*General Education: The Human Community*

Curriculum and Instruction Handbook

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## INTRODUCTION

This handbook describes the curriculum and instruction (C&I) processes for the General Education program, which are part of the university’s broader curriculum approval process. It includes explanations of Curriculog procedures as well as the parallel General Education C&I approval process. Since its inception in 1997-8, the General Education Program has encouraged experimentation, evaluation, and especially faculty input to maintain its integrity.

Faculty governance of the General Education program is provided by Area committees composed of faculty representatives who teach General Education courses and by the General Education Council. An overview of the General Education Program’s governance structure is provided in the General Education Council Handbook [insert link].

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

General Education: The Human Community is the core curriculum for all JMU students regardless of major or program of study. Its purpose is to provide students with a liberal arts education that emphasizes connections across academic disciplines as well as a variety of core skill-sets and perspectives. Courses in the program are mapped to learning outcomes which are organized into five areas: Each area emphasizes particular skills, rationales, methodologies, and disciplinary approaches. Taken together, courses in the General Education program and courses in a student's chosen major complement one another, and are essential to the overall educational experience.

## Mission

In the liberal arts tradition, General Education: The Human Community aspires to create informed global citizens of the 21st century. James Madison University’s General Education program is committed to creating an equitable and inclusive academic environment for all persons. We affirm that equity advances understanding and is integral to a liberal arts education. We acknowledge the history of exclusion and inequity nationally and at James Madison University. We embrace the process of making JMU’s General Education program accessible, affirming, and action-oriented.

By placing inclusion and equity at the center of our mission, we seek to implement strategies and diversity policies that reimagine the relevance of a liberal arts education. We challenge our community of students, faculty, and staff to engage in personal and collective reflection, development, and action.

### Program Goals

* Students will understand the historical and contemporary distinctions and interconnections among people, institutions, and communities that create, preserve, and transmit culture and knowledge in the arts, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and humanities.
* Students will become skilled in questioning, investigating, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating.
* Students will participate in a variety of aesthetic and civic experiences reflecting human concerns and values that transcend the limits of specialization.

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### Program Structure

The General Education Program has 14 requirements, designed by faculty to ensure that the program’s goals are met. The requirements are organized into thematic areas (See Table 1). Each set of requirements has a specific set of learning outcomes designed by faculty that guide curriculum by indicating what each student should be able to know, demonstrate, evaluate, or understand after completing the requirements.[[1]](#footnote-2) Course options offered are designed by faculty to ensure that students can meet the relevant learning outcomes, to reflect the Guiding Principles of General Education and to ensure the program’s curricular integrity.

Each Area has a faculty governance committee that has oversight of its requirements, outcomes courses and serves as the equivalent of a departmental Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) body. Area committees are composed of faculty representatives who teach in the Area and who report to the departments or programs that offer its courses. In addition to advising on the General Education Program, the Area committee considers curricular issues such as: addition or deletion of a course, approval of experimental courses, proposed changes to learning outcomes, maintenance of the assessment instruments and review of the results, structural changes to the Area. Curricular actions in the General Education Program must be reviewed by the relevant Area committee before being considered by the General Education Council (GEC).

An Area Coordinator chairs the committee and serves as a unit head equivalent for voting purposes. On approval C&I actions from area committees go forward as recommendations to the GEC, the program college level C&I body.

Table 1: General education requirements and thematic areas

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Requirement** | **Area** |
| * + Critical Thinking   + Human Communication   + Writing   + Information Literacy | Madison Foundations (9 credit hours) |
| * + Human Questions and Contexts   + Visual and Performing Arts   + Literature | Arts and Humanities (9 credit hours) |
| * + Quantitative Reasoning   + Physical Principles   + Natural Systems   + Lab Experience | The Natural World (10 credit hours) |
| * + American Experience   + Global Experience | American and Global Perspectives (7 credit hours) |
| * + Sociocultural Domain   + Wellness Domain | Sociocultural and Wellness Area (6 credit hours) |

