

**Proposal for Revisions
to the
General Education Program**

Final Version

March 1998

The General Education Subcommittee

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**PROPOSAL FOR REVISIONS TO
THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

THE REVIEW OF GENERAL EDUCATION

The GES believes that the Proposal for Revisions to the General Education Program is ready to be considered by the GVSU's governance structure. We have made an extraordinary effort to involve faculty in the development of this proposal, and this final version represents the collective efforts and thoughts of those who chose to participate in the process of reviewing and revising General Education.

The Review Process

In response to an earlier request from President Lubbers, the General Education Subcommittee began a formal review of the General Education Program in September of 1996. We used material from the following sources: faculty forums; a 1995 faculty survey; peer group assessments of all categories; student focus groups; recommendations from several task forces; information about General Education Programs at approximately twenty other universities; the March 1994 General Education issue of the Grand Valley Review; the Association of American Colleges 1994 Strong Foundations Report; and information from the Academy for General and Liberal Studies meetings (AGLS).

The General Education Subcommittee made it a priority to keep faculty informed as the review advanced and to invite faculty to participate in the discussion and decisions about how to improve our General Education Program. In this spirit, we took the following actions:

- 1) During the initial review year, the Coordinator wrote four updates (October, 1996; December, 1996; February, 1997; April, 1997) to faculty detailing the questions we were asking and our thoughts about the issues. Each communication asked faculty to give us feedback.
- 2) During the first review year, the Coordinator and/or the Chair of GES met with every academic dean, with a number of unit heads, and with some individual faculty members to gather opinions and solicit advice. This feedback was part of the information we used to prepare the initial proposal for revisions.
- 3) The Coordinator and the Chair met with Provost Niemeyer and President Lubbers two times to discuss our plans and to get their input.
- 4) The Coordinator and the Chair met with the University Curriculum Committee several times to keep them informed and to solicit feedback.

- 5) During the summer of 1997, the Coordinator and the Chair met with Bob Fletcher, Lynn Blue, Bill Eiola, and Bonnie Ulmer to discuss the impact of the proposed program on transfer students and the MACRAO agreement.
- 6) The Coordinator, the Chair, and GES representatives presented and distributed our developing proposal to every division at least once. Most of these meetings occurred in April and September of 1997.
- 7) The GES distributed an initial Proposal for Revisions to all faculty in September of 1997. A cover letter from the Provost invited units, divisions, and programs to send written feedback to the GES. We compiled all of the responses we received, posted them on the General Education Bulletin Board, and distributed copies of them at the first two faculty forums. The Bulletin Board was also used by individuals who wished to make statements or share ideas.
- 8) During the second year of the review process, the GES held five faculty forums (October, November and December of 1997; January and February of 1998). We asked interested faculty members from different divisions to moderate the forums.
- 9) Based on the written feedback we received, input from the divisions to their GES representatives, and the discussions that occurred at the first three faculty forums, we modified the proposal. The second version of the Proposal for Revisions was distributed to all faculty in January, 1988.
- 10) In January of 1988 the Coordinator and the Chair met with the Student Senate to answer questions and receive feedback.
- 11) We continued to receive feedback from governance committees within divisions. We used this information together with the discussion that occurred at the last two forums to produce this third and final Proposal for Revisions to the General Education Program.

HOW THE PROPOSED PROGRAM IMPROVES GENERAL EDUCATION

During the course of its review, the GES identified six major areas of weakness in our current program. They are each detailed below, together with a description of how the proposed program corrects these deficiencies.

1) *The current Program lacks an identifiable mission statement; the proposed program incorporates a philosophy and a mission statement that address the purposes of General Education.*

It seemed obvious to the GES that our General Education Program should have a mission statement that addresses the purpose of general education at our university. The proposed version of the mission statement largely evolved out of discussions that occurred in the three Fall 97 faculty forums.

We also looked at the 1995 responses to the Faculty Survey on General Education. There was quite a bit of agreement across units; a sample of responses from units about the purposes of general education follows:

- "to equip students for lifelong learning; to help students engage in the common discourse; and, to emphasize issues of values" (School of Communications)
- "make students aware of the major issues confronting humanity" (Modern Languages)
- "produce an enlightened electorate and a responsible citizenry" (Anthro/Soc/Geo)
- "to acquire a generalized knowledge and familiarity with all of the basic areas of human thought and endeavor" (Mathematics and Statistics)

We believe the proposed mission statement reflects the common thoughts of the faculty about the purposes of general education.

2) *The current Program has no goals that describe what General Education tries to accomplish; the proposed program has goals that address both knowledge and skills.*

The original program that was approved by faculty governance contained no program objectives. Nine of the ten peer groups addressed the need to teach both knowledge and skills. The strongest arguments were made by peer groups from the Physical Sciences, the Life Sciences, the History of Western Civilization, and Values and Ideas. The peer group reviewing All College C stated that "content in and of itself is of little use without the existence of a vessel in which to place it" and proposed that all courses in their category must teach critical thinking and writing. The peer group from All College D stated that "it is essential that writing be recognized as a significant part of courses in this category."

