

General Education Requirements

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I. Introduction

General education is the foundation of a college education, providing students with the core literacies, critical thinking, and competencies that will enable their success in subsequent coursework and prepare them for lifelong learning. At an access institution like UWM, general education is critical to helping students prepare for their major coursework and for college education more generally.

Effective general education programs are designed to achieve specific, measurable outcomes that ensure that students have college-level baseline skills in communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and cultural understanding that will make them successful in subsequent coursework and as well-rounded citizens. Universities of Wisconsin institutions share a commitment to liberal education, as defined by the American Association of Colleges and Universities: “Liberal education is a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement.” To that end, the Universities of Wisconsin and UWM specify key learning outcomes that students should be able to demonstrate at graduation, and general education provides critical foundations to this work:

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World** including breadth of knowledge and the ability to think beyond one’s discipline, major, or area of concentration. This knowledge can be gained through the study of the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, and social sciences.
- **Critical and Creative Thinking Skills** including inquiry, problem solving, and higher order qualitative and quantitative reasoning.
- **Effective Communication Skills** including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and information literacy.
- **Intercultural Knowledge and Competence** including the ability to interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to lead or contribute support to those who lead; and to empathize with and understand those who are different than they are.
- **Individual, Social, and Environmental Responsibility** including civic knowledge and engagement (both local and global), ethical reasoning, and action.

General education provides a broad body of knowledge as context for specialization, and the general education emphasis on conceptual inquiry leads students to more comprehensive views of their specialties. In this way, students learn to relate particular tasks to general areas and thus acquire sufficient agility of mind and mobility of skills to move from problem to problem as knowledge develops.

II. General Education Requirements

The General Education Requirements for UWM include two major requirement categories, the first designed to assure basic student competencies, and the second designed to provide a broad body of

knowledge as a context for specialization. The first set of requirements, competency requirements, includes the general areas of English composition, mathematics, and languages other than English. The second set of requirements, distribution requirements, includes four general “areas of inquiry” aligned with the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as well two additional areas of inquiry, one aligned with health and wellness, and the other with global and intercultural engagement.

A. Competency Requirements

1. Oral and Written Communication (OWC) Competency

The oral and written communication requirement ensures that students will be creative, flexible, and effective communicators, whether speaking or writing, and has two parts – Part A and Part B.

- a. OWC-Part A is satisfied by either:
 - i. earning a grade of C or higher in English 102 or an equivalent course; or
 - ii. a suitable score on the UW System English Placement Test (or another appropriate test, as determined by the English Department).
- b. OWC-Part B is satisfied by completing an approved advanced course with a significant written or oral communication component by students who have completed the Part A requirement.

Courses that count toward the Part B requirement may be offered in a variety of disciplines and students are encouraged to choose the course that matches their interests and helps them meet the requirements of their degrees.

It is recommended that students complete OWC-Part A in the first year of their study.

2. Quantitative Literacy (QL) Competency

The Quantitative Literacy requirement ensures that students will have the ability to evaluate, construct, and communicate arguments using quantitative methods and formal reasoning. The requirements are in two parts – Part A and Part B.

- a. QL-Part A is satisfied by any of the following:
 - i. a minimum of 2.5 credits with a grade of C or higher in any 100-level Math course (excluding 194 and 199) or Math/Philos 111; or
 - ii. a placement level of 30 or higher on the Mathematics Placement Test (or another appropriate test, as determined by the Mathematical Sciences Department).

QL-Part A skills must be broad-based in order that they have a positive impact on the readiness of students to take a QL-B course in a variety of disciplines. It is recommended that students complete the QL-A requirement within the first 60 credits earned.

- b. The QL-Part B requirement is satisfied by completing at least one QL-B course (at least three credits) as decided by the major. To be certified as a QL-B course, a course must make significant use of quantitative tools in the context of the other course material and formally assess for proficiency in applying these quantitative tools. In general, it is expected that a QL-A course is a prerequisite for a QL-B course. However, a course with a QL-A course as a prerequisite is not by definition considered QL-B.

3. Language Requirement

Based on the UWM mission's commitment to global and intercultural engagement, UWM requires that students demonstrate competency in a language other than English equivalent to completion of one year of college-level instruction.

Completion of the language requirement can be demonstrated by satisfying one of the following options:

- a. Prior to enrollment at UWM, complete with a passing grade at least the second year of high school-level instruction in a single language other than English; or
- b. complete the second semester or higher of college level instruction in a language other than English with a passing grade; or
- c. demonstrate ability at the level of completion of the second semester or higher of college level language other than English by means of a satisfactory score on an approved proficiency, departmental, or other appropriate examination; or
- d. document satisfactory completion of the equivalent of two years of study at a secondary institution or two semesters of study at a post-secondary institution where the language of instruction is other than English; or
- e. satisfy the APCC-approved alternative GER Language Requirement, if any, stipulated by the student's particular degree program.

B. Distribution Requirements

Students must earn three credits in each of the six distribution areas, for a total of 18 credits. The cultural diversity and laboratory or fieldwork components may be satisfied within these 18 credits.

1. Criteria for General Education Courses

Courses eligible to be designated for inclusion in the general education distribution areas must:

- a. meet the criteria described in detail in Appendix A. These criteria include requirements that courses must be aimed at a general audience, help students transition to higher level classes, be supported by co-curricular structures, and be enhanced with high-impact practices;
- b. not have prerequisites, except for: 1) courses that may require prior completion of a Quantitative Literacy–Part A (QL-Part A) or Oral and Written Communication–Part A (OWC–Part A) course; 2) courses that have as prerequisites other GER courses in the

same distribution area; 3) Honors College GER courses that have as prerequisites other GER courses, which may be in different distribution areas.

2. General Education Courses Required by Programs

- a. Programs may not compel students to take specific general education courses in addition to courses required by the major; students should be able to complete the degree within the minimum number of required credits regardless of which general education courses they choose. However, general education courses can be required within a major, and can simultaneously fulfill both general education and major requirements.

3. Distribution Areas

The first four distribution areas correspond with the four traditional disciplinary divisions of the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. The remaining two distribution areas are more disciplinarily diverse and may include courses from a wider range of disciplines. A given course may appear in only one distribution area.

- a. **Engaging With Creative and Artistic Expression**
Courses in this area focus on the history, philosophy, theory, or practice of the creative, expressive, and interpretive arts and provide students insight into the skills and disciplines involved in the creative arts. Students will gain an understanding of the creative process and the ways that creative thinking associated with the arts can be more broadly applicable.
- b. **Understanding Ideas, Languages and Cultures**
Courses in this area focus on the study of human thought, history, language, and artistic expression, fostering a deeper understanding of our shared human experience. Students will enhance their abilities to engage with multifaceted ideas and develop effective communication skills to articulate complex concepts.
- c. **Understanding the Natural World**
Courses in this area explore the natural world and its processes, as well as how scientific endeavors affect our interaction with the natural world. Students will learn how scientists advance our understanding of the world through investigation, experimentation, and/or innovation. They will gain an understanding of how scientific inquiry impacts their lives, now and in the future. Courses may contain an experimental component.
- d. **Understanding Individuals, Groups, and Societies**
Courses in this area investigate human behavior, society, culture, and values of the past and present. Students will develop the ability to assess diverse and substantial artifacts of human knowledge, and to think critically about cultural traditions, social organizations, and institutions.
- e. **Fostering Health and Well-Being**
Courses in this area investigate physical and mental health and well-being among individuals or populations, including social and environmental determinants of health. Students will explore scientific, practical, or experiential aspects of health and well-being across levels of influence including individual, interpersonal, environmental,

cultural, or societal. Courses will use real-world applications to develop health and well-being literacy and foster skills in critical thinking and problem-solving.

f. Exploring Global Impacts and Innovations

Courses in this area invite students to investigate the relationships between themselves, the environment, and the global society. Courses in this area incorporate the individual, social, civic, and environmental responsibilities of being a citizen in a global world by providing the intellectual tools for engaging ethically as members of society.

4. Cultural Diversity Requirement

Students must take one course of at least three credits in any distribution area selected from a list of approved courses that satisfy the cultural diversity requirement.

5. Laboratory or Fieldwork Requirement

Students must take one course of at least three credits that includes a laboratory or fieldwork requirement; that course may be selected from any of the areas of inquiry, from a list of approved courses. For the purposes of the general education requirement, a course that requires enrollment in a separate laboratory or fieldwork course will count the total number of credits in both as a single course. A course may count towards the laboratory or field requirement if it has 1) a significant, scheduled component that is structured to illustrate the generation, testing, and interpretation of data and the application of concepts and knowledge to the solution of problems, or 2) a significant component of practical, applied, or other work that takes a student outside the classroom into another setting.

III. Procedural Matters

The following recommendations relate to the implementation and administration of general education requirements.

A. Governance and Administration

1. The Academic Program and Curriculum Committee (APCC) shall establish policy in general education. This responsibility includes: approving all courses to be included in or removed from the distribution requirements; defining the cultural diversity requirement and approving all courses to be included in or removed from the requirement; approving courses for inclusion in or removal from the laboratory or fieldwork course requirement; approving all competency examinations and the setting of minimum scores; establishing policies pertaining to student appeals; monitoring of the academic impact of the requirements; determining other necessary curricular matters not specified in this policy.
2. The faculty of an individual school or college may request exemption from portions of the general education requirements for one or more of its programs. Such requests should be addressed to the APCC and may be based on such grounds as excessive credit burden on majors, conflict with accreditation standards in the profession, or other academic grounds. Decisions of the APCC may be appealed to the Faculty Senate.
3. Individual student compliance will be monitored in the same manner as compliance with other curricular requirements, e.g. by college advisory staff and by the Office of the Registrar.
4. The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs shall manage the regular operations of the general education requirements, with the assistance of the Office of the Registrar and

the separate schools or colleges, in accordance with present procedures. Academic Affairs will maintain and publish lists of approved courses; ensure the regular assessment of general education courses; advise schools and colleges and the APCC on student demand and appropriate capacity; monitor the overall general education array for efficiency and student success, and advise schools and colleges and the APCC accordingly.

5. In order to maintain consistency and efficiency across the general education curriculum, the member appointed to the APCC by the Office of Academic Affairs, as specified in the APCC charter, will advise the committee on matters related to general education, recommend courses to be added or removed from the general education requirements, and inform the committee as needed about overall GER efficiency and student success.

B. Admission Requirements

The APCC shall work with the Admissions and Records Policy Committee to review admissions standards in relation to general education requirements.

C. Registration, Records, and Class Standing

The Faculty Senate shall establish a single set of rules for advancement of class standing in all undergraduate schools and colleges. (See Faculty Document No. 3394).

D. Effective Date

1. These revised requirements will apply to all new students entering the institution beginning in fall 2026.

Appendix A: Criteria for General Education Courses in the Distribution Areas

General Education is at the core of the undergraduate experience, building essential critical thinking and communication skills, increasing understanding of diverse social and cultural contexts, and defining a university-educated citizen. General education supports life-planning and provides a foundation for success and growth at the university as well as for careers, society, and culture. General education also prepares students with a foundation for growth and flexibility after graduation; as professions become more dynamic and career paths less predictable, the ability to place information into context through critical thinking, develop solutions to complex problems, and make ethical decisions become essential skills for a resilient society. Well-designed general education programs are also recruiting and retention tools that convey to students and faculty the coherence and value of the many possible degree and career paths at the university.

To those ends, general education courses should strive toward four basic goals:

- **Build a Strong, Broad Foundation** of knowledge and skill needed to lead fulfilled, productive, and ethical lives.
- **Facilitate Transformative Exploration** and widen learning to foster intellectual curiosity, critical and creative thinking, and cultural understanding.
- **Support Integrative and Connected Learning** to synthesize and adapt knowledge from different perspectives and branches of learning.
- **Develop Adaptive Strategies, Practices, and Abilities** for solving problems and addressing issues affecting society in the present and future.

To meet these goals, UWM general education courses should meet the following criteria. We anticipate that some of our instructors will require training and assistance in re-developing their courses and will work with CETL to develop appropriate mechanisms. GER courses must:

- **Align with the learning outcomes of the relevant Area of Inquiry.** Those outcomes further align with UW System shared learning goals.
- **Fit within the overall array of the Area of Inquiry.** Each Area of Inquiry, coordinated by the APCC, should offer the appropriate capacity to meet student demand and programmatic needs without creating excess capacity across campus. This stabilizes the schedule of classes and helps departments plan assignments and course sequences.
- **Be assessed, in conjunction with the Office of Assessment.** Instructors establish measures of learning outcomes; these measures are built into the course and are easily extracted for analysis and preparation of course assessments (not linked to individual students). These assessments document course activities that prepare students to meet learning outcomes, which are general measures of thinking, communication, and comprehension that define college-educated citizens.
- **Align capacity with pedagogical goals.** Optimal course size should be driven by course content, primary activities, and pedagogy. Courses should identify and explain why they are best suited for small (25 or less), medium (up to 50), or large (>50) classes. This aids in schedule development and setting departmental and campus priorities.
- **Include high-impact practices. The syllabus should contain a** transparent and recognizable presence of appropriate High Impact Practice Quality Features. The eight features include requirements for sustained effort, public demonstrations of competence, higher level complexity, frequent feedback, integration and reflection, diverse encounters, interaction, and real-world applications.
- **Incorporate accessibility, inclusivity, and equity-mindedness.** Course design, syllabus and policies, messaging, and assignment design embrace universal design practices, accommodating the needs of all learners and helping all students learn how to learn.

- **Provide support beyond the classroom.** Student success data strongly suggests that students who engage with activities like tutoring and supplemental instruction are more successful, even when accounting for prior preparation. Each course proposal should include a plan for how students can receive additional support; this can serve to help students succeed in the course and to build habits for future courses.
- **Provide a plan for sustainability.** How will the course maintain quality and improvement across time and multiple instructors?

All courses should incorporate an introduction to relevant systems and technologies in use at UWM, encourage student engagement and belongingness, build community, and connect with student support offices.