



# University Bulletin

## Undergraduate Degree Programs

### Primary Navigation

## WHAT IS GENERAL EDUCATION?

The inclusion of General Education in every degree program reflects Penn State's deep conviction that successful, satisfying lives require a wide range of skills and knowledge. These skills include the ability to reason logically and quantitatively and to communicate effectively; an understanding of the sciences that makes sense of the natural environment; a familiarity with the cultural movements that have shaped societies and their values; and an appreciation for the enduring arts that express, inspire, and continually change these values. General Education, in essence, augments and rounds out the specialized training students receive in their majors and aims to cultivate a knowledgeable, informed, literate human being.

For more information, see [gened.psu.edu](http://gened.psu.edu).

Penn State's General Education program is designed to enable students to:

- acquire knowledge through critical information gathering, including reading and listening, computer-assisted searching, and scientific experimentation and observation;
- analyze and evaluate, where appropriate in a quantitative manner, the acquired knowledge;
- integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and fields;
- make critical judgments in a logical and rational manner;
- develop the skills to maintain health and understand the factors that impinge upon it;
- communicate effectively, both in writing and orally, and using the accepted methods for presentation, organization, and debate particular to their disciplines;
- seek and share knowledge, independently and in collaboration with others;
- gain understanding of international interdependence and cultural diversity and develop consideration for values, lifestyles, and traditions that may differ from their own;
- comprehend the role of aesthetic and creative activities expressing both imagination and experience.

Courses within the structure of General Education become an integral part of the overall educational experience. These courses may be relevant to a major or to an individual's interests. Students are encouraged to consider how a course might be useful to their current interests and goals. An important part of academic planning is working with an academic adviser not only to understand the role of General Education requirements, but also to make sure that course selections complement the academic requirements of a student's specific major.

## Components of General Education

The *typical* baccalaureate Penn State academic program requires the completion of between 120 and 130 credits. The General Education requirements are common to all degree programs and compose about one-third of the course work (45 credits). All students must also complete a First-Year Engagement program, courses in United States Cultures and International Cultures, and a writing-across-the-curriculum course as part of

their degree program. For simplicity, those courses are included with the General Education program as described in this bulletin. The course selections are designed to provide students with a well-rounded academic experience within an integrated curriculum that allows for individual flexibility. The components of the program are:

- *Skills courses* that help develop quantitative and communication skills.
- *Studies in the Knowledge Domains of the Arts, Humanities, and the Sciences* (including the Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences) that provide a broad overview of the world in which we live.
- *First-Year Engagement Programs* that help introduce students to the scholarly community of the University.
- *Writing Intensive* courses of the "Writing Across the Curriculum" component that further enhance writing skills.
- *United States Cultures and International Cultures* that provide opportunities to increase understanding of the relationship between people of different cultures and widen international perspective.

## General Education Requirement Descriptions

### SKILLS

#### Writing / Speaking

*Courses with the GWS designation satisfy this component.*

It is the objective of these courses to teach students to communicate information clearly and set forth their beliefs persuasively both orally and in writing. In particular, it is expected that students become sufficiently proficient in writing, such that their expository prose meets the expectations of educated readers in both form and style.

#### Quantification

*Courses with the GQ designation satisfy this component*

The objective of the quantification courses is to teach the students to work with numbers so as to measure space, time, mass, forces, and probabilities; to reason quantitatively; and to apply basic mathematical processes to daily work and everyday living.

### KNOWLEDGE DOMAINS

#### Health and Physical Activity

*Courses with the GHA designation satisfy this component*

Courses in the Health and Physical Activity area focus on the theory and practice of life span wellness and fitness activities, and on the knowledge, attitudes, habits, and skills needed to live well. The courses include such diverse topics as diet, exercise, stress management, the wise use of leisure time, alcohol consumption and drug use, sexual health awareness, and safety education. Courses may be knowledge-focused (about aspects of the biological, social, and behavioral aspects of healthful living) or practice-focused (emphasize attitudes, habits, and skills needed to engage in healthful living and can include traditional dance, exercise, and sport activity classes) or integrated in any manner.

#### Natural Sciences

*Courses with the GN designation satisfy this component*

The Natural Sciences reveal the order, diversity, and beauty of nature and in so doing enable students to develop a greater appreciation of the world around them. These courses help students to understand the nature of science through exposure to the broad divisions

of science--physical science, biological science, earth science, and applied natural science. In these courses the students will be taught how to acquire scientific factual information, to use scientific methodology and to develop an appreciation of the natural world. Students should gain an understanding of how scientists reason and how they draw conclusions and think critically.

## **Arts**

*Courses with the GA designation satisfy this component*

Courses taught in the area of the Arts are expected to help students understand and appreciate some of the more important creative works, traditions, literature, and history of the arts and architecture. General Education Arts courses aim to teach students to recognize the comprehensive role of arts and architecture as an expression of the cultural values of a society and the need to preserve these expressions for the benefit of future generations.

Through the courses in the Arts area, students should recognize aesthetic values as an integral part of society's essential need and gain lifelong benefits through the acquisition and appreciation of arts-related skills. Students should become conversant with the terminology, techniques, attitudes, ideas, and skills that the arts comprise so as to understand how humankind relates to the arts.