Units responding to the 1995 survey also indicated that they thought the General Education Program should teach both knowledge and skills. The need to teach specific skills was mentioned by Anthro/Soc/Geo, Art & Design, Communications, Economics, Education, History, Library, Mathematics & Statistics, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology, and Public Administration. The skills most commonly called for, in descending order, were critical thinking, writing, media literacy, and public speaking.

In addition to this internal feedback, we found that schools represented at the AGLS meetings are moving towards goals based on skills and learning rather than only content objectives.

In response to the above mentioned input, we developed program goals that address both content and skills. They appear on pages 13 and 14. Faculty at the December 1997 forum approved these goals.

3) *The current Program has become fragmented; the factors that make it a coherent program need to be specified and monitored. The proposed program connects the categories and creates a more unified undergraduate learning experience.*

President Lubbers' concern that our program is "too much of a potpourri" prompted him to request a review of the General Education Program on November 13, 1991.

Units responding to the 1995 survey about General Education echoed this concern. Units that identified fragmentation and lack of integration as a program weakness included Art & Design, Music, English, History, Philosophy, Modern Languages, Education, Psychology, Public Administration, Anthropology/Sociology/Geography, and Geology. A sampling of their comments includes:

- "The major weakness of the current program is a severe lack of connective tissue and general purpose....As a result gen ed is looked upon as merely checking off boxes...." (Art & Design).
- Students lack "an awareness of the often obscured interdependence among disciplines. The same problem of unity arises from the standpoint of the faculty - instructors have little awareness of the theme or specific content of courses in departments other than their own." (Philosophy)
- "We would like to see a more coherent interdisciplinary approach" (Modern Languages)
- "Major weaknesses include...lack of integrated course sequences." (Psychology)
- "Discrete courses do little to explore the purpose of helping students understand or think critically about the differences or the connections between fields or disciplines..." (Public Administration)

The student focus groups confirmed that General Education is seen as a list of course requirements, not a coherent program.

The proposed program creates coherence in several ways. Each of the Foundation Categories addresses the ways in which the area of study creates and evaluates knowledge. All of the categories help students become more proficient in essential skills. The upper-level classes build on the knowledge obtained in the Foundation Categories. The Thematic Group fosters integration by looking at an idea from three different perspectives. The cultural requirements are more complete, encompassing both world and U.S. perspectives.

4) *The current program lacks an upper-level component; the proposed program requires two upper-level courses.*

Nearly every unit responding to the 1995/96 survey on General Education supported the inclusion of an upper-level component. Of all the units and divisions that responded to our initial proposal, only two units questioned the need for an upper-level requirement.

The inclusion of an upper-level component strengthens our commitment to general education as a foundation for lifelong learning. This change assures that students will do some advanced work outside their majors, and allows them to bring greater maturity and more sophisticated perspectives to their general learning.

One of the greatest deficiencies of our current program is that it is strictly menu-driven, i.e., there is no building on or integrating of different courses. An upper-level requirement will allow students to build on the basic skills and concepts they acquired in their foundation courses. It helps make general education a program rather than a group of courses.

5) *The distinctions between the Divisional Categories and the All-College Categories have become blurred. Two of the All-College categories are not functioning as All-College. Through the revised categories and the addition of a Thematic Group, the proposed program better realizes the original GVSU General Education intent of introducing students to basic areas of knowledge and then helping them integrate this knowledge across subjects.*

This problem was pointed out by Professor Hoitenga in the General Education issue of the *Grand Valley Review* (March, 1994). In addition, if one reads the original descriptions of what the Divisional and the All-College Categories were intended to do, it becomes obvious that we have failed to carry forth the vision of General Education that was approved by the faculty governance system in 1985.

The General Education Booklet (pg. 7) explains that the Divisional Categories are based in the traditional liberal arts disciplines and "provide an introduction to a particular area of study." The All-College Categories consist of "broad areas of inquiry and are different from discipline-based instruction in that their content is overarching, cross-cutting, and integrative."

The proposed program preserves and strengthens this distinction. Mathematics and History (currently All-College A and C) have been moved to the Foundation Categories because they are introductions to basic areas of study. The All-College Categories have been replaced with the Thematic Group; this approach will help students integrate ideas much better than maintaining the discrete categories in our current structure.

6) *The current descriptions and objectives of the categories are vague; the proposed program defines more specifically what the courses in each category are supposed to accomplish.*

Every Divisional and All-College Category has been assessed by a peer group at least once; some have been reviewed twice. Every peer groups has asked for a more specific rewrite of its category description and/or objectives. The peer groups from the three

Social Sciences Categories stated that "The goals of SS Gen Ed are not satisfactory. They are too general...." The peer group from Literature said the "existing characterization of A&H/B borders on gibberish." The peer group from All College B identified "the ambiguity of the category" as problematic.

