to the appropriate foundational area requirement. This is an option, not a requirement.
- Eliminate the cap of 150 courses, while ensuring faculty oversight for the curriculum and for General Education administration coordination with teaching units to provide adequate access to courses within the foundational areas.
- In accordance with task force recommendations and campus-wide consideration and implementation, all teaching units would review their current General Education course offerings and, as appropriate, propose revisions that will revitalize the program and engage faculty.
- All (undergraduate) teaching units should develop and offer Sophomore Seminars by Fall 2013.
- All (undergraduate) teaching units should explore partnerships to link General Education courses in thematic and/or sequential clusters beginning in Fall 2012.
- The process for approval of General Education “wild card” courses should be made more efficient with one time administrative approval by the General Education director with a report to the Senate committee. Subsequent offerings of the “wild card” course would warrant full committee consideration and approval

Recommended changes, once approved, will go into effect in Fall 2012 for incoming American University students. Current AU students who have not completed General Education requirements may switch to the revised General Education program without losing any credit for any coursework completed.

C. Current General Education regulations that will continue:

- Students may use up to two courses per discipline (as indicated by the “discipline designator”) to meet General Education requirements.
- In accordance with the current Academic Regulations, only grades of D or above will count towards fulfilling the General Education requirement.
- Courses completed for university requirements may (double) count for general education
- In-coming freshmen and transfer students may apply credit earned for up to four General Education courses through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, German Abitur, CLEP, or other appropriate exams as defined in American University’s Academic Regulations.
- Current General Education regulations for transfer students will continue.
- The General Education curriculum is intended for completion by the time a student earns sixty credits at American University. While the task force recognizes that progression in some majors may inhibit the completion of all General Education requirements prior to the start of the junior year, academic advisors/counselors should continue to work closely with students and faculty to ensure timely completion of the program.

D. Faculty Oversight of and Engagement in the General Education Program

Recommendation: The 2009-2010 General Education Task Force underscores that to ensure the integrity of the curriculum, tenure-line faculty should be engaged actively in the development, teaching, and oversight of the General Education Program. The task force recognizes, however, that staffing issues are extremely complex, and that units and faculty must balance instructional responsibilities among various constituencies, including the General Education Program. While not formally proposing either a cap on adjunct faculty teaching of General Education sections or setting a minimum target for tenure-line or full-time faculty, the task force strongly recommends that, whenever possible, primary staffing of the program should be first by tenure-line faculty and then by full-time faculty.