General Education at the University of Oregon

Purpose

The liberal arts and sciences form the foundation of the General Education curriculum at the University of Oregon. The General Education curriculum prizes a common educational experience for all students, and offers opportunities for mastery of linguistic, analytic and computational skills, as well as the development of aesthetic values. It fosters personal development and an expanded view of self. It offers a breadth of knowledge and a variety of modes of inquiry. It strives for coherence of learning through integration and synthesis. It seeks to impart enthusiasm for learning. It emphasizes critical thinking, logic, and effective reasoning along with a healthy skepticism. It encourages appreciation of heritage and culture and examines values and controversial issues.

The University of Oregon, as a comprehensive research university, offers opportunities through General Education to develop an understanding of and appreciation for:

1. the centrality of effective communication and language facility
   * oral and written communication
   * group, interpersonal and technological communication

2. the moral foundations of human interaction
   * ethical judgment, personal and social responsibility
   * the increasing interdependence and diversity of world cultures
   * the consequences of current actions and policies

3. the nature of the historical past and its relationship to the present
   * the common concerns and diverse responses of societies, past and present
   * historical approaches to understanding contemporary issues

4. the diversity of human experience through the study of various cultures
   * culture and its tangible achievements
   * creative expression
   * critical approaches
   * aesthetic standards
   * oral and written histories

5. the importance of modern sciences and technology
   * science as an interrelated body of knowledge, rather than a collection of isolated facts
   * scientific methods of discovery
   * scientific perspectives on major problems facing society
   * quantitative reasoning and computational skills

6. the fundamentals and interrelationship of the human mind and body
   * human behavior
   * perception and cognition
   * diverse modes of thought and creativity
   * self awareness
   * health and physical activity

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1 This document is a synthesis of proposals by the UO Undergraduate Council that were approved by the University Senate during the period from Fall 1999 through Spring 2004. These sources are indicated by lower case letters at the appropriate places in this document, and links to them in the archives of the University Senate are given at the end of the document.
Criteria for Group-Satisfying Courses

Courses approved for General Education provide perspectives that encourage students to integrate knowledge and develop skills that will enable them to pursue further knowledge effectively. A large proportion of General Education coursework is intended to introduce students to the wide range of human inquiry and accomplishment, divided into three Groups: Arts and Letters, Social Science, and Science. The criteria that courses in each of these Groups should meet are given below:

1. All Group-satisfying courses in Arts and Letters, Social Science, and Science must meet the following general criteria: 

   A. **Group-satisfying courses in Arts and Letters** must create meaningful opportunities for students to engage actively in the modes of inquiry that define a discipline. Proposed courses must be broad in scope and demonstrably liberal in nature (that is, courses that promote open inquiry from a variety of perspectives). Though some courses may focus on specialized subjects or approaches, there must be substantial course content locating that subject in the broader context of the major issues of the discipline. Qualifying courses will not focus on teaching basic skills but will require the application or engagement of those skills through analysis and interpretation.

   B. **Group-satisfying courses in the Social Sciences** must be liberal in nature rather than being professionally oriented or limited to the performance of professional skills. They must cover a representative cross-section of key issues, perspectives, and modes of analysis employed by scholars working on the subject matter addressed by the course. The subject matter of the course will be relatively broad, e.g. involving more than one issue, place, or time. Courses with an emphasis on methods and skills will satisfy the requirement only if there is also a substantial and coherent theoretical component.

   C. **Group-satisfying courses in the Sciences** should introduce students to the foundations of one or more scientific disciplines, or should provide an introduction to fundamental methods (such as mathematics) that are widely used in scientific disciplines. Courses should introduce students to the process of scientific reasoning. Although laboratory courses are not automatically excluded from Group-satisfying status in the sciences, to acquire this status, the courses must not focus primarily on techniques or data collection.

2. Upper division Group-satisfying courses must meet these additional criteria: 

   Upper division Group-satisfying courses must serve as broad introductions to fields with which students are unfamiliar and provide depth and rigor beyond that of typical lower division General Education courses. To achieve this dual purpose, such courses should do the following:

   - Introduce students to the perspectives of a discipline and engage them in substantial application of its fundamental ideas. Courses may be focused on a single text or period, but should use the examples provided by that focus to illuminate the larger discipline; and,

   - Educate students about the way knowledge is created in a discipline by identifying its significant questions and showing how those questions can be answered. For instance, a course might analyze the design of particular experiments, show how modeling is done and when it is informative, or introduce specific kinds of data analysis. The use of primary sources is encouraged where appropriate, that is, in fields where this information is accessible to a non-specialist; and,

   - Encourage integration of perspectives, as well as specific application of general principles, through synthesis and analysis of course material, including concepts from
other courses. These courses should also employ evaluation methods that measure this high level of understanding; and,

- Assume that students are capable of advanced university-level intellectual engagement as a result of having completed substantial lower division work, although not necessarily in the subject of the course. Some upper division Group-satisfying courses may also have specific prerequisites in the form of other courses whose content provides an essential foundation in the subject.

