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Why Gen Ed?

Gen Ed courses can broaden your horizons, sharpen your life skills, and prepare you for our diverse world.

What's in it for you?

Employers are looking for:

- Independent, creative problem-solvers
- Effective communicators
- Productive contributors in a diverse workplace

Everyone needs skills in:

- Writing
- Critical Thinking
- Working with diverse perspectives

Gen Ed: Let it work for you.

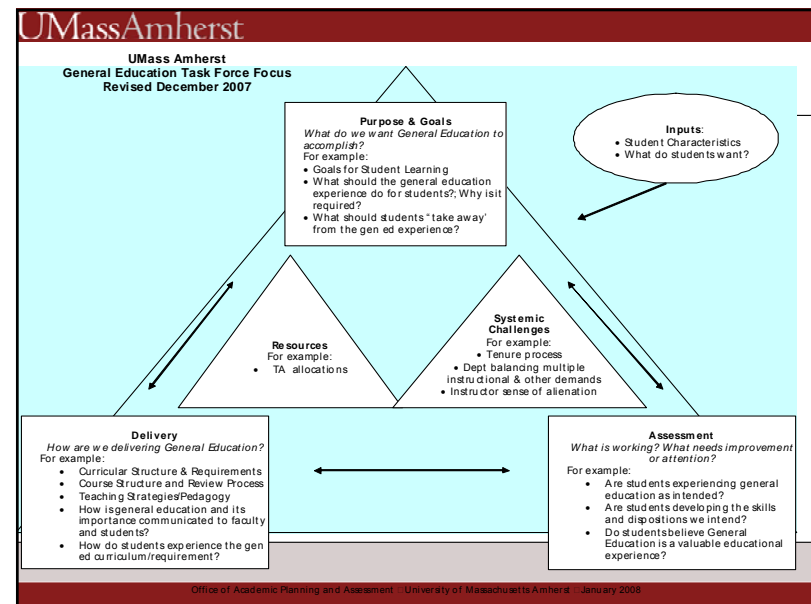
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
 OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Using Assessment to Make General Education More Explicit

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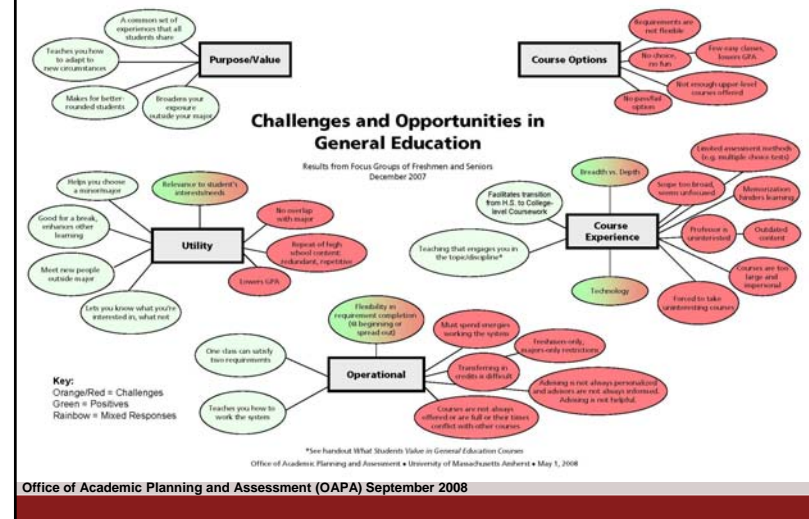


Students' Perspectives on the Gen Ed Program

Challenges and Opportunities in General Education

The thematic diagram, "Challenges and Opportunities in General Education," was developed to provide a visual representation of UMass Amherst students' perspectives of and experiences with General Education. The schema draws from the results of two focus groups (one of first year students, one of seniors) conducted in fall 2007 by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) to gather information about students' understanding of and experiences with General Education.

Student responses were coded and general themes identified and categorized as positive elements of General Education (green), negative elements (orange), or mixed elements (green and orange combined). This diagram represents the results in a manner that highlights the challenges and opportunities that students experience in their General Education courses. The broad themes identified are: purpose/value, utility, operational, course experience, and course options. For example, within the theme of utility, student responses fell into both positive and negative responses while, when referring to course options available, only negative responses were recorded. Within utility, students mentioned specifics such as General Education being useful in helping choose a major/minor and providing the opportunity to meet new people. They cite the lack of overlap with their major and redundancy of courses as elements of General Education that are not useful to them.



