General Education Board
Guidelines for General Education Courses General Education Board - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

(derived from GB.91.02 with proposed revisions as of Spring 201067)

The Morrill College Land Grant Act of 1862 under which the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was founded sought to promote “liberal and practical education” and included both specialized education in the agricultural and mechanical arts and General Education in other “scientific and classical studies.” From its founding, the University of Illinois faculty has maintained requirements recognizing the Morrill Act’s distinct but complementary goals of specialized and General Education. These educational aims remain vital today, with specialized or professional education intended to prepare students for their chosen careers and with General Education intended to increase their knowledge and understanding of the wider range of historical, philosophical, scientific, political, ethical, and aesthetic concerns, and other dimensions of thought and human experience. Specialized and General Education are complementary educational aims that generate the basic framework for undergraduate education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

To appropriately balance specialized with General Educational aims, the UIUC Senate adopted a revised set of General Education requirements in 1989 and made provisions for the creation of a Campus-wide General Education Board to implement the new requirements. This document outlines guidelines from the General Education Board that must be met by courses proposed for General Education credit. These guidelines are distributed at this time so that departments may make use of them as they undertake revisions in courses and curricula in response to the new requirements. Additional guidelines concerning the specific form course proposals must take and the nature of the course review and approval process will be distributed separately.

The remainder of this document is divided into several sections. The first outlines a set of guidelines that apply to all General Education courses. This section is followed by separate sections outlining guidelines for courses within specific content areas.

Part I: General Guidelines for All General Education Courses

1. Basic Requirements and Instructional Goals to be Met by General Education Courses

1.1 In addition to meeting the basic requirements and instructional goals set forth in this section, a course approved for General Education credit must meet the requirements of a specific General Education content area as set forth in Part II of this document.

1.2 General Education courses must strive to broaden students’ understanding of human thought and achievement, to provide them a richer context within which to understand their own fields, to develop their communication skills, and to enhance their critical thinking about the materials in the course.
1.3 General Education courses should be designed to give students an opportunity to gain understanding of how significant data in a particular discipline or area of study are collected and analyzed, and the theoretical underpinnings for these processes. Thus, General Education courses should focus on data and methods appropriate to the area.

1.4 General Education courses stress the importance of the students' ability to communicate. Appropriate means of developing and assessing the students' skills of communication relevant to the area, its data, and its methods should form a significant component of all General Education courses. Thus, where appropriate, General Education courses should include one or more of the following as graded exercises: writing assignments, moderated discussion, oral presentations, visual or artistic expression, or written exercises involving mathematical or other modes of formal symbolic expression.

1.5 General Education courses should introduce students to the theories, concepts, and methods of the discipline, but should be more than superficial introductions. They should strive to present their content in appropriate ways to students for whom this may be the only course taken in the discipline. At the same time, they should provide majors and potential majors in the discipline a meaningful introduction. In some disciplines, the same course might serve both for General Education and as an introductory course for the majors in those fields; in other disciplines; distinct courses might be indicated for these purposes.

1.6 General Education courses should deal broadly with the discipline or subject matter; in most instances, courses that concern narrowly focused topics or cover only a small sub-area of the discipline or field are not appropriate for General Education. Usually, General Education courses will be 100- or 200-level courses; however, an upper-level course may be approved for meeting the General Education requirement if the course deals with the methodological or subject-matter issues of the discipline in sufficiently broad scope. In some instances the same course may fulfill the requirements for a major or a minor and for General Education.

1.7 Where appropriate, General Education courses should help students become familiar with scholarship on the significance of women and gender. Material drawn from this scholarship should be an integral part of a substantial number of General Education courses. To assure the effective implementation of this guideline the General Education Board will work with departments, colleges, and the campus administration to assure that there are adequate instructional development vehicles (workshops, seminars, course development funds, etc.) to aid the faculty in integrating the significant and increasingly visible scholarship about women and gender into General Education courses.

1.8 Individual courses will be approved to satisfy only one General Education requirement except as follows. Exceptions are the Advanced Composition, Quantitative Reasoning II, and the Cultural Studies requirements.