Examples of hypothetical course designs that could achieve these ends are given in the “Examples” section below.

3. The following specific criteria apply to some or all Group-satisfying courses:

A. Group-satisfying courses must be numbered at the 100, 200, and 300 levels.

B. Descriptions for Group-satisfying courses should be posted electronically in the Schedule of Classes. The posted course information should be substantially expanded over those provided in the catalog, should be understandable to someone unfamiliar with the field, and should emphasize the questions or issues that reveal, by their breadth and significance, why the course has earned Group-satisfying status. Effective descriptions for three existing courses are given in the “Examples” section below.

B. Lower division courses must be offered annually, and upper division courses at least every other year. All Group-satisfying courses should be offered in time periods that are standard for regular academic terms, and in no case may be offered for a period shorter than three weeks.

C. Courses that are offered for majors only are excluded from Group-satisfying status, but courses that are designed for both majors and other students may qualify.

Procedures governing the approval of General Education courses

D. Before submission to the Senate, such courses proposed by departments must be reviewed at several levels:

i. By the curricular committees of the various colleges and schools;

ii. By an inter-college committee including the members of the CAS Curricular Committee and two representatives appointed by the deans of the other schools and colleges. This second committee is also charged to review such courses as do not meet the criteria described above and to negotiate a solution with the sponsoring department;

iii. By the University Committee on Courses.

iv. The inter-college committee is authorized to establish procedures governing the review process

E. Each request that a course be given group satisfying status must include a statement identifying the parts of the Purpose Statement for General Education Requirements at the University of Oregon that are covered by the course.
F. Departments which offer several general education courses should suggest groupings or sequences of these courses that present a coherent development of knowledge and skills. The department's suggestions shall be included, for advising purposes, in the Green Book and in the Faculty Advising Manual.

G. Group satisfying courses must be resubmitted for renewal of their group-satisfying status by the College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee and then the University Committee on Courses. Reviews will be conducted on a five year cycle. The committees will select departments whose group offerings are to be reviewed each year, and request information essential for the review. At the committees' discretion, this information may include frequency of course offerings, course syllabi, statements explaining the manner in which courses meet conditions set forth in this motion, and an overview of the department's group offerings.

a  October 1999: Motion US99/00-2 Amend Criteria for Satisfying Group Requirements
b  May 2001: Motion US00/01-3 Replacement Motion
c  May 2004: Motion US03/04-8 Amend Criteria for Group-Satisfying Courses
Examples

1. Examples of expanded course descriptions

Humanities 102: Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages

Catalog description: Introduction to the Humanities. Ideas and modes of vision Western culture has inherited from the medieval to the Renaissance periods. Readings and discussions focus on literature, philosophy, history, the arts, and religion.

Expanded course description: Humanities integrates a number of academic disciplines – history, literature, philosophy, religion, art and architecture – in the study of the world’s cultures. This course treats the “Middle Ages,” a period when religion played an especially important role almost everywhere. In Europe the period is often thought of as the “Christian Middle Ages,” but from Spain all the way to India it was also a golden age of Islam. A prominent feature of the period is the tension among the three “Abrahamic” religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – think of the Crusades. These tensions are obviously still with us. Our news is dominated by the wars among these three religious groups – in Israel, in the whole of the middle East, and around the world. This course examines the deep history of these relations. If the assignments sometimes seem esoteric or “academic,” as assignments often do, remember that they’re in fact urgently relevant to our historical moment. Everyone should know Ibn Ishaq’s *Life of the Prophet*, for example, even if 8th century Arabia seems distant.

History 191: China Past and Present

Catalog description: Introduction to Chinese culture. Explores meanings of past and present in 20th-century efforts to modernize China. Chronological and topical inquiry into politics, literature, social structure, gender, art, economy.

Expanded course description: China today has multiple pasts – imperial, republican and revolutionary. China Past and Present introduces the epic sweep of China’s historical transformations since the nineteenth century. This survey provides a basis for understanding the uneasy relationship between past and present in modern China. Since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese intellectuals, reformers and revolutionaries have attempted to modify, reject, even to eradicate aspects of the Chinese past in order to construct a new, modern present. At the same time, they have sought to preserve a sense of specifically Chinese identity, and to redefine modernity in Chinese terms.

By the end of the course, students should be attuned to the ways China’s pasts haunt its present, and to the way in which the changing politics of the present transform understandings of the past.