The units and divisions involved in the Foundation Categories have defined the objectives for each category. In addition, the proposal drew on the reports of several task forces and peer groups to separate and more specifically define the objectives for the Cultural Emphasis requirements. These changes bring coherence to the categories and help ensure that students have a common experience regardless of which class they choose in any given category.

TRANSFER STUDENTS

Profile of Transfer Students:

In Fall of 1997, GVSU enrolled:

- 2520 first time college students
- 1411 transfer students

Of those 1411 transfer students,

- 617 came from a four year college
- 794 came from a two year college
- Historical data indicates that approximately 30% of our transfer students come to GVSU with 55 or more credit hours (junior status).

- Of the 794 transfer students who came from a two year college, 316 (8% of new admits) had a MACRAO agreement

The MACRAO Agreement

GVSU and Central Michigan University are the only two universities in the state who fully recognize the MACRAO agreement. If a student transfers to GVSU with a MACRAO, he/she has fulfilled all General Education requirements, but must still satisfy the basic skills courses of MTH 110 and ENG 305. The MACRAO consists of the following courses, which are completed at a community college:

- 6 credits in composition (equivalent to our ENG 097 and ENG 150);
- 8 credits in science (one must contain a lab; the other can be a math course equivalent to our MTH 097);
- 8 credits in social science, from two disciplines;
- 8 credits in arts and humanities, from two disciplines.

The GES recommends that if the new General Education Program is approved, students with a MACRAO be handled in the following way:

- the MACRAO will fulfill the Foundation Category requirements;
- the student will have to satisfy MTH 110 and ENG 305, and take an SWS (this is exactly the same as our current policy);
- the student will have to take two courses with the cultural designations, unless he/she has taken an obviously equivalent course(s) at the community college;
- the student will have to take the thematic group; one course, if appropriate, can be transferred in to satisfy a thematic group.

Transfer Students Without a MACRAO

The majority of our transfer students do not have a MACRAO agreement. Fulfillment of general education requirements has always been done by Dean Seeger on a course-by-course equivalency basis. This process would, of course, continue under the new program.

All foundation and cultural courses will be assessed on a course-by-course basis. One course, if appropriate, can be transferred to satisfy a thematic group. All transfers will therefore have to take at least two of the three thematic courses at GVSU. Because the majority of our transfer students do not come with any courses that satisfy our current All-College Categories, this will not add any net credit hours for most transfer students. Since two of the All-College Categories have been dropped from the General Education Program, students can take the thematic courses in their place.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW PROGRAM

The GES anticipates an implementation period of two years. The new program would therefore go into effect for all students, including transfers, in the Fall of 2000. Following is a broad overview of what we see as the necessary tasks.

The Foundation Categories

Because of the revised category definitions and objectives, divisions may want to move a few courses in or out of particular Foundation Categories. The GES will work with the divisions to determine what adjustments, if any, they want to the Foundation Categories. Any changes would then be forwarded to UCC for approval.

If the proposal passes this academic year, the GES will accept new course proposals and course changes for the Foundation Categories in Fall of 1998. We will not accept new course proposals for All-College B or All-College D. If the proposal is still under discussion, the GES will ask UCC for an extension of the moratorium on additions or changes to the General Education Program.

The Cultural Emphasis Requirements

A working group will be convened in March of 1998 to decide if the criteria for inclusion in the cultural emphasis designations need further specification. Membership in this group will consist of two faculty from SS, two from A&H, two from S&M, two from Seidman, and one from the professional schools. Participants for this group will be nominated by the dean of each division; the request for nominations was made on February 25th.

If the proposal passes, a standing General Education Culture Review Group will be elected for terms of three years by the faculty of their respective divisions. The committee will be in place for five years; at the end of the five years the need to continue the committee will be assessed by GES and UCC. Divisional representation will be the same as the working group. This Culture Review Group will report to and receive work from the General Education Subcommittee. Their primary tasks will be:

- reviewing the courses in All-College B; recommending which ones should receive a cultural designation
- the review of any additional classes that apply for the designations

The Thematic Groups

The GES believes that the development of the various themes needs to be a collective faculty effort. We want the faculty as a whole to identify and agree on an initial set of at least ten themes.

We would like to begin by inviting a speaker to our campus from one of the universities that uses themes. We would then proceed to a series of faculty forums to identify themes, the purpose and description of each theme, and the courses that could potentially be part of each theme. If the proposal is approved this year, we would like to hold a workshop at the annual fall semester teaching day to begin the process. After a set of themes has been identified, faculty who want to participate in a theme would then form a smaller group to work towards refining each theme and shepherding each one through the proposal and approval process.