1.9 Courses approved for General Education should be for at least three hours credit, and classes should meet for at least three hours a week.

1.10 Although courses may form part of a sequence, the first course of such a sequence should be complete in itself, so that the students' understanding of the subject is not unduly limited if they do not take the second-level course.

1.11 Courses with variable content (open topic courses such as 199 and 299) will not be approved as General Education courses except in the case of the Advanced Composition requirement where the demands of the writing component of the course remains stable across variable topics.
2. Expectations for Offering, Staffing, and Evaluating General Education Courses

2.1 General Education courses should be offered on a continuing and regular basis, though they need not be offered every year. Once approved, departments must agree to offer a General Education course for a minimum of three years on a regular basis (e.g., every semester or once a year).

2.2 Courses approved for General Education credit will be thoroughly reviewed and reevaluated at the end of the initial three-year period and will be reapproved or disapproved by the GEB in accord with procedures approved by the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Senate Educational Policy Committee. Thereafter, courses will continue to be reviewed and reapproved or disapproved on a regular, though more extended, basis as is determined to be the minimal amount of time feasible for careful reviews by General Education Board members.

2.3 A department offering an approved General Education course is responsible for assuring that the course is taught in line with the guidelines for General Education courses as summarized in the proposal seeking certification of the course for General Education credit. In pursuit of this goal, departments must have clear procedures for informing instructors about the guidelines and the certification proposal.

2.4 Responsibility for a General Education course rests with the department and normally should be exercised by a staff member of at least the rank of Assistant Professor (either tenure-track, tenured, or specialized faculty member). Teaching assistants may teach General Education courses, including autonomous sections, under the close and regular supervision of an appropriate staff member.

2.5 Departments offering General Education courses have responsibility for developing appropriate means for preparing, supervising, and providing guidance to teaching assistants assigned to General Education courses.

2.6 Departments are responsible for assuring adequate staffing of General Education courses to be able to provide students the expert-appropriate graded feedback on their work necessary to meet the disciplinary thinking and communication skill development objectives of General Education, as outlined in 1.4 above.

2.7 Departments are responsible for assuring that there is appropriate and thorough evaluation of instruction in all courses approved for General Education. To assure the ongoing improvement of their General Education courses, departments are encouraged to develop and regularly employ discipline-appropriate methods of assessing instructional quality that include both peer review and student evaluations.

2.8 Departments are responsible for developing appropriate instructional formats for courses proposed for General Education. The course format should not only be appropriate to the discipline and course content, but also should be consistent with the aims of General Education. In most instances the goals of General Education as set forth in these guidelines will not be met by instruction with mass lectures as the sole means of delivering instruction.

Part II: Guidelines for Courses in Specific Areas

Guidelines for courses in specific areas are outlined in this section.

1. English Composition
Each student must fulfill a two-part requirement, which is designated here as Composition I and Advanced Composition (formerly Composition II).

1.1 Composition I

1.1.1 The Composition I course requirement may be met by satisfactory completion of an approved course, taken at an appropriate skill level, in Rhetoric, Communication, or English as an International Second Language.

1.1.2 Courses approved as meeting the Composition I requirement should be (a) courses that have instruction in writing as a primary emphasis; (b) include a full semester (or equivalent) of frequent and regular (e.g., weekly) writing assignments; (c) emphasize critical thinking, development of ideas, clarity of expression, and organization in addition to correct grammar, spelling, and formal writing structure; (d) emphasize multi-draft writing assignments; and (e) involve rigorous evaluation of writing assignments.

1.1.3 Courses approved for Composition I must have extensive and well-conceived systems for the preparation and ongoing supervision of teaching assistants. This should include a carefully designed and substantial orientation program and/or in-service education program for new teaching assistants assigned to the course. There should be substantial faculty participation in the Composition I courses, including classroom instruction and, most importantly, significant and sustained involvement in guiding the instructional work of teaching assistants assigned to the courses.

1.1.4 Courses approved for Composition I should be taught with section sizes consistent with the goal of promoting development of writing through directed rewriting following careful evaluation.

