

Do you believe General Education in its current form at the College is effective in meeting the AAC&U's Learning Outcomes? If not, please identify ways in which you think General Education could meet these outcomes more effectively.

Some of the AAC& U outcomes are being addressed well now. Some skills in written and oral communication and in analytical thinking are required of students in every course they take. The current Gen Ed course requirements also ensure that students use these skills in a variety of disciplines. Since these are usually entry-level courses, students are not required to exhibit very *advanced* skills in much of their Gen Ed coursework; they reach that level of skill in the coursework they do in their major. Another outcome—"familiarity with the inquiry practices that explore the natural, social, and cultural realms" is well addressed through our current Gen Ed requirements because the coursework must be in several disciplines.

"Intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills" are often the *result* of courses students take in the Gen Ed curriculum, but there is nothing in the curriculum now that actually *requires* students to achieve these outcomes. To insure that students acquire this kind of knowledge and these kinds of skills, the College could require students to complete either courses or other experiences (internships, travel abroad) that develop this outcome a little more intentionally. Even a brief experience devoted to intercultural knowledge could heighten students' awareness of cultural diversity, and make them more receptive to subsequent coursework that addressed such topics.

The last two outcomes (civic and personal responsibility, mature habits of mind/ability to see connections) are certainly encouraged by many of the Gen Ed courses, but there is nothing in the current setup that *insures* that students will grow in their ability to do these things. Coursework in every major should be designed to promote these outcomes: to develop students' intellectual maturity and their appreciation for the interconnectedness of all human activity. If the curriculum of a major does not help its students see the value of other disciplines besides itself, there is more of a chance that those students will not value the Gen Ed coursework they have done, or see its relevance to their own studies and futures.

Such intellectual and cognitive development is recursive, so it must be reinforced over time rather than over a single semester. The effects of the current Gen Ed curriculum could be more powerful if the students' education were sequenced more carefully, so that students were frequently reminded of the connections between the courses they were taking, and were invited to use the skills they develop in one course in another course. It would also be helpful if the major coursework, or some other aspect of students' experience in the major, made more explicit reference to the skills and knowledge base students are gaining in the Gen Ed courses. This might take the form of interdisciplinary requirements in the major, or internships or other experiences which asked students to use skills and knowledge from several courses. Beginning courses in the major could help here by including some attention to the nature of this discipline and how it is different from and similar to other disciplines. The majors' capstone experience should include not

only high-level work in the discipline, but some means of connecting this work to other courses and to the students' lives beyond the classroom.

Do you believe General Education in its current form helps students to succeed in coursework in your department's major or minor? Are there ways a Gen Ed curriculum could enhance your students' work in the major so that they meet these AAC&U Learning Outcomes more effectively?

The current Gen Ed curriculum is good for our major and minor students in that the coursework orients students to some of the major disciplines or ways of knowing. Interpreting literature includes understanding the historical period and social conditions in which it is set, and raises questions about the human condition that are relevant to all the disciplines represented in Gen Ed (philosophy, religion, art, history, and even science and mathematics). The study of a foreign language helps students be more aware of how any language operates, so that requirement is useful to our majors as well. The scientific method is valuable to our majors because, although literary criticism is not a science, it, too, involves careful study of evidence—in our case, evidence a literary text presents—and the testing of a hypothesis (an interpretation of the meaning of a work of literature) against that evidence. The logic of mathematics and philosophy is also useful to our students, even though imaginative literature does not make meaning in the same strictly logical way. We want our students to be able to write logically and analytically, so if they have had to do this in their Gen Ed courses, they will be more successful in our major. Inasmuch as students are asked to write papers, make presentations, do library research, interpret large and complex written documents, and analyze problems for which there is no one simple answer, they are being asked to grow intellectually, and such students will be able to make greater strides in our major as a result of that rigorous Gen Ed coursework.

Unfortunately, not all Gen Ed coursework is as rigorous as it might be, nor is it always designed to foster students' cognitive development. Gen Ed courses, usually entry-level courses, are not always given the resources and attention that could foster greater learning by the students. When professors teach large classes, they do not have time to grade many (if any) papers or essay exams. They assign fewer of them and respond to the students' work in much less detail than they would if Gen Ed classes had lower enrollments, and if departments were urged to make the Gen Ed instruction as important as their work in the major (or as important as their department's FTEs).