It will not be necessary to develop all themes immediately. The thematic requirement will phase in gradually because most current students will probably stay under the old catalog. In the Fall of 2000, we will need enough themes to begin to immediately serve new transfer students with more than 25 credits (1,200-1,500 students). By the Fall of 2001, we need to have enough themes in place for approximately 4,000 students. The thematic requirement will continue to cover more students each year; in the Fall of 2009 all undergraduate students will have to meet the requirements of the new program.

Additional Implementation Tasks

The GES recommends that a scheduling component be incorporated into General Education. Someone needs to make sure that courses, particularly those in the themes, will be offered at a variety of times and locations.

The Coordinator is currently working with Dean Seeger to better train the facilitators of freshman orientation in the purpose and requirements of the General Education Program. They will also be working on an improved orientation for new faculty members.

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Philosophy of General Education

Ensuring that undergraduate students receive a broad general education has been a primary goal of colleges and universities since their inception. In this era of increasing specialization and growing demand for professional expertise, it is vital that we continue to emphasize the value of general learning. Grand Valley State University maintains that a complete education involves more than preparation for a particular career. A career occurs in the context of a life, and a sound general education helps one "make a life" as well as "make a living." The University therefore remains committed to assuring that all undergraduate students, regardless of academic major or intended profession, receive a broad education rooted in the arts and sciences.

The focus of our General Education Program is to provide students with an education that balances depth with breadth, the specialized with the general. The General Education Program helps students become literate in a sophisticated way in a number of disciplines, and it fosters their ability to make connections across various domains of knowledge. Such preparation will provide students with the general knowledge and skills necessary to participate intelligently in the discourses that shape local, national, professional and global communities.

Teaching in the liberal tradition is at the heart of Grand Valley's identity, and this focus is critical in our General Education Program. Liberal education transcends the acquisition of information; it goes beyond the factual to ask important evaluative and philosophical questions. Liberal learning holds the fundamental principles and suppositions of a body of knowledge up to inquiry, question, and discussion. It helps a person recognize the assumptions under which he/she operates and encourages the examination and questioning of those assumptions. Liberal learning begins in the General Education Program and continues through the more specialized studies comprising each student's major and minor areas of study.

GVSU is dedicated to making sure that our students, via their academic majors, become competent specialists in their fields of endeavor. An equally pressing priority is that our

graduates also possess the marks of a generally educated person -- that they will have acquired the broad knowledge and life skills that will allow them to be informed and thoughtful people. These ideals co-exist within our institution, and together they produce people who can contribute to their own well-being, their communities, their professions, and the world in which they live.

Mission of the General Education Program

The Grand Valley State University General Education Program provides a broad-based liberal education experience that fosters lifelong learning and informed citizenship. The program prepares students for intelligent participation in the public dialogues that consider the issues of humane living and responsible action in local, national, and global communities.

Goals of the General Education Program

The General Education Program consists of a liberal arts and sciences curriculum that teaches both the skills and the general body of knowledge needed for students to intelligently participate in public discourse. Mastery of critical content and the development of essential skills occurs concurrently in all General Education courses.

The structure of the General Education Program is designed to acquaint students with the following areas of knowledge:

1. The major areas of human investigation and accomplishment - the arts, the humanities, the mathematical sciences, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.

A generally educated person is able to understand a variety of disciplinary perspectives, their respective contributions to the growth of human knowledge, and the various approaches through which knowledge is generated, tested, and used.

2. An understanding of one's own culture and the cultures of others.

A generally educated person is able to comprehend and respond constructively to the world's diversity, a diversity manifested not only in ideas and ways of knowing but also in populations and cultures. As citizens of the United States, students should be familiar with our pluralistic heritage. As citizens of the world, students should be knowledgeable about cultures and perspectives different from their own.

3. The tradition of humane inquiry that informs moral and ethical choices.

A generally educated person is able to identify the values that shape his/her choices, assess the consequences of those choices, and understand alternate value perspectives. This enables one to make informed choices in light of ethical, moral, and practical concerns.

The pedagogy of the General Education Program helps students develop the following academic and life skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective writing and speaking.

A generally educated person has mastered the various forms of written and oral communication that permit full participation in a society and world dependent on the free interchange of ideas and information.

2. To think critically and creatively.

A generally educated person is able to think logically and creatively. Expressiveness, imagination, and originality are needed for innovation. Innovative ideas must be subjected to critical evaluation, which involves distinguishing information from judgment or assumption; evaluating evidence and the logic of arguments; identifying and assessing differing perspectives and assumptions; and reasoning systematically in support of arguments.

3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

A generally educated person is able to locate, gather, and process information from a variety of sources, and evaluate and use that information as the basis of informed judgments and intelligent decisions.

4. To integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives.

A generally educated person is able to correlate and synthesize facts, basic concepts, and disparate knowledge into a coherent and meaningful whole. Making sense of a variety of data and experiences allows one to address human concerns in a broader way than can be accomplished through any one discipline.

Characteristics of General Education Courses

The General Education Program provides students with a common experience that will give identity and coherence to the program. Therefore, courses in the General Education Program are characterized by the following:

- 1) They meet the content objectives of the category.
- 2) They help students develop four skills.