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Students' Perspectives on Teaching and Learning in Gen Ed Courses

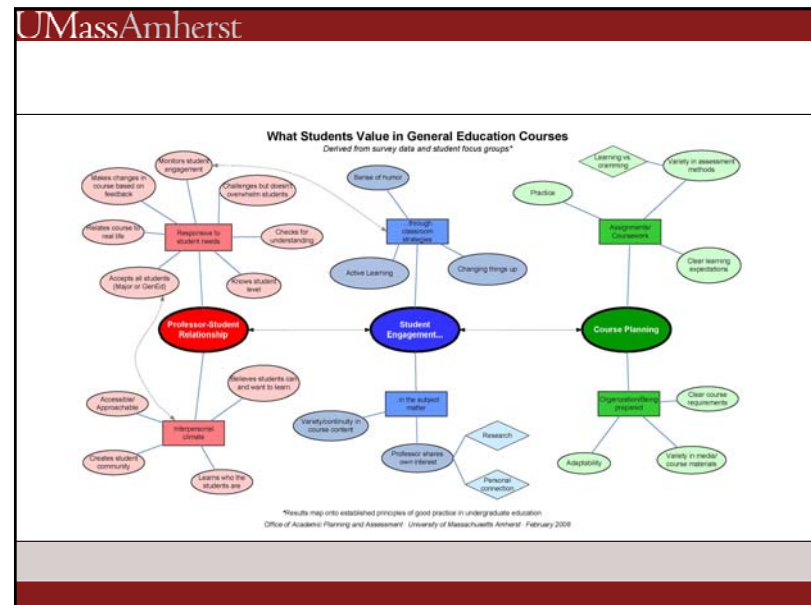
What Students Value in General Education Courses

The thematic diagram, "What Students Value in General Education Courses," was developed to provide a visual representation of UMass Amherst students' descriptions of their experiences in General Education courses. The diagram is designed to help inform General Education instructors in their course design and instructional efforts. The schema draws from two sources of data collected in the fall of 2007: an online survey and two focus groups. The student survey was administered through the General Education course "The Biology of Cancer and AIDS" (N=423, Response rate = 89%). Responses were taken specifically from the following questions: 1) *Think of the best General Education course you have taken in college thus far. What is it about that course that made it the best course for you?* and 2) *Think of the worst General Education course you have taken so far at UMass. What is it about that course that made it the worst course for you?* The focus group responses were pulled from transcriptions of two focus groups (one of first year students, one of seniors) conducted to generate information about students' understanding of and experiences with General Education.

Student responses were coded and general themes developed. While information was collected from both positive and negative responses about General Education, this diagram represents the results in a manner that highlights the positive actions instructors can take to facilitate student engagement in their General Education course. The broad themes identified are: the professor-student relationship, student engagement, and course planning. The level of specificity increases at each level with the lowest level intending to provide concrete information about characteristics students value in their General Education courses. For example, within the theme of course planning, student responses fell into two main categories: responses mentioning assignments and coursework and responses mentioning the instructor's level of organization and preparedness. Within the category of "organization/being prepared", students' comments fell into three subcategories: clear course requirements, adaptability, and variety in media/course materials. These subcategories reflect a range of specific recommendations within each theme. For example, under "variety in media/course materials" students indicated they had preferences for the use (and not overuse) of PowerPoint, videos, course websites, and online assessments.

While this schema was developed in an inductive manner (drawing more general concepts from students' individual perspectives) the themes that emerged reflect those that are common across much of the research on effective strategies for teaching and learning and the well-established "Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education¹," first developed in 1987.