Physics 161: Physics of Energy and the Environment

Catalog description: Practical study of energy generation and environmental impact, including energy fundamentals, fossil fuel use, global warming, nuclear energy, and energy conservation.
Expanded course description: A practical course for non-science majors to introduce the concepts necessary to understand and work with energy (what it is), energy generation (transformation) and energy use. We will be mostly interested in the relationship of energy to our everyday lives (other than eating), the environmental consequences of global energy consumption, and what this means for the future of our lifestyles. There is no question that *major changes* in our energy consumption habits will be forced upon us in our lifetimes. We will explore why this will happen and what some of the alternatives might be.

Fundamental issues of physics will be discussed with a minimum of mathematics (high school algebra at most). Some calculations will be required for homework and a few of the exam problems, so a standard calculator will be essential (scientific calculator not required but helpful).

Of the ten week term, approximately 5 weeks will be spent introducing and developing a reasonably thorough understanding of energy: mechanics (physics of motion), electricity and magnetism (most versatile form of energy) and thermodynamics (movement of heat). We will learn about mechanical power based on engines (heat, combustion, electrical or solar energy).

The sun is the ultimate energy source for world weather, and, as it turns out, for most of our present needs as well. These topics will be discussed in enough detail that we can apply the concepts to everyday life. Great emphasis will be placed on practical examples and in-class demonstrations. We will have 2-3 “in-class” lab days to do practical experiments. For example, we will perform very simple experiments to measure the power output of the human body and energy content of fossil fuels.

The last part of the term will deal with our energy lifestyles. We will study the source of and use of fossil fuels, generation of electricity and nuclear energy. Finally, the environmental consequences (air pollution, global warming) of our energy use will be discussed.
2. **Examples of hypothetical course designs that illustrate desired characteristics of 300-level Group-satisfying courses:**

   a. **introduce students to the perspectives of a discipline and engage them in substantial application of its fundamental ideas:**

      1. In a Humanities course, the political, economic and religious influences on particular artists might be used to examine the kinds of forces that shape personal taste and distinctive artistic style in all periods and places.

      2. In a Literature course, texts from a specific period, genre, or individual might serve to represent larger cultural trends and developments.

      3. A course on Environmental Economics would further develop the tools and analytical techniques introduced in “principles courses,” and would show how analytical tools applicable to economics, generally, can be applied to environmental issues.

      4. A History course might deal with a short time period, but use it to illustrate patterns of social interaction that can be generalized.

      5. A Biology course might use a specific disease (Mad Cow, for example) to explore the fundamental molecular and genetic principles that explain both the disease and normal cellular function.

   b. **educate students about the way knowledge is created in a discipline by identifying its significant questions and showing how those questions can be answered:**

      1. In the Humanities course on style, students would use a textbook, but would also study paintings, sculptures, buildings and musical compositions directly, in an effort to identify common elements of style.

      2. Students in a Literature course might be called upon not only to exercise interpretive and analytical skills, but also to explore the material and ideological circumstances that contribute to the production of literary texts in a given time and place.

      3. In the Economics course, students would take the fundamental microeconomic concepts and tools used by economists and policy-makers and apply them to a specific problem. Texts, homework assignments, and lectures would all be used to demonstrate how to apply these tools. As an example, students might use models of consumer and producer behavior to predict the economic effects of regulating the price of oil.

      4. A History course would use primary documents for at least part of the course material. For instance, a course on the US involvement in Vietnam might ask students to read a major US newspaper covering a crucial period and try to reconstruct the relationships among: the news reports, public opinion, and events as they are now understood.

      5. The Mad Cow course might examine the experimental logic that led to the heretical idea that proteins, not viruses, cause the disease. Textbooks would be used to present fundamental
cellular mechanisms, but students would also read popular science articles (e.g. *Scientific American* articles by the investigators who had key insights) and a few primary research papers to get a sense of the evidence and reasoning behind scientific conclusions.

c. *encourage integration of perspectives, as well as specific application of general principles, through synthesis and analysis of course material, including concepts from other courses:*

1. The Humanities course might ask students to summarize the key ideas in Leonard Meyer’s essay, “A Theory of Style” and then apply these to a particular art form or an individual piece of creative work.

2. Students in a Literature course might be expected to apply various analytical paradigms, such as a Marxist, Post-Structuralist, or Feminist framework, in their critical writing about literary texts.

3. The Economics course might ask students to apply the tools they’ve been working with to a problem they haven’t analyzed before. For example, having looked at the effects of oil price regulation, a student might be asked to analyze another instance of price regulation, or to put two types of regulation or price distortion together in a way that wasn’t covered in class - e.g. what would happen if a price ceiling and a per unit tax were imposed simultaneously?

4. A History course might ask students to use their understanding of particular philosophical ideas to defend or refute the statement, “Enlightenment philosophy was responsible for the outbreak of the French Revolution.”

5. The Mad Cow course might ask students to examine other phenomena that appear related (e.g. Alzheimer’s Disease and long term memory) and propose specific molecular mechanisms for them.