Each course in a Foundation Category and each course that has received a cultural designation will use methods that help students develop the first three skills (articulate expression, thinking, and information literacy). Articulate expression can be developed by giving students opportunities to either write or speak, Foundation and Cultural courses do not have to do both. Speaking and/or writing do not have to be a large part of each course; the methods chosen would be up to each instructor and/or unit. A course which uses essay questions, short answer exams, short writing assignments, journal entries, reporting experiment results, short presentations, debate, structured discussion, etc., would, we believe, contribute to developing the ability to be articulate. Of course, we would hope that some courses would choose to use more intensive methods.

Courses in the thematic groups will use methods that will help students become more proficient in the four General Education skills. It is expected that upper level thematic courses will use more intensive methods than the foundation and cultural courses.

- 3) Units with courses in the General Education Program are expected to ensure that all faculty who teach in the program, including adjuncts, are knowledgeable about its goals and objectives.

In addition to the above requirements, instructors of General Education courses are encouraged to do the following:

- 1) Use multiple methods of learning to achieve general education goals and objectives. Possibilities include lecture, discussion, debate, presentation, group projects, reading, experimentation, technology, writing, simulation, visual, aural, and related methods.
- 2) Use multiple sources of materials. Possibilities include primary sources, textbooks, anthologies, current event coverage, expository pieces, cultural events, technology, appropriate media, etc.
- 3) Use multiple forms of learning evaluation that assess how well students are meeting both skills and category content objectives.

The Structure of the General Education Program

The General Education Program is divided into three sections: the Foundation Categories, the Cultural Emphasis Requirements, and the Thematic Group. Following is a brief description of each:

The Foundation Categories

Courses in the *Foundation Categories* introduce students to the major areas of human thought and endeavor. These courses present the academic disciplines as different ways of looking at the world, they introduce students to the varied methods used to create knowledge, and they acquaint students with major questions and principles of the field.

The pedagogy of the Foundation Categories helps students develop the essential skills of creative and critical thinking, articulate expression, and information literacy. Since it is important that this work begin early in the college experience, all classes in the Foundation Categories help students develop these skills.

The Cultural Emphasis Requirements

An important component of education is realizing that how we know is as important as what we know. The study of culture prompts students to recognize themselves as cultural beings, and to understand the diverse ways in which people organize life and perceive the world. Courses that receive the Cultural Emphasis Designations focus on the values, perceptions, history, and social life of various cultures and sub-cultures in the United States and in other countries or regions. Such study enhances one's ability to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in a multicultural nation and an interdependent world.

All classes that have received the Cultural Emphasis Designations help student develop the skills of creative and critical thinking, articulate expression, and information literacy.

The Thematic Group

Preparing for responsible participation in public discourse requires that people become conscious of both complimentary and competing viewpoints and recognize that any issue or problem can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Cross-disciplinary study helps students integrate knowledge from various disciplines through the study of a major idea.

The thematic component of the General Education Program builds on the knowledge gained in the Foundation Categories. Each thematic group consists of interrelated courses that explore an idea from three different perspectives and examines the connections that exist, actually or potentially, among our various ways of understanding major ideas.

The pedagogy used in the thematic classes continues to address the essential skills of creative and critical thinking, articulate expression, and information literacy. In addition, these courses focus on integrative skills. These classes emphasize the integrative, synoptic, and creative qualities of thought characteristic of the generally educated person. All classes in the Thematic Groups help students become more proficient in the four general education skills.

General Education Requirements

Foundation Categories:

- 1) The Arts (one course)
- 2) The Humanities (two courses, one from each category):
 - Philosophy and Literature
 - Historical Perspectives
- 3) The Mathematical Sciences (one course)
- 4) The Natural Sciences (two courses, one from each category; one must contain a lab):
 - Physical Sciences
 - Life Sciences
- 5) The Social Sciences (two courses from two disciplines)

Cultural Emphasis Requirements

Each student will select one class that carries a World Perspectives designation and one class that carries a U.S. Diversity designation. These classes can come from the Gen Ed Program, the major, minor, or electives.

Thematic Group

Each student will select a theme and choose three courses from that theme. The courses must come from three different disciplines and two divisions. Two of the courses must be upper level.

TOTAL: 10 to 11 classes, depending on the theme selected. (If a student chooses to take two cultural courses that are separate from any other requirement, the total would be 11 to 13 courses.)

THE FOUNDATION CATEGORIES

The Arts and Humanities

The studies recognized as the arts and humanities rest upon intellectual discourse and philosophical reflection and emphasize aesthetic creation and understanding. They are a heritage of the traditional liberal disciplines of logic, rhetoric, and grammar -- together with music, poetics, interpretation, history, and philosophy. We may speak of them as the arts of reflective thinking, communication, and creation of meaning. The arts and humanities provide students with training in judgment and the interrelationship of intellectual and emotional abilities. They furnish an opportunity for students to experience works from art, history, literature, and philosophy which address concerns shared by human beings across the boundaries of time, geographical location, and culture.

