

Guidelines for the Approval of State University General Education Requirement Courses

For each State University General Education Requirement (SUNY-GER) category, the Task Force-defined learning outcomes are set out in plain text. Following each set of learning outcomes, guidelines for review and approval are set out in bold italicized text. The guidelines take into account the intentions of Board Resolution 98-241, and the PACGE's recommendations regarding the interpretation of the Task Force learning outcomes. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide transparency as to the expectations of the kinds of courses that may be approved in each of the SUNY-GER categories. They are not intended to constitute a logically exhaustive description of possible ways in which the learning outcomes can be met or evaluated. But it will generally be true that the further a given course is from obviously meeting the articulated guidelines, the less likely it may be approved for the category in question. It is anticipated that these guidelines will be subject to review, refinement and correction on an ongoing basis to account for shifts in disciplinary boundaries and feedback from campuses on a range of relevant issues.

I. KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL AREAS

1. MATHEMATICS ¹

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- interpret and draw inferences from mathematical models such as formulas, graphs, tables and schematics;
- represent mathematical information symbolically, visually, numerically and verbally;
- employ quantitative methods such as, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, or statistics to solve problems;
- estimate and check mathematical results for reasonableness; and
- recognize the limits of mathematical and statistical methods.

If a student has passed the Regents Math B exam with a score of 85 or above, the campus may judge the student to have satisfied all the learning outcomes for this category.

2. NATURAL SCIENCES

Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of the methods scientists use to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical analysis; **and**
- application of scientific data, concepts, and models in one of the natural sciences.

For courses in the traditional natural science disciplines (e.g., chemistry, biology, physics, etc.) the inclusion of a laboratory component, though highly desirable, is not necessary for approval.

¹ Revision made 4/13/05, reflecting the content of student learning outcomes approved by State and National mathematical organizations.

For inter- or multi-disciplinary courses (e.g., environmental science, or the science portions of integrated curricula), or courses that fall outside the envelope of traditional natural science disciplines (e.g., psychology), submitted course information should demonstrate clearly:

- *how they use all the methods listed in the first student learning outcome for the natural sciences;*
- *a rationale for which discipline(s) in the natural sciences they draw on for concepts and models;*
- *that the majority of the texts used fall clearly within the natural sciences.*

3. SOCIAL SCIENCES

Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis; and
- knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.

More than some other broadly defined discipline areas, the boundaries of the social sciences may vary significantly from campus to campus. In order to be approved for the social science category, submitted information should demonstrate clearly that the course provides a substantial introduction to an acknowledged social science discipline.

For inter- or multi-disciplinary courses (e.g., women's studies, or the social science portions of integrated curricula), or courses that otherwise fall outside the envelope of traditional social science disciplines, submitted course information should demonstrate clearly:

- *how they teach understanding of social science methodologies;*
- *a rationale for which discipline(s) in the social sciences they draw on for concepts and models;*
- *that the majority of the texts used fall clearly within the social sciences.*

4. AMERICAN HISTORY

Students will demonstrate:

- knowledge of a basic narrative of American history: political, economic, social, and cultural, including knowledge of unity and diversity in American society;
- knowledge of common institutions in American society and how they have affected different groups; and
- understanding of America's evolving relationship with the rest of the world.

To satisfy this SUNY-GER category, students must take either

- (i) a basic introduction to American History; or*
- (ii) a more specialized course in American History (only if they scored 85 or above on the NYS American History and Government Regents Exam).*

A. Kinds of courses that are approvable for category (i):

- 1. One half of the typical year-long survey of U.S. history.*
- 2. Introductions to American Government that document significant attention to historical context.*
- 3. American History courses with a somewhat narrower chronological focus that nevertheless provide enough historical context to cover a narrative equivalent to one semester of the U.S.*

History survey. Courses in 20th century U.S. history, e.g., have been approved when it has been documented that there is significant coverage of the 19th century context.

4. *Special theme courses that have as an explicit component the coverage of the basic narrative equivalent to one semester of the U.S. History survey. Examples of such courses are UGC 211 American Pluralism (Buffalo), and GEA 2000 American History, Society, and the Arts (Purchase). Both of these examples document the breadth of coverage of U.S. history by the use of a U.S. history textbook among the readings for the course.*

B. Kinds of courses that are approvable for category (ii):

1. *Virtually any American History course.*
2. *Courses on American society and culture that adopt an ostensibly historical perspective and address in a significant way the 2nd and 3rd Task Force learning outcomes. These include, e.g., courses on the sociology of American institutions and/or minority groups. Courses that focus narrowly on literature, philosophy, the arts, vel sim., would not normally be deemed to provide the breadth of coverage of U.S. history intended by the Board Resolution.*

5. WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Students will:

- demonstrate knowledge of the development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of Western civilization; and
- relate the development of Western civilization to that of other regions of the world.