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAM CURRICULUM

1. General Education: The Human Community is the core curriculum for all JMU students regardless of major or program of study. Its purpose is to provide students with a liberal arts education that emphasizes connections across academic disciplines.
2. General Education: The Human Community is based on learning outcomes rather than courses, and these outcomes are divided into Areas. Each Area provides students with learning opportunities that address its specific outcomes.
3. Faculty who teach a particular course should consult on course content so there is some consistency across sections.
4. Any change to the learning outcomes must first be approved by the relevant Area committees and then the General Education Council (GEC).
5. Any change to the organization of an Area must first be approved by the relevant Area committees and then the GEC.
6. All students complete the Madison Foundations Area during their first academic year at JMU because critical thinking, oral and written communication, and information literacy are the foundation to examine and explore the human community. All Areas are responsible for reinforcing the learning outcomes initiated in Madison Foundations.
7. Major, minor, and pre-professional programs may choose to require courses that are part of General Education: The Human Community, so long as these requirements are clearly listed in the catalog. However, no major, minor, or pre-professional program can require its students to take a particular course in Madison Foundations.
8. The number of courses in the requirements of an area shall be limited to accommodate scheduling and to promote coherence in the areas.
9. Any course in the program must be designed so that multiple faculty members can teach it and should be offered in multiple sections consistently every semester. If exceptional circumstances warrant them, alternative scheduling arrangements may be permitted, pending consideration by the relevant administrators.
10. Each area will have a procedure to assess students’ ability to meet its learning outcomes. Assessment data will be used to promote continuous development and strengthening of each area.
11. The evaluation and development of the program will be ongoing. The General Education program will participate in the Academic Program Review (APR) process in a ten-year cycle. This review will follow the APR instructions and calendar schedule as established in the Provost’s Office of Academic Affairs.
12. The stability and academic excellence of General Education: The Human Community depends upon fully qualified, experienced, and committed faculty. In general, the participation of part-time instructors and graduate students in the program should be limited.

## Curriculum and Instruction Governance Structure and Processes

### Role of Area Committees in Curriculum and Instruction Process

In this document, the term Area refers to the General Education Area described in the Program Structure. Each Area has a faculty governance committee that has oversight of its requirements, outcomes, courses and serves as the equivalent of a departmental Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) body. Area committees are composed of faculty representatives who teach in the Area and who report to the departments or programs that offer its courses. In addition to advising on the General Education Program, the Area committee considers curricular issues such as: addition or deletion of a course, approval of experimental courses, proposed changes to learning outcomes, maintenance of the assessment instruments and review of the results, structural changes to the Area. Curricular actions in the General Education Program must be reviewed by the relevant Area committee before being considered by the General Education Council (GEC).

An Area Coordinator chairs the committee and serves as a unit head equivalent for voting purposes. On approval C&I actions from area committees go forward as recommendations to the GEC, the program college level C&I body.

### Role of the General Education Council in the Curriculum and Instruction Process

The General Education Council (GEC) provides faculty governance for JMU’s General Education program and serves as the program’s college-level curricular body. In this role the GEC determines:

* approvals and deletions of program courses
* modifications of program courses, including title and number changes
* alterations to the goals or learning outcomes
* revisions of the program overall.

Changes to the curricular process within the General Education program are also made by a vote of the GEC, providing those changes are consistent with university policy.

For curriculum approval purposes, all voting members of the GEC constitute the General Education Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Committee. In November 2009, the GEC voted to create the position of Curriculum and Instruction Chair to coordinate curriculum and instruction functions of the GEC. Further details on the duties of the C&I chair are provided below.

## Curriculum and Instruction (C & I) Chair Duties

In November 2009, the GEC voted to create the position of Curriculum and Instruction Chair. The term of service is two years with the tenure staggered to overlap that of the GEC Chair and with multiple consecutive terms permissible. Duties of the position are:

* + Chairs the General Education Council when the GEC acts in its capacity as a C&I committee
  + Coordinates curriculum proposals for the GEC (this ensures proposals are made available to GEC members in time for voting)
  + Acts as a resource for C&I questions (requires familiarity with C&I procedures)
  + Votes in Curriculog on behalf of GEC
  + Serves on C&I Chairs Committee
  + Serves on the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP).

The GEC C&I Chair serves on both the university’s C&I Chairs Committee as well as the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) and can provide explanation for and understanding about the impact of any proposed curricular changes before these two bodies.

## Approval Processes

While the General Education Council retains oversight of the General Education program, courses in the General Education program are designed and implemented by faculty within academic units. Consequently, proposals relating to courses in General Education require parallel approval processes (see Figure 1) to ensure that academic units have appropriate input into curricular development and that the General Education Council meets its obligation to ensure that the learning outcomes of the program are met. Faculty proposing curricular change in the General Education program should consult with academic units, colleges, the C&I committees, the relevant Area committee and Area Coordinator and the General Education Council. Curricular actions in the General Education Program must be reviewed and approved by the relevant Area committee before being considered by the General Education Council (GEC). In general, curricular proposals relating to learning outcomes or course content should follow these steps to ensure that the guiding principles of the program curriculum are followed:

1. Broad consultation with academic units, colleges, C&I committees, Area committees, Area coordinators, and General Education Council C&I chair to ensure direct and timely notification of any proposed changes.
2. Review of proposals by Area committees.
3. Consideration of proposal to General Education Council.

The remaining sections of this document describe the parallel processes involved in curricular development in General Education.

Below are several examples of curriculum and instruction actions in Curriculog[[2]](#footnote-3) that require General Education program approval. Instructions for adding or deleting a course, adding an experimental course to the curriculum, as well as programmatic changes are provided in this handbook.