The Mathematical Sciences

The studies recognized as the mathematical sciences are part of the creative human effort to search for patterns and order that help make the world comprehensible. The study of the mathematical sciences aims at understanding abstract concepts such as number, chance, form, algorithms, functions, propositions, and principles of reasoning. As sciences of abstract objects, the mathematical sciences rely on valid inference rather than observation as their standard of truth. Even so, they still employ observation, simulation, and experimentation as means of discovering truth. These goals are pursued through the diverse disciplines of computer science, logic, mathematics, and statistics. These disciplines deal with data, measurements, and observations; with inference, deduction, and proof; with mathematical models of natural phenomena, of human behavior, and of social systems; and provide a common fabric of communication indispensable in society.

The Natural Sciences

The studies recognized as the physical and life sciences are rooted in the creative human endeavor to understand, control, and adapt to nature. The natural sciences are a continuing, skeptical, self-correcting inquiry that strives for increasingly inclusive explanations of our physical universe and its life forms. The physical and life sciences taken together provide students with awareness of the role of science in human society, scientific methodologies as ways of knowing, and a knowledge about the workings of the natural world. Scientific inquiry is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the contemporary world; a scientifically literate person can apply scientific knowledge and habits of mind to both individual and social purposes.

The Social Sciences

The studies recognized as the social sciences represent the systematic study of human behavior and culture. They are concerned with the development of universal principles that explain individual thought, action, and experience; the interactions between people in the context of small groups, communities, institutions, and societies; and the functioning of social systems. Taken together, the social sciences form a base for public discourse, inform us about ourselves, and provide insight into the behavior and cultural patterns of other people. They provide students with analytical tools and principles that will help them to make informed decisions in their personal and public lives, and assist them to become aware of their responsibilities as citizens of a national and international community.

The Arts

Category Purpose and Description

Through the study of the visual and performing arts, students will come to realize that art functions as an important component in the individual life experience and as a major cultural force in human society. An understanding and appreciation of the arts help people in defining what is meaningful and significant in life.

Each course in this category is a broad introduction to an area of study in the arts; courses will assist students in understanding art by introducing them to the language, conventions, and symbols used in the creation and performance of works of art. The aim is to make the arts more accessible and enjoyable, while preparing students to make informed interpretations about individual works of art.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Arts Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of the arts as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) An analysis of the formal elements and aesthetic value in works of art;
- 3) How meaning in the arts is created and interpreted;
- 4) An understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which specific works of art were created;
- 5) An understanding of the relationship between artists and society;
- 6) A direct exposure to works of art and/or attending of live performances; preparation of written responses to the experiences.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Arts Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking, writing or appropriate artistic media;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Arts Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

Humanities: Historical Perspectives

Category Purpose and Description

The study of history enables a society to share a common memory of where it has been, what its core values are, and what decisions in the past account for present circumstances. It helps to create an informed discriminating citizenry educated in the democratic process of governance that characterizes the United States. In addition, the study of history nurtures the individual by providing one of the keys to self-identity within the context of shared community. Finally, history allows one to see both the differences among and the universality of world cultures.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Historical Perspectives Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of history as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) An understanding of how knowledge in history is created, including chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, and historical analysis of issues;
- 3) The use of history in any inquiry into the political, social, or moral issues in a society;
- 4) The ways in which knowledge of one's roots and one's place in the stream of human history allows the development of both a self-identity and a sense of shared community;
- 5) The ways in which the past has influenced U.S. culture and identity;
- 6) An examination of different cultures and ways of life, and a consideration of the common problems and shared humanity among different peoples of the world;
- 7) The development of historical understanding through the integration of five spheres of human activity: social, political, scientific/technological, economic, and philosophical/religious/aesthetic.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Historical Perspectives Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively

Criteria for Inclusion in the Category

- 1) Courses in this category will emphasize the narration and analysis of events over a period of at least 500 years, using a comparative approach to civilizations.
- 2) Where possible, United States history should reflect a global context, and modern world histories should treat the United States as one of its integral parts. Where this is not possible, such as the study of ancient history, focus should be placed on the analysis of events and intellectual constructs that have relevance for modern Americans.
- 3) Courses in this category should treat the history and values of diverse civilizations, including those of the West, and should especially address the interactions among them. Thus all courses in this category will, to some extent, cross the borders of their immediate focus.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Historical Perspectives

Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

Humanities: Philosophy and Literature

Category Purpose and Description

Literary and philosophical works represent an ongoing conversation about the fundamental ideas and values that shape cultures and civilization. To participate fully in this conversation requires knowledge both of those works that are recognized as defining the history of the conversation, and of works that offer original or critical additions to it in the present. Through the study of great works of Philosophy and Literature, students will come to understand more clearly their own response to the world and to the ideas that give it form and comprehensibility.

