

Appendix C: General Education Requirement

Purpose

The purpose of General Education in the Ontario college system is to contribute to the development of citizens who are conscious of the diversity, complexity, and richness of the human experience; who are able to establish meaning through this consciousness; and, who, as a result, are able to contribute thoughtfully, creatively, and positively to the society in which they live and work.

General Education strengthens student's generic skills, such as critical analysis, problem solving, and communication, in the context of an exploration of topics with broad-based personal and / or societal importance.

Themes

The following themes will be used to provide direction to colleges in the development and identification of courses that are designed to fulfill the General Education requirement for programs of instructions:

- Arts in Society
- Civic Life
- Social and Cultural Understanding
- Personal Understanding
- Science and Technology

Appendix C1 that follows provides statements of rationale and offers suggestions related to more specific topic areas that could be explored within each theme. These suggestions are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. They are included to provide guidance regarding the nature and scope of content that would be judged as meeting the intent and overall goals of General Education.

Courses

It is understood that the discrete courses developed and offered to deliver General Education will include measurable outcomes that provide evidence of student achievement. Typically, students' achievement is demonstrated by their ability to apply

these specific learning experiences to a broader understanding of the themes under study.

Requirement

The General Education requirement for programs of instruction is stipulated in the Credentials Framework ([Appendix A](#) in the Minister's Binding Policy Directive Framework for Programs of Instruction).

While the inclusion of General Education is locally determined for programs of instruction leading to either a college certificate or an Ontario College Certificate, it is recommended that graduates of the Ontario College Certificate programs have been engaged in learning that incorporates some breadth beyond the vocational field of study.

In programs of instruction leading to either an Ontario College Diploma or an Ontario College Advanced Diploma, it is required that graduates have been engaged in learning that exposes them to at least one discipline outside their main field of study, and increases their awareness of the society and culture in which they live and work. This will typically be accomplished by students taking 3 – 5 courses offered and designed discretely and separately from vocational learning opportunities (courses).

These learning opportunities would normally be delivered using a combination of required and elective processes. Further clarification is provided in Appendix C2 Questions and Answers related to the implementation of the general education policy in programs of instructions in colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario.

Appendix C1: Themes for Courses Developed to Provide General Education

Theme 1. Arts In Society

Rationale:

The capacity of a person to recognize and evaluate artistic and creative achievements is useful in many aspects of his/her life. Since artistic expression is a fundamentally human activity, which both reflects and anticipates developments in the larger culture, its study will enhance the student's cultural and self-awareness.

Content:

Courses in this area should provide students with an understanding of the importance of visual and creative arts in human affairs, of the artist's and writer's perceptions of the world and the means by which those perceptions are translated into the language of literature and artistic expression. They will also provide an appreciation of the aesthetic values used in examining works of art and possibly, a direct experience in expressing perceptions in an artistic medium.

Theme 2. Civic Life

Rationale:

In order for individuals to live responsibly and to reach their potential as individuals and as citizens of society, they need to understand the patterns of human relationships that underlie the orderly interactions of a society's various structural units. Informed people will have knowledge of the meaning of civic life in relation to diverse communities at the local, national, and global level, and an awareness of international issues and the effects of these on Canada, and Canada's place in the international community.

Content:

Courses in this area should provide students with an understanding of the meaning of freedoms, rights, and participation in community and public life, in addition to a working knowledge of the structure and function of various levels of government (municipal, provincial, national) in Canada and/or in an international context. They may also provide an historical understanding of major political issues affecting relations between the various levels of government in Canada and their constituents.

Theme 3. Social and Cultural Understanding

Rationale:

Knowledge of the patterns and precedents of the past provide the means for a person to gain an awareness of his or her place in contemporary culture and society. In addition to this awareness, students will acquire a sense of the main currents of their culture and that of other cultures over an extended period of time in order to link personal history to the broader study of culture.

Content:

Courses in this area are those that deal broadly with major social and cultural themes. These courses may also stress the nature and validity of historical evidence and the variety of historical interpretation of events. Courses will provide the students with a view and understanding of the impact of cultural, social, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics.

Theme 4. Personal Understanding

Rationale:

Educated people are equipped for life-long understanding and development of themselves as integrated physiological and psychological entities. They are aware of the ideal need to be fully functioning persons: mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and vocationally.

Content:

Courses in this area will focus on understanding the individual: his or her evolution; situation; relationship with others; place in the environment and universe; achievements and problems; and his or her meaning and purpose. They will also allow students the opportunity to study institutionalized human social behaviour in a systematic way. Courses fulfilling this requirement may be oriented to the study of the individual within a variety of contexts.

Theme 5. Science And Technology

Rationale:

Matter and energy are universal concepts in science, forming a basis for understanding the interactions that occur in living and non-living systems in our universe. Study in this

area provides an understanding of the behaviour of matter that provides a foundation for further scientific study and the creation of broader understanding about natural phenomena.