1.2 Advanced Composition (formerly Composition II)

1.2.1 The Advanced Composition requirement is met by completing an approved writing-intensive course. This requirement will normally be completed on the UIUC campus. Courses taken elsewhere must be individually evaluated and substantial documentation of the writing component provided if they are to satisfy the requirement.

1.2.2 Approved Advanced Composition courses may be in any department on the Campus, and will fall into one of three categories: (a) approved courses in the rhetoric and communication disciplines that build upon the Composition I requirement and have writing as their principal focus; (b) approved courses meeting another area of the General Education requirements that have a substantial writing component; and (c) approved courses meeting requirements within a major, minor, or elective field of study that are designed to require and enhance writing in the disciplinary subject matter. All departments are strongly encouraged to develop writing-intensive courses. Departmental undertakings in this area will be supported by the campus-wide Center for Writing Studies.

1.2.3 Approved courses meeting the Advanced Composition requirement can be at any level.

1.2.4 Courses approved to meet the Advanced Composition requirement must involve writing assignments that (a) demand analysis and synthesis of the subject matter of the course, or in the case of writing courses in the rhetoric and communication disciplines, application of the principles under study; (b) require substantial original composition (typically totaling at least 20 to 30 pages over the course of a semester); and (c) involve multiple drafts as graded exercises throughout the course of the semester. By special permission of the General Education Board a two-course sequence may be certified as fulfilling the Advanced Composition requirement, if the writing component of the sequence meets the standards.
specified for certification of a single course; credit for Advanced Composition will not be given for completing only one course in the sequence.

1.2.5 The student-instructor ratio in courses approved to meet the Advanced Composition requirement should permit the thoughtful appraisal of written assignments. A substantial portion of the overall course grade should be based upon evaluation of the quality of written assignments.

2. Quantitative Reasoning

Each student must fulfill a two-part Quantitative Reasoning requirement, designated Quantitative Reasoning I and II.

2.1 Quantitative Reasoning I

To fulfill the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement the student must receive credit for at least one college-level course in mathematics, computer science, statistics, or formal logic. Guidelines for courses meeting the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement in each of these areas are detailed below.

2.1.1 Completion of the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement with a college-level course in mathematics shall involve one of the following: (a) a course in calculus or a mathematics course for which calculus is prerequisite; (b) an approved course in mathematics which emphasizes that mathematics involves logical thought processes and places little emphasis upon memorization and manipulation of mathematical formulas.

Clear organization and exposition of mathematical thought is to be expected throughout a course in Category (b). For instance, such a course might expose the student to the process of formulating conjectures on the basis of the study of examples, followed in elementary situations by finding proofs of the conjectures. A course in Category (b) should not cover primarily material included in high school courses in algebra, geometry, and trigonometry used to meet the Campus entrance requirements.

2.1.2 Courses in computer science approved as meeting the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement must involve problem formulation, algorithm development, a significant amount of coding in a programming language, and the application of computer programs to the solution of problems in one or more fields, including, for example, agriculture, education, engineering, natural science, social science, business, and/or architecture.

2.1.3 The Quantitative Reasoning I requirement may be met by a course in probability and statistics. Approved courses should emphasize the relationships between the assumptions of the probabilistic and statistical models presented and the conclusions drawn. The course(s) should not be primarily “cookbook” in nature and must require that students understand when it is appropriate and inappropriate to apply particular models.

2.1.4 The Quantitative Reasoning I requirement may be met by any course in philosophy that emphasizes the forms and methods of symbolic logic and scientific reasoning. The course must introduce students to the techniques of formal logic, including truth-functional logic and quantification theory; methods for the evaluation of scientific evidence; and the use of scientific information in decision making. Such course(s) must (a) teach the student how to translate verbal arguments into their symbolic counterparts; (b) cover the relationships between premises and conclusions, and thus foster logical thinking; and (c) involve the manipulation of symbols.

2.2 Quantitative Reasoning II
The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement may be met in any one of the three following ways.

2.2.1 The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement can be satisfied by completing a second course that has been approved to satisfy the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement.

2.2.2 The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement can be met by completing a course from the areas of mathematics, computer science, statistics, or formal logic that builds upon and expands a prerequisite course taken to meet the Quantitative Reasoning I requirement.