Courses in this category will introduce students to the interpretation of a significant body of literary or philosophical work, assist them in the careful reading and interpretation of primary texts, help them arrive at meaning through discussion, and explore the important issues in their own lives and in the lives of others.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Philosophy and Literature Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of philosophy or literature as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) An understanding of how knowledge in these fields is created; the ways in which philosophy and literature have contributed to human knowledge and civilization;
- 3) The reading of primary sources as a major portion of course content;
- 4) A consideration of the relationship between the works discussed, the cultures in which they were created, and the human concerns they illuminate;
- 5) The methods and terminology appropriate to critical analysis;
- 6) The critical analysis and interpretation of one or more primary texts.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Philosophy and Literature Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Philosophy and Literature Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

Natural Sciences: The Physical Sciences

Category Purpose and Description

The physical sciences represent an exploration of the physical universe. They seek to understand the fundamental workings of nature, from the behavior of particles of matter to the functioning of the galaxies. Study of the concepts, history, contexts, and methodologies of the physical sciences assists students in becoming scientifically literate. Each course in this category is a broad introduction to a physical science field of study. Courses contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and help students apply an understanding of scientific ways of thinking to their own lives and careers.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Physical Sciences Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of the physical sciences as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) An understanding how scientists use information to explain the phenomena observed in the physical universe;
- 3) The unifying concepts of the physical sciences including the forces of nature, the structure of materials, and the role of energy in the physical universe.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Physical Sciences Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Physical Sciences Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

Natural Sciences: The Life Sciences

Course Purpose and Description

The life sciences are the study of the structure and function of living things. Such study ranges from the level of molecules within cells to ecosystems of organisms interacting with each other and their environment. Study of the concepts, history, contexts, and methodologies of the life sciences assists students in becoming scientifically literate. Courses in this category prepare students to better understand and appreciate not only themselves as organisms, but also other organisms in the world around them. Courses contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and help students apply an understanding of scientific ways of thinking to their own lives and careers.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Life Sciences Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of the life sciences as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) The approaches life scientists use at various levels of organization to understand how living things function;
- 3) The unifying concepts of the life sciences such as evolution and cellular organization of organisms.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Life Sciences Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Life Sciences Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

The Mathematical Sciences

Category Purpose and Description

The development of formal reasoning and abstract thought have been defining characteristics of civilization. Through the study of the mathematical sciences, students will develop their ability to reason and solve problems with abstract ideas or quantitative information. Full participation in many professional and public policy discussions requires the ability to express scientific, economic, or social issues in quantitative terms. Study of the concepts, history, contexts, and methodologies of the mathematical sciences assists students in becoming mathematically or quantitatively literate.

Courses in this category introduce students to the foundations of mathematical, logical, and quantitative reasoning. They will develop each student's mathematical, statistical, quantitative, or logical reasoning skills in ways that allow these skills to be transferred or used in other content areas.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Mathematical Sciences Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of computer science, logic, mathematics, or statistics as "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field;
- 2) An understanding of how computer scientists, logicians, mathematicians, or statisticians think and how knowledge in these fields is created;
- 3) An analysis of problem solving, including recognition of key problem elements, the choice of suitable methods for solving a problem, and the appropriate application of these methods.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Mathematical Sciences Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively through:
 - a) the solving of multiple step problems which require logic and reasoning skills;
 - b) the application of problem solving and logical reasoning skills to new problems;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Faculty Qualifications:

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Mathematical Sciences Category shall include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study in the discipline;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

The Social Sciences

Category Purpose and Description

The social sciences examine the human condition from various levels of analysis. These include individuals, communities, social institutions, social structure, and culture. The theoretical developments and empirical findings of the social sciences are an essential part of public discourse and constitute a basis for self-reflection, public and social policy decisions, and social and cultural changes. A grounding in the theories and methodologies of the social sciences provides a basis for critically evaluating different accounts of the nature of individuals, minds, social institutions, human communities, and culture.

Students select two courses from two disciplines; each course is a broad introduction to a social science field and fosters an understanding of the scope, methods, theories, and goals of that field of study. Students will come to understand how a particular field analyzes a large question (e.g., what is the nature of the mind? of groups? of culture? of government?) into answerable components. Students will also learn how that componential knowledge is synthesized into broader theoretical structures and how the discipline's findings and theories can be applied.

Content Objectives

All courses in the Social Sciences Category include the following content:

- 1) The introduction of the social sciences as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field, including their social and cultural contexts;
- 2) An understanding of how social scientists think and how knowledge in the social sciences is created;
- 3) A broad introduction to the contemporary status of a social science field of study
- 4) The scope of the field's approaches, methods, and theories;
- 5) The key concepts and vocabulary necessary for an educated layperson to follow developments in this field over the next decade;
- 6) Examples of some of the ways that knowledge developed in the field find application;
- 7) A sufficiently critical stance that will allow students to begin to understand how to weigh ideas and claims within the field's domain.