Similarly, the various applications and developments in the area of technology have an increasing impact on all aspects of human endeavour and have numerous social, economic, and philosophical implications. For example, the operation of computers to process data at high speed has invoked an interaction between machines and the human mind that is unique in human history. This development and other technological developments have a powerful impact on how we deal with many of the complex questions in our society.

Content:

Courses in this area should stress scientific inquiry and deal with basic or fundamental questions of science rather than applied ones. They may be formulated from traditional basic courses in such areas of study as biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology, or agriculture. As well, courses related to understanding the role and functions of computers (e.g., data management and information processing), and assorted computer-related technologies, should be offered in a non-applied manner to provide students with an opportunity to explore the impact of these concepts and practices on their lives.

Appendix C2: Questions and Answers

The following series of Questions and Answers is offered as an attempt to provide clarity of understanding and ease of implementation of the General Education requirement for programs of instruction offered by colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario and leading to one of the following credentials: Ontario College Certificate, Ontario College Diploma, or Ontario College Advanced Diploma. It is not presented as an exhaustive list.

1. Why is there a new general education policy?

Under the Minister's Binding Policy Directive Framework for Programs of Instruction, released effective April 1, 2003 to support the Ontario Colleges Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, certain initial changes to the previous policy were noted. Specifically, the policy changes were noted as:

- in Ontario College Certificate (one-year) programs there is an expression of the desirability that students have exposure to general education that incorporates some breadth beyond the vocational field of study, along with the removal of the requirement for one 45-hour course per semester; and,
- in Ontario College Diploma and Ontario College Advanced Diploma (two-year and three-year) programs, while maintaining the requirement for some discretely designed general education learning opportunities (i.e., 3 – 5 courses), the requirement for one 45-hour course per semester is removed.

This was an initial step in the re-articulation of the requirement on General Education. At the same time the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities undertook to work cooperatively with the Coordinating Committee of Vice-Presidents, Academic to further update the general education requirement in light of the Credentials Framework, by updating and re-articulating the goals and objectives originally established in 1994.

2. What is different under the new general education policy?

There is a re-articulation of the purpose and goals of General Education in colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario.

There is a change (from 8 to 5) in the number of broad goal areas, now described as themes, to assist colleges in the development, identification, and delivery of courses designed to fulfill the General Education requirement.

There is no longer a mandated time requirement (i.e., one 45-hour course per semester) attached to courses used to deliver General Education.

As noted above, there is a change in the requirement of having courses of a prescribed number of hours throughout a program of instruction. In programs of instruction leading to an Ontario College Certificate (a program that would be considered as a one-year post-secondary program), there is room for a college to determine, locally, whether or not to have discrete courses in their programs.

In programs of instruction leading to an Ontario College Diploma or an Ontario College Advanced Diploma, the requirement is to have students engage in 3-5 discrete courses in an area of study that is outside their chosen vocational field of study.

3. The credentials framework says that for general education in Ontario college diploma and Ontario college advanced diploma programs, "... this will typically involve students taking 3-5 courses (or the equivalent)...". What does this mean?

In some colleges student progress is expressed through an accumulation of 'credits' rather than 'courses'. There is no standard measure for 'credits' as used in this context. As a result, a college is expected to provide students with learning opportunities outside their chosen field of vocational study that would be equivalent to 3 – 5 courses. For example, if a college expressed successful completion of a course as being worth 3 credits, a student would have to accumulate a total of 9 to 15 credits to meet the 'equivalent of 3-5 courses'.

4. Does a college have to have one course delivering general education in each semester, or could they be 'clustered'?

The requirement is that students are engaged in learning that exposes them to at least one discipline outside their main field of study. The requirement for this to be done in 3-5 courses applies to the entire program of study. As such, the courses developed to deliver General Education may be offered at any point throughout the program of instruction.

5. Can either discipline-specific or interdisciplinary courses be used to deliver general education?

As with the previous policy, courses and their learning outcomes may be drawn from either a specific discipline, or from across disciplines. Courses developed or used to deliver General Education provide a vehicle for an increased depth of understanding of a broad topic area, and are not intended to develop proficiency in specific applied skills.

For example, a course developed under the theme of Arts in Society may include experimentation with painting in order to provide students with a firsthand experience with the challenges and accomplishments of the artist under study, and not primarily for the purpose of developing painting skills.

6. How many of the five themes must be addressed through courses developed to deliver general education?

Students are to be exposed to at least one discipline outside their main field of study so as to increase their awareness of the society and culture in which they live and work. Although students are encouraged to develop life-long learning habits and pursue areas of interest, of equal importance is the need to expand those areas. In order to achieve an appropriate level of breadth, students are encouraged to select courses in more than one theme. The achievement of breadth is dependent on colleges having sufficient offerings and the students being able and required to take advantage of them.