2.2.3 The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement can be met by an approved course in any department at the 100, 200 or 300-level in which at least 25 percent of the course material and graded material require the use of mathematics, computer science, probability and statistics, or symbolic logic consistent with the Quantitative Reasoning II guidelines, as described below.

2.2.3.a. The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement may be met by a course that incorporates mathematics. The course should include one of the following: (a) the use of calculus or mathematics for which calculus is a prerequisite; (b) mathematics which involves logical thought processes and places little emphasis on memorization and manipulation of mathematical formulas. Clear organization and exposition of mathematical thought is to be expected in a course in Category (b). A course in Category (b) should not cover, but may be based on, material included in high school courses in algebra, geometry, and trigonometry used to meet the Campus’ entrance requirements. 2.2.3.b. The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement may be met by a course that incorporates the following computer science principles: problem formulation; algorithm development; coding in a programming language; and the application of computer programs to the solution of problems. 2.2.3.c. The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement may be met by a course that incorporates probability and statistics. Approved courses should emphasize the relationships between the assumptions of the probabilistic and statistical models presented and the conclusions drawn. The material should not be primarily "cookbook" in nature and must require that students understand when it is appropriate and inappropriate to apply particular models. 2.2.3.d. The Quantitative Reasoning II requirement may be met by any course that incorporates philosophy which emphasizes the forms and methods of symbolic logic and scientific reasoning including: formal logic, including truth-functional logic and quantification theory; methods for the evaluation of scientific evidence; and the use of scientific information in decision making. The material must: (a) include the translation of verbal arguments into their symbolic counterparts (b) cover the relationships between premises and conclusions, and thus foster critical thinking; and (c) involve the manipulation of symbols.

3. Language Other Than English

To ensure that all UIUC graduates will have a working knowledge of a language other than their primary language English, each student must obtain credit or demonstrate proficiency at the third college semester level or satisfactorily complete the third secondary school year of another language other than English.

3.1 To have its language course sequence approved as meeting the General Education requirement, each language department must develop a statement of competencies expected of a student satisfactorily completing the third-semester level course. These competencies should be stated as a range of skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that demonstrate general language proficiency and contribute to cultural understanding. These competencies will vary from one language department to another.

3.2 Courses approved as meeting the Language Other Than English requirement should have well designed systems for the preparation and ongoing supervision of teaching assistants by faculty.
3.3 Courses approved as meeting the Language Other Than English requirement should be taught with section sizes small enough to promote development of a substantial working knowledge of the language.

4. Natural Sciences and Technology

Each student must satisfactorily complete at least nine credit hours of approved coursework in the Natural Sciences and Technology. Guidelines for Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, and Technology follow.

4.1 To be approved for General Education credit, a course in the Physical Sciences (a) must be introductory in nature and present (or have as a prerequisite a college course that presents) the fundamentals of the physical science; and (b) should emphasize scientific methodology by involving the student in making observations, evaluating data, and solving problems. The course may be one required for majors in the physical sciences and technology or a course designed for non-specialists; courses designed for non-specialists should include coverage of the relationship of the physical science to human and environmental problems.

4.2 To be approved for General Education credit, a course in the Life Sciences (a) must be an introductory course which presents (or has as a prerequisite a college course that presents) the fundamentals of biological science, including genetics/speciation/evolution, growth/differentiation, metabolism/bio-energetics and ecology/ethology; and (b) should emphasize scientific methodology by involving the student in making observations, evaluating data, and solving problems. The course may be one required for majors in the life sciences and technology or a course designed for non-specialists; courses designed for non-specialists should include coverage of the relationship of the life sciences to human and environmental problems. Introductory courses for majors in the life sciences that do not cover all the topics specified under (a) above may be certified for General Education credit by special permission of the General Education Board.

4.3 Courses that are approved for General Education credit in the Natural Sciences and Technology category may focus primarily on technology and its application to the Natural Sciences. However, these courses must be submitted for approval in either the Physical Sciences or Life Sciences and satisfy the requirements listed above. Courses with an emphasis on technological application (a) should emphasize the applications of the sciences to the solution of human and societal problems; (b) should be comprehensive enough to give a broad perspective on the implications of technology to society; and, (c) should emphasize the problem-solving nature of technology by involving the student in such activities rather than being simply descriptive and requiring only memorization of facts.