Skills Objectives

All courses in the Social Sciences Category use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Criteria for Inclusion in the Category:

Courses must be an introduction to a social science field, and be sufficiently broadly based that they can meet the course objectives described above. Courses addressing specialized topics within fields of study are not appropriate for inclusion in this category.

Faculty Qualifications

Minimum qualifications for faculty assigned to teach in the Social Sciences Category include the following or their equivalent:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the mission, goals, and objectives of the GVSU General Education Program;
- 2) College level teaching experience and advanced study or experience in the subject;
- 3) A professional commitment to the subject, as demonstrated by teaching experience, publication, continuing professional education, or professional activities.

THE CULTURAL EMPHASIS REQUIREMENTS

The study of culture prompts students to recognize themselves as cultural beings and to understand the diverse ways in which people organize life and perceive the world. Courses that receive the Cultural Emphasis Designations focus on the values, perceptions, history, and social life of various cultures and sub-cultures in the United States and in other countries or regions. Such study enhances one's ability to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in a multicultural nation and an interdependent global world.

Courses that receive the Cultural Emphasis Designations can be part of the themes, part of other General Education Categories, part of electives, or part of the major/minor studies. Although not mandated, it is strongly recommended that each theme contain one or more courses that focus on U.S. Diversity and/or World Perspectives.

Purpose and Description of the U.S. Diversity Designation

Courses that receive this designation are meant to help students understand that the United States has been and continues to be a society comprised of people from many different backgrounds. Rarely in history has another nation opened its borders and extended citizenship to so many diverse groups of people. Members of such a society need to be able to understand how diversity may affect their relationships with people in their local communities as well as at regional and national levels.

Courses that receive the U.S. Diversity designation will have demonstrated that the following content comprises a significant portion of the course:

- 1) An examination of the various cultures that make up the United States, highlighting both the variability and similarity in human behavior, beliefs, customs, and values;
- 2) Examination of how knowledge and perception is conditioned by ethnic identity, race, culture, and history;
- 3) The historical and social consequences of United States diversity;
- 4) A consideration of whether there is a United States culture -- a common culture that unites and subsumes all groups in the United States.

Purpose and Description of the World Perspectives Designation

Courses that receive this designation are meant to provide students with an opportunity to analyze and understand the experiences and perspectives of people in societies located outside the boundaries of the United States. In light of the increasing interaction among nations, the growth of transnational organizations, the growing ease of global communications and population movements across borders, it is necessary for students to be knowledgeable about international matters and matters of global scope and importance. Courses receiving this designation provide student with the necessary basis for understanding and interpreting the variety of world cultures, institutions, societies, and issues.

Courses that receive the World Perspectives designation will have demonstrated that the following content comprises a significant portion of the course:

- 1) An examination of how ways of thinking and knowing are conditioned by where we live;
- 2) A comparison of the country/region under study to the United States;
- 3) Examination of experiences and world views of societies, nations, regions, and/or peoples located outside of the United States;

- 4) The interconnectedness and interaction that characterize relationships within the global community.

Skills Objectives

All courses that receive the U.S. Diversity or World Perspectives designations use teaching methods that help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expressions through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

THE THEMATIC GROUP

An important part of general education is the development of the ability to think in broad terms and to see the connections in the world. A thematic group helps students learn to integrate knowledge from various disciplines through the study of a major idea. Preparing for responsible citizenship requires that we become conscious of both complimentary and competing viewpoints and recognize that any issue or problem can be viewed from multiple perspectives.

Purpose of Thematic Teaching

The various academic disciplines represent different ways of viewing the world and creating knowledge. The purpose of the thematic group is to provide students with a coherent educational experience by immersing them in the ways different disciplines illuminate a topic. This kind of cross-disciplinary study helps students learn to integrate and harmonize different perspectives and prepares them to intelligently participate in the increasingly complex discourses that shape the modern world.

Characteristics of a Theme for GVSU General Education Program

- 1) We define a theme as a group of courses that focuses on the same idea, event, issue etc. from different perspectives. A theme has to be sufficiently broad to include courses from at least three disciplines and two divisions. It should focus on a concept that can demonstrate enduring relevance over time.
- 2) Each theme will generally consist of five to seven courses.
- 3) A student will select a theme at the start of the sophomore year, and choose three classes from that theme. At least two of the selected courses in a thematic sequence must be at the upper level, although all three can be upper level. The three courses selected must come from three different disciplines and two different divisions.
- 4) Completion of the Foundation Category requirements will serve as the prerequisite for upper level courses in the themes. Some of the upper level courses might have additional prerequisites and others will not. If appropriate, a course in the Foundation Categories can serve as the lower level course in a theme.
- 5) Although not mandated, it is strongly recommended that each theme contain courses that focus on U.S. Diversity and/or World Perspectives.

Skills Objectives

All courses in a Thematic Group use teaching methods that will help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking and writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively;
4. To integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives.