

Why General Education

General Education Program and Requirements



General Education classes are a kind of 'free ticket' to the bigger world; most young people--of any generation of any geographical location--grow up in a relatively enclosed physical and cultural space: their family and community. It's normal and not a bad thing in itself. But growing up means growing outwardly as well as internally.

It is unlikely that you can predict exactly the course your life will take. To have the chance to spend several years in an intense and rich environment where ideas, information, understandings, questions, experiences and 'quests' are shared, undertaken, reflected upon and constructed gives university students the chance to make deeper, more interesting, and more personally-meaningful connections with many of the intriguing unknowns of the world.

Travel is the common currency of youth; young people all want to get away from home, see the world, learn about things that are unfamiliar. A gen ed class is (while not literally free) a travel pass to worlds that lie beyond. We never quite know what changes 'making a trip' will bring to our lives: a gen ed class is a great chance to make a possibly life-changing expedition with little expense, risk or inconvenience. (Deryn Verity – Applied Linguistics)

Writing and Speaking

The ability to express thoughts effectively and gracefully is an essential skill. Any discovery, any insight, any expressive work exists in the world of discourse. Writing and speaking courses aim to teach students to articulate their own discoveries and insights and also to speak and write about those of others. The acts of writing and speaking require critical inquiry and systematic thought, so the study and practice of speaking and writing develop a well-trained intellect. Writing and speaking are an expressive dimension of human interaction, and they allow us to live together in society. Learning to speak and write well is empowering, and as the university works to develop tomorrow's leaders, they must be taught to communicate effectively, competently, and artfully. Writing and speaking courses teach students the art and craft of language so that its use becomes purposeful, elegant, controlled, and precise. Learning to communicate well makes our students better thinkers, better employees, better neighbors, better citizens, and even better parents. Language is the glue that holds the world together, but it is also the nitre that can blow it all apart. Speaking and writing

courses teach students to handle this most powerful substance. (Susan Johnston Graf - Mont Alto)

Quantification

We make personal decisions based on numbers every day - caloric intake, comparing costs/expenses, critically interpreting information in the news. Similarly, every organization makes decisions based on numbers; our ability to contribute to those decisions with confidence will help each of us succeed no matter what the role is. Having the skills and confidence to interpret and communicate mathematical and numerical information will help to meet the demands of modern life, as well as excel in professional situations.

Arts

The Arts are a fundamental expression of humanity – the human experience has been expressed through the Arts throughout history, and the study of the Arts provides insight into human experience through time. Because the Arts often explore the emotional and imaginative dimension of that experience, they provide an important record of the impact of events on societies and individuals, and the enduring values of a culture. A study of the Arts is a critical component of a college education because it establishes context and continuity for our own cultural experience.

A study of the *practice* of the Arts requires the student to develop an expressive form that integrates concept, method, and material to express original thought and emotional experience. This is a critical component of education because it fosters critical thinking, problem solving, and communication, as well as risk-taking, exploration, and experimentation – all highly valued skills in many disciplines and professions.

As professions become more dynamic and career paths less predictable, the ability to place information into context through critical thinking and the ability to develop solutions to complex problems become essential skills for a resilient workforce. Creative practice prepares students of all disciplines to be resourceful in the application of their knowledge towards complex problem solving, and to communicate that knowledge in a variety of forms. (Catherine Rios – Harrisburg)

Humanities

Penn State University requires students to study subjects such as literature, philosophy, religion, and history—subjects broadly termed “general humanities”—because these disciplines present us to ourselves. They show us where humans come from, where we have been, what we have thought, what we have done, how we have been wise, and how we have been unbelievably short-sighted and stupid. These are important considerations for working in complex cultural and social environments. It is for this reason that the university has seen fit to require the study of such topics in order for a student to earn a degree. It is humanities courses that provide a forum for students to think about being human beings, to think about what it even means to think about being human. Such courses lead to reflection, both personally and culturally. Ideally, in a humanities course students are challenged to consider who they are, what they believe, and how they came to believe as they do. Humanities courses work to develop the intellect of the student through the study of conscience

Humanities courses work to develop the intellect of the student through the study of conscience, ethics, emotions, communication, motivation, logic, and so much more because these elements are the raw materials of the humanities. Students can learn about what it means to be human by studying both the inspiring and beautiful as well as the chaotic and destructive expressions of human existence. Humanities courses are crucial because they often tackle the messy, non-quantifiable, ineffable substance that constitutes the entirety of human experience. Such study nudges students to think globally, and it helps them to stand outside themselves and survey their experiences, their cultures, and their species in the hope that doing so will make them better citizens of the world. (Susan Johnston Graf, Mont Alto, English)

Health and Wellness

General education in health and wellness has the potential to have a profound and lifelong impact on the student and their families. We have the opportunity to challenge misconceptions, change habits, and influence decision making in ways that can help students build healthy adult lives. General education in health and wellness can give students the tools to evaluate health information to help them discern useful, accurate information from misinformation, advertising, or other misleading information. That capability can have an impact on health behaviors beyond the content presented in the classroom. This foundation has the potential to influence not only our students, but their families and future generations. We have the opportunity to help students become early adopters of health protective behaviors and help make up for early life inequities. As is the case with all of general education, health and wellness education has the potential to level the playing field for all of our students, giving students who have not had access to the same opportunities and information early in life the same chance at success as their more affluent peers. (Shelli Stine, HHD)

Social and Behavioral Sciences

The social sciences add an important element to understanding the world. They combine an interest in people and human behavior with a methodical process of discovery and the rigor of science. In this way, social science disciplines serve as an intellectual link between the humanities and the natural sciences. Skills learned in sociology or other social sciences, such as critical and analytical thinking, can supplement skills learned in other disciplines and thus benefit a student in almost any future career. Further, the study of social sciences shows students how human behavior, rather than being random or entirely subjective, is patterned and is in some respects predictable. In my experience as a sociologist, one of the most valuable things about sociology courses is seeing students come to better understand the delicate balance between social structure and human agency. In other words, while all of us have “free will,” we make our choices in a social context of opportunities, resources, values and strategies that shape and constrain those choices. This is usually the most challenging but also valuable thing to teach students in social science courses – because for many their sense of self is tied with absolute individualism, personal choice, and meritocracy. It can be difficult for students to realize that as members of a larger society, we are all interdependent. In other words, the learning objective is help students to appreciate that society is not external to them. At the same time, many students hope to enter a career that helps to better

society in some way, often related to addressing or even solving a particular social problem (such as a career in law enforcement to combat the problem of crime). Through a basic education in the social sciences, students learn that that an understanding of the patterned nature of human behavior is a necessary component of social policy and to solving social problems in general. On a personal level, the study of social sciences can help students become more informed, self-aware, and engaged citizens. More importantly, though it could be unsettling at first, coming to terms with the fact that they are but one person in a world full of people can help students see their individuality in a broader context where they are at once responsible for their own well-being and that of others, as part of a local as well as a global community. (Karyn McKinney- Altoona)

Natural Sciences

It behooves us to become informed and critical consumers of scientific and technical info in our increasingly technological world. Citizens of the world need to be able to make decisions based on evidence so that they can avoid being taken advantage of as credulous dupes. "The first principle is that you must not fool yourself — and you are the easiest person to fool." -Richard Feynman, [Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!](#)

Moreover, students need to be prepared for jobs that don't exist yet. It is important they have appreciation for and understanding that modern life doesn't exist without scientific and technological achievement. They need to learn to learn, becoming more facile learners in areas outside of their comfort zones, so they are prepared to master whatever comes next. (Julia Kregenow, College of Science)