5. Humanities and the Arts

Each student must satisfactorily complete at least nine credit hours of approved coursework in the humanities and the arts. At least one course must be from an approved list of courses in literature and the arts and at least one must be the other from an approved list of courses in historical and philosophical perspectives.

5.1 The Humanities and the Arts are those studies which foster skill in communication; discriminating judgment and the appreciation of ideas; an understanding of human cultural traditions; an appreciation of cultural, ethnic and national diversity; conceptions of literary, artistic, philosophical or historical criticism; and reflection on goals for human life. All courses approved for General Education credit in the Humanities and the Arts should fulfill these goals by (a) introducing students to the typical critical approaches and methods utilized in the discipline and to past accomplishments in the field; (b) relying
substantially on primary texts and sources; (c) requiring substantial writing; and (d) approaching their
subjects in ways that would be intellectually challenging for majors as well as non-specialists.

5.2 Courses in literature approved for General Education credit (a) should involve study of texts, in prose
or verse, that have exemplary style and express themes of more than temporary value; and (b) should
address appropriate issues concerning the work’s author, structure and content, language and style,
historical context and audience, and expressed and implied cultural attitudes and values.

5.3 Courses in the arts approved for General Education credit (a) will study the art forms produced
through the written arts, music, architecture, dance, theatre, painting, sculpture, other visual arts; (b) will
address appropriate issues concerning the characteristics and essential qualities of the medium; (c) and
will address such basic questions as the social function of the art form, its means of conveying meaning,
and how it and other art forms are to be evaluated. Courses in the arts approved for General Education
credit may involve the student in the experience of the actual doing of the art; to be approved for General
Education credit, such courses must meet both the general criteria for all Humanities and the Arts
courses as well as those detailed in this paragraph for courses in the arts.

5.4 Courses presenting an historical perspective for General Education credit (a) should attend to
questions of continuity in human experience and elucidate how human institutions, ideas, beliefs, and
social structures have developed; (b) should facilitate individuals’ understanding of who they are and how
their society came to be by promoting a fuller cognizance of human traditions; (c) should foster a “sense
of the past” that allows individuals to learn from the successes and failures of their predecessors; and (d)
should nurture social sensitivity and lessen provincialism. Courses with a historical perspective that are
approved for General Education credit should (a) pursue these goals by surveying a broad chronological
and/or geographic aspect of human history; and (b) combat present-mindedness and deficiencies in
historical knowledge by familiarizing students with significant movements, persons and events in their
intellectual, social, economic, and political contexts.

5.5 Courses presenting a philosophical perspective for General Education credit (a) should involve critical
inquiry into problems of human thought, value, or existence; (b) should engage students in the critical
and/or historical study of philosophical issues; and (c) should involve either (i) attention to contemporary
philosophical works presenting different perspectives on recurring intellectual, cultural, or social issues
and problems; or (ii) study of an important institution, discipline or practice (e.g., law, religion, art,
reasoning, science) that explores its place in life generally, its relation to others endeavors, and its claim
to importance.

6. Social and Behavioral Sciences

Each student will satisfactorily complete at least nine six credit hours of approved coursework in the
social and behavioral sciences. At least it is recommended that one course must be from an approved list
of courses in social sciences and at least one the other course must be from an approved list of courses in
behavioral sciences.

6.1 To be approved for General Education credit, a Social Science course (a) should provide
opportunities for studying social groups, institutions, and organizations, and their context; (b) should have
a primary emphasis upon persons in relation to others and their environment; (c) should formulate basic
questions and inquiry about the nature of social life through both interpretive and systematic analyses; (d)
should address a broad area, chronologically, geographically or culturally; and (e) should reflect concern
both for methodological and substantive issues.
6.2 To be approved for General Education credit, a Behavioral Science course (a) should concern the empirical approach to the study of human behavior; (b) should be broadly conceived; and (c) should give appropriate attention to both the general issues and methods of the behavioral sciences.