The large number of adjuncts and temporary instructors teaching Gen Ed courses, and the very poor compensation adjuncts receive, also contributes to the lower quality of instruction and the decreased rigor of the Gen Ed courses. This is not to suggest that adjuncts never teach well; many do. To paraphrase a Tennessee Williams heroine, the College has always depended on the kindness of adjuncts. In our department, there are some temporary faculty whose sustained attention and professional expertise is admirably high. Yet this is not something the College can count on forever. "Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart," as W. B. Yeats wrote. The College is inviting low performance and hard hearts when it pays adjuncts at a very low rate and provides

them with no benefits or job security. If more of our exemplary adjuncts were full-time instructors, their expertise could be more fully integrated into the department, and both students and faculty would see their work in the Gen Ed curriculum as a high priority of the College, rather than a place where the College can lower its production costs.

In light of these Learning Outcomes, we ask that you revisit the "Goals and Objectives for Disciplinary Requirements in Current General Education Curriculum" and describe any changes or revisions you think would improve/enhance General Education at the College. We invite your department to give particular attention to the goals and objectives for any Gen Ed courses you currently provide.

(From the "Disciplinary Goals" document)

1. Requirement: English 101-102

Written Communication: *Through approved general education courses, students are expected to*

develop the ability to read with insight, perception and objectivity;

develop an understanding of the writing process and the ability to write with clarity and precision following the rules of standard English grammar and composition;

learn invention, revision, editing, and documentation techniques;

explore the ways of thinking and understand the relationship between the writer and the reader;

understand the importance of careful observation, specific detail, and the logical development of ideas and demonstrate how these principles are embodied in quality writing;

demonstrate the ability to retrieve information and evaluate its use as evidence in creating and supporting an argument; and

prepare research papers.

Revised Goals for General Education Writing Requirement

Students in English 101-102 or Honors 105-106 will receive training in the practices necessary for successful college writing, including

- Reading, analysis, and interpretation of college-level texts
- Shaping written work according to the requirements of a genre, occasion, and audience
- The processes of planning, drafting, and revising college-level papers
- Locating appropriate research material, integrating such material effectively into one's own work, acknowledging the use of such sources and using the proper forms of documentation
- Editing written work according to the conventions of standard American English and of academic disciplines

These courses cannot help students make meaningful progress in writing unless they have very small class sizes. For students to be more successful in their first-year writing

courses, the *required composition classes should have no more than fifteen students*. If writing courses were *four hours rather than three hours* each semester, the students would benefit further. A stronger foundation in their first-year writing classes would benefit students in all their subsequent coursework.

Writing well is a complex skill that is learned over time. Therefore students will benefit much more from their freshman composition courses if other General Education courses and their major coursework *continue* the writing instruction they receive as freshmen. Students should be required to take numerous courses that require significant writing and that provide writing instruction. Writing development occurs when students receive extensive guidance, opportunities for practice and revision, and detailed, individual feedback on their written work. This labor-intensive teaching is not recognized as an FTE, and there is little in the College's current reward structure to motivate faculty members to offer more writing instruction than they are already doing. Instead, the College's current reward structure actively discourages intensive writing instruction and individualized teaching generally. We believe the Gen Ed experience, and the overall education of our students, would be improved if the College introduced *lower class sizes for writing-intensive courses*, and gave departments other *incentives for offering upper-level writing-intensive courses*. Furthermore, many dedicated faculty who are themselves skilled writers and demanding teachers do not have *expertise in writing instruction*. They and their students could benefit if the College gave all faculty opportunities and incentives to develop expertise in the teaching of advanced writing in their disciplines.

(These are the goals of the second aspect of our Gen Ed offerings, as currently described)

6. Requirement: 12 hours of Humanities

Humanities: Through approved general education courses in the humanities, students are expected to:

acquire knowledge of major achievements in the fine arts of our own and other civilizations and the cultural, social and historical context in which they were created;

acquire knowledge of the world's great literary, philosophical, and religious traditions;
and

demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skill in the multiple ways of knowing and methods of inquiry appropriate to the humanities disciplines

The current goals for general education courses in the humanities are laudable and achievable under the existing 12-hour requirement. We would like note as well that courses in the study of imaginative literature (in any language, not just English) are particularly suited to achieve some of the "Outcomes for Undergraduate Education"—the ability to synthesize, to understand cultural diversity, and to discern connections between disciplines.

Many universities include a literature course among their Gen Ed requirements, and we would welcome such a requirement at the College. Since students will need to read and write well in order to succeed in almost any academic or professional endeavor, they will be well served by the study of literature, which attunes them to the infinite possibilities of linguistic expression. We believe that imaginative literature is a "way of knowing" that is

enormously valuable, both for the pleasure and personal insights it affords its readers, and for the way literature portrays the complexities and possibilities of human experience. Written language is so malleable that, in the hands of great writers, it can convey a myriad of emotional overtones and insights on the people and eras it portrays. The study of literature helps students understand some of the interconnections and layers of meaning that words create when they operate artistically, and helps students glimpse how much the human consciousness can contain.