In addition to generic, eponymously titled, courses on the history of western civilization, courses that are more specialized—in either chronology or theme—may be approvable. Information submitted for such specialized courses would have to demonstrate

- (i) *a focus on an aspect of western civilization that is reasonably construed as foundationally important; and*
- (ii) *relate that focus to the overall development of western civilization.*

Thus, courses on specialized topics or periods—examples include: classical mythology, the Renaissance, the Bible, French civilization, the history of theater—are approvable so long as the materials submitted demonstrate that the primary focus of the course is related to larger cultural developments of western civilization. Courses that focus narrowly on particular authors or figures are generally not approvable, even if the authors in question should be very important ones. The operative idea is that the core of the course must be central to western civilization and that the treatment of that core must be placed in a broader cultural perspective, so that it could reasonably be said that students will gain an acquaintance with western civilization and not just a specialized knowledge of one narrowly defined topic.

6. OTHER WORLD CIVILIZATIONS

Students will demonstrate:

- knowledge of either a broad outline of world history, or
- the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of one non-Western civilization.

The intention of this category is to provide a counterpoint to the European focus of the Western Civilization requirement. Thus, approvable courses in this category must be either entirely or preponderantly non-European and non-US in focus. In addition to courses on the civilizations of Asia

or Africa, this would, for example, allow courses on the histories of Latin America, the Caribbean, and/or indigenous peoples of the Americas.

7. HUMANITIES

Students will demonstrate:

- knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas required by the General Education program.

This category does not specify a particular humanities discipline or approach. In order to preserve the Task Force intention in splitting the original Humanities/Arts category in two, “performance” courses will generally not be approvable unless supported by documentation that they include a preponderance of scholarly humanistic study. Standard scholarly histories of the arts are approvable in both the Humanities and Arts categories.

For inter- or multi-disciplinary courses whose scope does not obviously fall within the envelope of traditional humanistic disciplines (e.g., some communications offerings), submitted course information should demonstrate clearly:

- *a rationale for which humanities discipline(s) they draw on for conventions and methods;*
- *that the majority of the texts are within humanities disciplines.*

8. THE ARTS

Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of at least one principal form of artistic expression and the creative process inherent therein.

In order to be approved for the Arts category, offerings should engage the creative process directly as well as foster understanding of a principal form of artistic expression. Both performance-oriented and scholarly/historical offerings in the expressive arts are approvable for this category. Literary offerings are also approvable depending on campus-based criteria for distinguishing the Humanities and Arts categories. Courses imparting purely technical skills with no demonstration of aesthetic content are not approvable.

For inter- or multi-disciplinary courses whose scope does not obviously fall within the envelope of traditional principal forms of artistic expression (e.g., courses on technical or practical aspects of design or electronic media) submitted course information should demonstrate clearly:

- *which principal form(s) of artistic expression students will encounter;*
- *the amount of time spent on each form;*
- *how students will show understanding of the creative process(es) inherent in the form(s).*

9. FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Students will demonstrate:

- basic proficiency in the understanding and use of a foreign language; and
- knowledge of the distinctive features of culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.

The first college semester, or above, of a foreign language constitutes an approvable course in this category.

It is acknowledged that campuses have widely differing practices and available resources for the assessment of foreign language preparation. Previously acquired language competence may be determined by a standard measure selected or developed by the relevant faculty and should demonstrate the student's readiness to enter the second college semester of foreign language study. In the case of the Regents Exam, this would mean passing Checkpoint B with a score of 85 or above. Use of the Regents Exam for this purpose is at the discretion of the campus. Many campuses have, and are encouraged to have, language requirements that go beyond the minimum established by the Board resolution.

American Sign Language may be used to satisfy this category only by students in the following programs:

- *programs leading to certification in elementary and secondary education;*
- *programs leading to careers where there is likely to be significant contact with the hearing-impaired.*

10. BASIC COMMUNICATION

Students will:

- produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms;
- demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts;
- research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details;
- develop proficiency in oral discourse; and
- evaluate an oral presentation according to established criteria.

Approvable courses for this category include

- *writing-intensive courses that also include significant attention to speaking skills;*
- *speaking-intensive courses that also include significant attention to writing skills.*

Campuses proposing to cover the Basic Communication outcomes by diffusion (e.g., Writing Across the Curriculum programs) must demonstrate that they are taught and practiced in all the courses involved. This demonstration may be facilitated by describing the mechanisms of course or program organization for achieving the learning outcomes.

Remedial or ESL courses are not acceptable within this category. Nor should students place out of the Basic Communication requirement by high verbal SAT scores, on the grounds that all students need an awareness of and continual practice in all the specifically college-level knowledge and skills.

II. COMPETENCIES

The following two competencies should be infused throughout the General Education program:

1. CRITICAL THINKING (REASONING)

Students will:

- identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own or others' work; and
- develop well-reasoned arguments.

2. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Students will:

- perform the basic operations of personal computer use;
- understand and use basic research techniques; and
- locate, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources.

The Critical Thinking and Information Management competencies are not necessarily associated with any one course, though either or both of them could be imparted in specific “Critical Thinking” or “Information Management” courses. In either case, campus submissions must demonstrate that the learning outcomes are accomplished in the overall undergraduate curriculum.

*Office of the Provost
System Administration
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