



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

THE VALUE OF GENERAL EDUCATION

PURPOSE

You are receiving this handout because you are teaching one or more courses that fulfill a general education requirement at UNO. Students do not always engage fully in this part of the curriculum and may misunderstand the value and purpose of general education. Recent evidence to support this claim includes a 2016 survey that showed first-year students at UNO reported lower engagement indicator scores than their Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan University (CUMU) peers for how their coursework emphasized higher order learning, an important aim of general education. Specifically, UNO first-year students provided lower ratings than our CUMU peers for how their coursework emphasized

1. *Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations*
2. *Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning*
3. *Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source*
4. *Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information*

These findings indicate a need to deliberately talk with our students about the general education curriculum, its aims, and its value in their personal and professional endeavors. Accordingly, this handout aims to provide you with information and resources you can use to engage with your students about general education, its importance, and how it relates to your course.

GENERAL EDUCATION AND THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

A comprehensive college education provides students with knowledge that should enrich their lives and prepare them to face the challenges of living and learning in an ever-changing world. Courses that are part of UNO's General Education curriculum foster the development of certain intellectual skills and dispositions in our students essential to informed citizenship and an ability to effectively deal with complexity, diversity, and change.



UNO GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The three main components of UNO's General Education curriculum include (a) fundamental academic skills in quantitative literacy, oral communication, and composition, (b) distribution requirements in humanities/fine arts, social science, and natural science, and (c) diversity requirements for U.S. and global cultures. Each of these areas and their sub-components are associated with specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) which are located on [UNO's General Education website](#).

Fundamental Academic Skills (15 CREDITS)

Proficiency in reading, quantitative skills, and written/oral expression are essential for professional success and effective citizenship. The courses in fundamental academic skills are designed to provide you with the foundation for advanced academic study.

Distribution Requirements (25 CREDITS)

Distribution requirements provide students the opportunity to: 1) understand, analyze, and explore the human condition; 2) understand the complex dynamics that make up the world particularly the challenges, problems, and factors that lead to social stability and change as essential for contributing to and living in contemporary society; 3) understand the nature of scientific inquiry and the operation of the natural, physical, and technological world for making personal and public policy decisions.

Diversity Requirement (6 CREDITS)

A 21st century education requires exposure to cultures and institutions around the world, as well as within your own society, in order to promote intellectual flexibility, cultural understanding and informed citizenship. UNO fosters cultural understanding to assist you in becoming responsible citizens in a diverse world.

THE VALUE OF GENERAL EDUCATION

Students sometimes wonder why they are required to complete a broad curriculum of general education courses outside of their academic major. They do not always see a connection to how general education courses align with their goals of a degree, a job, and hopefully, a fulfilling life. The links below represent some of the resources you can use to stimulate discussion with your students about the value of general education and why it is important that they work hard, apply themselves, and learn as much as they can about different disciplines, perspectives, and methods. Ultimately, the skills they develop in their undergraduate general education courses provide a solid foundation for success in all of their academic, professional, and personal endeavors.

Reason #1: *Employers value the intellectual skills and dispositions at the core of UNO's General Education curriculum.* Employers have repeatedly affirmed the importance of a college graduate's ability to innovate, think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems. In many cases, this is more important than choice of academic major.

- a. [Tech Should Look Beyond Stem and Covet Liberal Arts Grads](#)
- b. [Billionaire Predicts Liberal Arts-Driven Future](#)
- c. [How to Survive a 5G Future](#)
- d. [The 1 Skill Warren Buffet Says Will Raise Your Value by 50 Percent](#)
- e. [Education for a Jobless Future](#)
- f. [How Robots Will Save Liberal Education](#)
- g. [The Skills Gap is Actually an Awareness Gap](#)
- h. [It Takes More Than a Major](#)

Reason #2: *General Education courses help students develop skills and perspectives that will help them succeed in their academic major.* Occasionally students lament the "unfortunate" necessity of having to "get through" their general education courses before they can finally get to the important work of studying their academic major. However, it is not possible in reality to separate the academic skills at the heart of the general education curriculum from academic excellence in specific disciplines. These separate parts of a student's undergraduate education complement each other to broaden students' perspectives, ideas, methods, and approaches to complex issues in our world that can help them perform in their chosen discipline.

- a. [We Don't Need more STEM Majors. We Need More STEM Majors with Liberal Arts Training](#)
- b. [Liberal Education vs. Professional Education: The False Choice](#)
- c. [General Education Helps College Students Succeed](#)
- d. [Four Things You Should Expect to Get Out Of College](#)
- e. [Why You Need to Take Gen Eds](#)

Reason #3: *Exposure to different values, perspectives, traditions, a cornerstone of UNO's General Education program, is important to engaged citizenship, meaningful careers, and fulfilling lives.* A 21st century education requires exposure to other cultures and institutions around the world, and within one's own society, in order to promote intellectual flexibility and responsible and informed citizenship.

- a. [How Colleges Can Teach Students to Be Good Citizens](#)
- b. [Liberal Education Liberates Students to Live Free](#)
- c. [Liberal Education and America's Foundation](#)
- d. [What's Your Civic Life? Why Does it Matter?](#)
- e. [From General Education to Civic Preparation](#)

Reason #4: *For undecided students, general education coursework can provide a breadth of study that can spark the imagination, inspire a passion, and ultimately lead to interest in a previously unexplored academic major.*

- a. [It's Not Just About Jobs. Colleges Must Help Students Find Their Passions](#)
- b. [Distribution Learning Matters](#)
- c. [Gen Ed Course Led to a New Career Path](#)
- d. [Helping Students Find Their Calling](#)
- e. [3 Things Undecided Majors Should Look for in Colleges](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT GENERAL EDUCATION AT UNO

General Education Curriculum

- [General Education Student Learning Outcomes](#)
- [Curriculum Overview](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)



General Education Assessment

- [Assessment Overview](#)
- [General Education Assessment Guide](#)