6.3 For courses that might involve some crossover between the Social Sciences and the Behavioral Sciences or between the Social Sciences and the Humanities, departments are responsible for proposing and defending courses as appropriate candidates for a particular General Education category.

7. Cultural Studies

Each student must obtain General Education credit for two-three courses (at least nine hours) approved for satisfaction of the Cultural Studies requirement. One of these must be approved and designated as concentrating on Western culture, and one on either non-Western culture, and one on or U.S. Minority culture. These courses may fulfill other curricular requirements, but may not both be taken from the same General Education category. No single course can fulfill multiple Cultural Studies categories.

7.1 Courses approved as meeting the Cultural Studies requirement (a) should be concerned broadly with culture understood as the interaction among the intellectual, artistic, political, economic, and social aspects of a society or other cultural grouping; (b) should treat topics and issues that can be expected to promote a deepened understanding of the culture(s) focused upon; and (c) provide either (i) a broad description and analysis of the interaction of intellectual, artistic, political, economic, social, and other aspects of a society's cultural life; (ii) an intensive investigation of the cultural life of a society or group in a particular time and place; (iii) a focused investigation of particular aspects of a society's or group's culture (e.g., its art, literature, and music); or (iv) a comparative investigation of cultural systems and the development of constructs for cross-cultural sensitivity and analysis.

7.2 Courses approved as Western Cultures courses should provide deepened understanding and appreciation of significant aspects of the cultural tradition evolved from the confluence of Greek and Roman philosophical thought and European religious traditions (i.e., the cultural traditions associated with European and North American countries).

7.3 Courses approved for the Non-Western Cultures category (including U.S. Minority cultures) should provide deepened understanding and appreciation of significant aspects of cultural traditions originating outside the Western cultural tradition or outside the dominant cultural tradition of the United States.

7.4 Courses approved for the U.S. Minority Cultures category should provide deepened understanding and appreciation of significant aspects of the cultural tradition of a socially-significant, non-dominant population of the United States. Courses that focus on a racial minority should appropriately and substantially address the experiences, conditions, and perspectives of that population. Courses that focus on socially-significant, non-racial minority identities (for example, sexuality, gender, religion, and disability) or broadly on diversity, inequality, or discrimination should significantly represent the experiences of U.S. racial minority populations.

7.5 Departments may also wish to develop courses that treat western and non-western cultures comparatively in the same course. Such courses will count in the Western Cultures category.

7.6 In some instances, it will be difficult to ascertain whether cultures are Western or non-Western from purely geographical or group designations (e.g., Latin America or Middle East), and appropriate categorization will depend upon the emphasis of the particular course. Departments shall be responsible for designating and providing the rationale for proposed categorizations.
8. Perspectives on Women and Gender

The Senate has directed that material drawn from the scholarship in the various fields of inquiry on the significance of women and gender be made an integral part of a substantial number of General Education courses. Attention to such materials is important both to enhance students’ awareness of the contributions made by women in scientific, artistic, political, economic, and intellectual arenas and to further understanding of the changing and dynamic nature of gender roles and relationships in contemporary society.

8.1 The general guidelines detailed above applying to all General Education courses state that “where appropriate, General Education courses should help students become familiar with scholarship on the significance of women and gender. Material drawn from this scholarship should be an integral part of a substantial number of General Education courses.” Departments must take special care to assure that appropriate attention is given to scholarship concerning women and gender issues in courses proposed for General Education approval.

8.2 Departments are also encouraged to develop courses for General Education credit that focus directly upon women and gender issues. Courses should be available that explore such issues from a variety of perspectives (historical, economic, social, cultural, etc.).

8.3 As a means of expanding students’ exposure to the contribution of women in the various disciplines, faculty proposing courses should give attention to assuring that appropriate scholarship by women is included in courses proposed for General Education credit.

8.4 As was noted in the general guidelines above, the General Education Board will work with departments, colleges, and campus administration to assure that there are adequate instructional development vehicles (workshops, seminars, course development funds, etc.) to aid the faculty in integrating the significant and increasingly visible scholarship about women and gender into General Education courses.