## **Humanities**

*Courses with the GH designation satisfy this component*

Humanistic studies are divided into four categories: (1) literature, (2) history and culture, (3) advanced language, and (4) philosophy. The study of the Humanities should develop competency in interpretive understanding of the human condition and of the values inherent in it. This interpretive understanding should evolve into the development of insights and a critical evaluation of the meaning of life, in its everyday details as well as in its historical and universal dimensions. Through this development students should acquire knowledge of and concern for the humanistic values that motivate and inform all humanistic studies.

## **Social and Behavioral Sciences**

*Courses with the GS designation satisfy this component*

Social and Behavioral Sciences courses develop students' understanding of the diverse personal, interpersonal, and societal forces that shape people's lives and teach them how to approach these subjects through the concepts, principles, and methods of scientific inquiry. The general goal is a theoretical understanding of the interrelationships of the determinants of the organization of human behavior. These courses are expected to introduce students to the scientific analysis of: (1) the forms, practices, and theories of politics; (2) the nature and operation of economic analysis; (3) the interrelationships of social institutions; (4) the dynamics of individual and group behavior and change; and (5) the processes and functions of human communication.

Through the application of the methodologies of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, students should develop an understanding of the multiple nature of causality in social settings. The Social and Behavioral Sciences require a comprehensive, integrative, empirical, and theoretical view of the social world.

*Note:* Some colleges or majors might require the completion of specific GWS, GQ, GHA, GN, GA, GH, and/or GS courses.

## **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

### **First-Year Engagement Program**

The First-Year Engagement Programs are designed to actively involve students in learning, acquaint them with the learning tools and resources available at Penn State and orient them to the scholarly community from the outset of their undergraduate studies in a way that will bridge to later experiences in their chosen majors. In addition, the First-Year Engagement Programs facilitate students' adjustment to the high expectations, demanding workload, increased academic liberties, and other aspects of the transition to college life and introduce them to their responsibilities as members of the University community.

All incoming first-year baccalaureate students are required to complete a First-Year Engagement Program, with a student's campus of enrollment determining whether or not this includes a First-Year Seminar (FYS). All students enrolled in a University Park college, the Division of Undergraduate Studies at University Park, and the World Campus are required to take 1 to 3 credits of the First-Year Seminar, as specified by their college First-Year Engagement Plan. Other campuses may require the First-Year Seminar; campuses that no longer require a First-Year Seminar provide students with a first-year engagement experience. First-year baccalaureate students entering Penn State should consult their enrollment home for these requirements.

*Courses with the suffix S, T, or X, or PSU abbreviation satisfy a First-Year Seminar requirement.*

### **United States Cultures**

*Courses with the US designation satisfy this requirement*

A course that fulfills the United States Cultures requirement must strive to increase students' understanding of contemporary United States society. Such a course need not focus exclusively on the present and may concern a historical subject.

Courses with the United States Cultures designation will include two or more of the following components and will include those components in the graded evaluation of student performance:

1. Cultivate student knowledge of issues of social identity such as ethnicity, race, class, religion, gender, physical/mental disability, age, or sexual orientation;
2. Convey to students knowledge of different United States values, traditions, beliefs, and customs;
3. Increase student knowledge of the range of United States cultural achievements and human conditions through time;
4. Increase student knowledge of United States social identities not in isolation, but in relation to one another (for example, the interaction of race or gender with socioeconomic status);
5. Introduce students to interpersonal communication and interaction issues among United States cultures.

### **International Cultures**

*Courses with the IL designation satisfy this requirement*

A course that fulfills the International Cultures requirement must strive to increase student knowledge of the variety of international societies and may deal to some extent with U.S. culture in its international connections. It need not focus exclusively on the present and may, indeed, be a historical subject. Courses with the International Cultures designation will do two or more of the following:

1. Cultivate student knowledge of the similarities and differences among international cultures;
2. Convey to students knowledge of other nations' cultural values, traditions, beliefs, and customs;

3. Increase students' knowledge of the range of international cultural achievements and human conditions through time;
4. Increase students' knowledge of nations and cultures not in isolation, but in relation to one another;
5. Introduce students to interpersonal communication and interaction issues among international cultures.

## **Writing Across the Curriculum**

*Courses with the suffix W, M, X, or Y satisfy this requirement*

Developing the skill to communicate by means of the written word is extremely important. Courses other than General Education English composition courses emphasize the ability of students to write. Colleges and/or departments have established "W" courses in specific programs. Students are required to complete at least 3 credits of writing-intensive courses offered within their major or college of enrollment.

Typically, "W" courses include writing assignments that relate clearly to the course objectives and serve as effective instruments for learning the subject matter of the course. In writing-intensive courses, assignments are designed to help students investigate the course subject matter, gain experience in interpreting data or the results of research, shape writing for a particular audience, or practice the type of writing associated with a given profession or discipline.

Opportunities for students to receive written feedback from the instructor and to apply the instructor's feedback to their future writing are built into the writing courses. A writing-intensive course may also include peer review of written work, tutorial assistance, instructor conferences, group writing projects, the use of writing or learning centers, teaching assistant feedback, and classroom discussions of assigned readings about writing.

Courses that are designed to develop the students' writing competence are identified by the suffix "W, M, X, or Y" in the Undergraduate Bulletin and the Schedule of Courses. Both baccalaureate and associate degree students complete 3 credits in this area.

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The University reserves the right to change the requirements and regulations listed here and to determine whether a student has satisfactorily met its requirements for admission or graduation, and to reject any applicant for any reason the University determines to be material to the applicant's qualifications to pursue higher education. Nothing in this material should be considered a guarantee that completion of a program and graduation from the University will result in employment.

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