¹ Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. *AACU Bulletin*, 39, 3-7. Retrieved April 24, 2008, from <http://learningcommunities.eric.gov/online/pdffile.cfm?id=199>



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The purpose of the UMass Amherst General Education requirement is to stretch students' minds, broaden their experiences, sharpen their critical thinking and evaluation skills, make connections through shared experiences, and prepare them for:

Their college experiences and subsequent professional training
 Their careers and productive lives
 Community engagement and informed citizenship
 A diverse and rapidly changing world
 A lifetime of learning

The General Education curriculum does this by engaging students in:

- Fundamental questions, ideas, and methods of analysis in the humanities and fine arts, social sciences, mathematics, and natural and physical sciences;
- The application of these methods of analysis to real world problems and contexts;
- Creative, analytical, quantitative, and critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving and synthesis;
- Pluralistic perspective-taking and awareness of the relationship among culture, self, and others;
- Understanding and evaluating the consequences of one's choices and the implications of one's actions.
- Opportunities to develop and practice the skills of critical thinking, reasoning, and communication, including:
 - Working with ambiguity and multiple perspectives;
 - Communicating persuasively and effectively orally and in writing;
 - Working effectively and collaboratively with diverse groups;
 - Developing information and technological literacy.

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**Spring 2008 Gen Ed Instructor Survey:
 Wording for Objective Mapping Question**

Dear Faculty Member:

We would like you to indicate whether the General Education course(s) you have taught recently address each of the following learning objectives in any of three ways:

(1) **Introduce** students to the learning objective (through readings, lectures, class discussion, syllabus);
 (2) Asking students to **practice** the objective (through assignments, group work, case studies, etc.);
 (3) **Assess** students' performance on the learning objective through grading or other feedback.

Of course, no single course could or is even intended to address all of the objectives listed below, nor is there any specific expectation for how many of these objectives any single general education course would address. Please only indicate the objectives that you are certain your course addresses. If the objective is not addressed in these ways in your course, check "Not Applicable." Use the "Unsure" category if you are unclear about how an objective and its relevance to your course. Please use the comments section to indicate any questions, suggestions, or comments you have about these objectives.

Objectives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental questions, ideas, and methods of analysis in the disciplines • Application of these methods of analysis to real world problems and contexts • Creative Thinking • Analytical Thinking • Quantitative Thinking • Critical Thinking • Inquiry • Problem Solving • Synthesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pluralistic perspective-taking • Awareness of the relationship among culture, self and others • Understanding and evaluating the consequences of one's choices and the implications of one's actions • Working with ambiguity and multiple perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating persuasively and effectively orally • Communicating persuasively and effectively in writing • Working effectively and collaboratively in groups • Working effectively and collaboratively with diverse groups • Developing information literacy • Developing technological literacy
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**Instructor Survey Responses:
 Example of Grid for Mapping Objectives by Designation**

Mapping Gen Ed Learning Objectives Across Gen Ed Courses (by Designation)

≥90% of instructor teaching courses in this designation report addressing this Objective
>75% to 89% of instructor teaching courses in this designation report addressing this Objective
<75% of instructor teaching courses in this designation report addressing this Objective
"UNSURE" response for Objectives ≥ 10% (Indicates instructor confusion/lack of clarity regarding meaning of objective)

	DESIGNATION	OW	AL	AT	HS	SB	U	G	BS	PS	RI	R2
		Fundamental questions, ideas, and methods of analysis in the discipline(s)	INTRODUCE									
	PRACTICE											
	ASSESS											
	UNSURE											
Application of these methods of analysis to real world problems and contexts	INTRODUCE											
	PRACTICE											
	ASSESS											
	UNSURE											
Creative Thinking	INTRODUCE											
	PRACTICE											
	ASSESS											
	UNSURE											

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Example of Grid for Course Descriptives

Course Identifiers	Designations		Reason for Taking this Course (from Fall 2007 SRTI)			Class Level Enrollment Distribution				First-year Gen Ed enrollments (n=36,017)		
			Average % taking as a Gen Ed	taking as a Major or Other	Average response rate	%First-year	%Soph	%Junior	%Senior	First-year Enrollment	%enrolled in this course	
Subject	Gen Ed	Diversity										
ENGLWRIT	OW											
PSYCH	SB											
MATH	R2											
ECON	SB											
ECON	SB											
PHIL	AL											
MATH	R1											
CHEM	PS											
ASTRON	PS											
BIOLOGY	BS											

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) November 2008