

General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

Context

General education is an important component of all undergraduate and some graduate higher education degree programs. Institutions should identify and provide a recognizable core of general education that expresses the educational philosophy of the institution for each undergraduate degree program or cluster of degree programs. Consistent with institutional practices, general education degree requirements may be fulfilled through courses completed at the institution, transfer credits, competencies demonstrated in ways determined by the institution, or admission prerequisites.

A general education program—developed, owned, and reviewed by the institution's faculty—should be purposeful, coherent, engaging, and rigorous. General education skills may be taught or developed as part of courses in the major, in separate courses, or through a decentralized distribution. However, the skills and knowledge derived from general education and the major should be integrated because general education and study in depth, together, comprise a quality undergraduate education.

Institutions offering the associate and baccalaureate degrees will strike an appropriate balance between specialized and more general knowledge. The institution's ability to demonstrate that its students are able to integrate and apply in different contexts the core knowledge and skills learned in their coursework is a critical component of successful undergraduate educational programs.

General education incorporates essential knowledge, cognitive abilities, and an understanding of values and ethics, and it enhances students' intellectual growth. General education programs draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and sensitivity, and preparing them to make enlightened judgments outside as well as within their academic specialty. Information literacy—the understanding and set of skills necessary to carry out the functions of effective information access, evaluation, and application—is an essential component of any general education program and is promoted by the participation of professional library staff.

General education offerings should reflect the particular programs and mission of the institution. However, general education courses should not focus narrowly on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The content of general education within specialized degree programs should be comparable, though not necessarily identical, to traditional academic offerings at the collegiate level or above. Programs in postsecondary vocational technical institutions should evidence recognition of the relationship between broad education and the acquisition of techniques and skills. In professional degree programs beyond the baccalaureate, courses in ethics, humanities, and public policy may be particularly relevant.

Fundamental Elements of General Education

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- a program of general education of sufficient scope to enhance students' intellectual growth, and equivalent to at least 15 semester hours for associate degree programs and 30 semester hours for baccalaureate programs; (An institution also may demonstrate how an alternative approach fulfills the intent of this fundamental element.)
- a program of general education where the skills and abilities developed in general education are applied in the major or study in depth;
- consistent with institutional mission, a program of general education that incorporates study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives
- general education requirements assuring that, upon degree completion, students are proficient in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, technological capabilities appropriate to the discipline, and information literacy, which includes critical analysis and reasoning;
- general education requirements clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution; and
- assessment of general education outcomes within the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and evidence that such assessment results are utilized for curricular improvement.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- evidence of institutional statements of the rationale supporting the curriculum and the benefits of a quality general education program; and evidence that this rationale has been communicated to students, parents, advisors, employers, and other constituencies
- analysis of statements of institutional mission, goals, or objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education)
- analysis of statements of individual curricular or degree program goals/objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education)
- evidence of institutional support for the general education program (administrative structure, budget, faculty incentives)
- evidence of curriculum review processes that include general education components