

9.3

The institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the undergraduate level that:

- (a) is based on a coherent rationale.**
- (b) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree program. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent.**
- (c) ensures breadth of knowledge. These credit hours include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. These courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. (*General education requirements*) [CR]**

Rationale and Notes

General education is an integral component of an undergraduate degree program through which students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge. This Core Requirement establishes four key principles regarding the general education component of undergraduate degree programs:

- The General education component is based on a coherent rationale.
- General education courses are college level.
- In order to promote intellectual inquiry, general education courses present a breadth of knowledge, not focusing on skills, techniques, and procedures specific to the student's occupation or profession, and are drawn from specific academic areas.
- The general education component constitutes a minimum number of semester hours, or its equivalent, and comprises a substantial component of each undergraduate degree.

It is essential to understand the general education component of the degree program within the context of the institution's mission and within the expectations of a college-level institution. Through general education, students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge: humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences and mathematics. Courses in each of these areas introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and effective learning opportunities for each student. Such courses may also include interdisciplinary studies. It is important, however, that courses selected by students as "general education" do not focus on skills, techniques, and procedures specific to that student's occupation or profession.

The SACSCOC Executive Council adopted the following interpretation in February 2010:

Courses in basic composition that do not contain a literature component, courses in oral communication, and introductory foreign language courses are skill courses and not pure humanities courses. Therefore, for purposes of meeting this standard, none of the above may be the one course designated to fulfill the humanities/fine arts requirement in [this standard].

Note that this interpretation does not preclude the mentioned courses from being part of general education requirements beyond the required courses in the three specifically mentioned areas; while they are “skill courses,” these are not skills specific to a particular occupation or profession. Courses that would not be acceptable as meeting this standard are courses such as “dosage calculations” (specific to occupations) or most upper-level courses with multiple prerequisites (lack breadth of knowledge).

The rationale undergirding the courses that meet general education requirements is often published in institutional documents such as the catalog. It is important that institutions have criteria for evaluating courses for inclusion in the core curriculum, both to maintain adherence to the underlying rationale and to ensure the expected breadth of knowledge.

NOTES

In its publications, an institution is obligated to clearly designate the specific general education courses included in the three areas of knowledge: humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences and mathematics. Publications should clearly indicate or direct students in their options for selecting general education courses and, in particular, those considered pure humanities/fine arts that are in accord with the interpretation above. Finally, the institution should indicate how it ensures that all students follow the pathway for selecting general education courses as described in its publications.

In its assessment of institutions, the SACSCOC review committee will specifically evaluate whether each of the three subparts in the standard have been addressed. This review should specifically determine (with narrative supporting) its findings under part (c), whether credit hours that constitute the general education program at an institution are (1) drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics; (2) are consistent with the Executive Council’s interpretation cited above; and (3) include courses that do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a student’s particular occupation or profession.

Questions to Consider

- Does the institution have a formal guideline or policy that establishes a rationale for its general education requirements?
- How does the institution ensure that the student’s breadth of knowledge acquired through the general education component of the degree program is sufficient and appropriate to its mission?

- What measures does the institution use to ensure that general education represents a substantial component of the undergraduate degree program?
- What process is used to ensure that courses students may take to fulfill general requirements support the goals of the general education component of the degree program?
- What criteria does the institution use to ensure that the desired general education outcomes meet college-level standards?
- Even if there is some variation in general education requirements across some majors, do all undergraduate degree programs include at least one course from the three required areas of study, as well as the requisite total hours?
- Does the institution designate in its publications those general education courses that are considered pure humanities/fine arts in accord with the interpretation above? How has the institution validated that the courses that the institution designates are in accord with the standard?
- Are printed materials describing general education requirements clear as to how a student can meet the requirements?
- How does the institution ensure that all students follow the pathway for selecting general education courses as described in its publications?
- How does the general education program apply to transfer students, distance and correspondence education programs, or competency-based programs?

Sample Documentation

- Description of and rationale for general education, including expected student learning outcomes.
- Publications that consistently describe the general education requirements.
- Explanation of the process used to review or change how students meet general education requirements.
- If requirements vary by major or degree, documentation that the standard is met for all degree-seeking students.
- Specific information as to how general education requirements are met for transfer students as well as students in competency-based, direct assessment programs.
- An explanation (and examples) of how completion of general education requirements is tracked and verified.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 8.2.b (*Student outcomes: general education*)

Standard 9.7 (*Program requirements*)