* Adding, modifying, or deleting a course from the General Education program
* Adding, modifying, or deleting a course in the General Education program from a new or existing major or minor
* Making a General Education program course a prerequisite for a course offered by any other program (major, minor, pre-professional, degree)
* Adding or deleting a General Education program requirement, such as a competency test
* Changing the structure of the General Education program

For guidance on procedures relating to other curricular changes, proposers should consult with the Curriculum & Instruction Chair of the General Education Council and the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum on how to proceed.

#### Modification of Learning Outcomes

The process to revise learning outcomes is similar to the parallel process for course proposals; however, it does not involve Curriculog. Faculty seeking to modify the learning outcomes for a General Education Area must first consult with the relevant Area Coordinator and Area Committee. Proposals arising from this consultation should then be sent to relevant academic units for feedback by the Area Coordinator, with assistance from the General Education Program staff and the faculty representatives on the Area Committee. The proposal then reverts to the Area Committee who will also consult with CARS (Center for Assessment and Research Studies). The Area Committee makes a recommendation to the General Education Council regarding the changes. If the changes are approved by a vote of the GEC, they will then be added to the university catalog, the general education website and other curricular materials. The GEC and Area Committee will communicate the changes back to the teaching faculty and academic units so that pedagogical changes may be made, as appropriate.

#### New Course Approval Process

Faculty propose new courses to the General Education curriculum on behalf of departments. These proposals require use of Curriculog, JMU’s online system for curricular proposals; they move through academic unit, college, and university level C&I committees. However, General Education proposals must proceed through a simultaneous, parallel approval process that involves the appropriate Area committee (see <https://www.jmu.edu/gened/about/area-committee-members.shtml>) and the General Education Council (GEC) – see Figure 1. The Area committee must approve a proposal before it moves to the GEC for review.

Faculty seeking to include a new course in the General Education program should consult with the appropriate Area Coordinator before beginning the process in Curriculog. Consultation with the Area Coordinator ensures the course proposal aligns with the Area’s learning outcomes and the program’s guiding principles, which uphold the integrity of the curriculum, as well as addresses resource allocations and enrollment management matters. This consultation is similar to faculty consulting an academic unit head about a proposed major or program course. The proposer should then select the General Education program from the list of affected programs when initiating the proposal in Curriculog.

The next steps involve shared faculty governance of the program through the parallel approval process as outlined in Figure 1. The parallel approvals ensure that only courses approved by the academic unit and college are considered for inclusion in the program. The relevant Area committee must approve a course for inclusion in that area of the General Education program. This corresponds to the course approval on the academic unit level. The GEC must also approve courses for the program, which corresponds to approval on the college level. The GEC retains responsibility for determining if a course meets the relevant program outcomes and is appropriate for inclusion in one of the Areas. By approving courses for inclusion into an Area, the General Education curriculum process ensures that approved courses meet the program’s goals and learning outcomes.

There should be ample opportunities for meetings and discussion of proposed courses among course originator(s), the academic unit and college, the C&I committees, the relevant Area committee and the General Education Council. In addition, because course proposals are posted on Curriculog, all faculty have opportunities to examine and comment on proposed courses for the General Education program.

After approval in Curriculog by the Area and GEC, proposed curricular changes are forwarded as recommendations to the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum (dean’s level review), and then to university-wide review, and finally to the Vice Provost for Faculty and Curriculum. The Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) reviews proposed significant modifications to the General Education program.

This detailed outline explains the steps required to develop a new course proposal and obtain approval for permanent inclusion within the General Education program (see Fig 1).

1. A faculty member interested in developing a new course for inclusion in the General Education curriculum must ensure the proposed course meets the Area or group learning outcomes. See: <https://www.jmu.edu/gened/about/learning-outcomes.shtml>
2. The new course originator(s) must consult with the relevant academic unit head(s) and Area coordinator to assess its feasibility from each unit’s perspective. The program’s “Guiding Principles” must be adhered to. No course can be considered unless it has one or more home academic units willing to house and staff it with multiple full-time instructors each semester. One or both unit heads must give approval in Curriculog before proceeding to the next step.
3. The proposed new course will follow the usual curriculum process in Curriculog, except that designated General Education unit heads and chairs also vote at each step. The parallel General Education review process can also begin, but only courses approved by the academic unit and college are eligible for inclusion in the General Education program. If either the academic unit or college declines the course, the proposal stops.
4. The next step in the process is to consult Curriculog training tutorials at <https://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/training/>. This site offers information in pdf and video formats. It also provides a link to Curriculog. Another link to Curriculog is: <https://jmu.curriculog.com/>
5. The originator(s) initiates the proposed course in Curriculog. The originator(s) will give a rationale for the proposal, complete all required fields including (but not limited to) a course description, course learning objectives and a course outline, and indicate the resources needed to offer the course every semester.
6. The GEC C&I chair will inform the appropriate Area Coordinator and Area committee and provide the link so they can begin their formal review of the proposed course. This step parallels the unit level reviews by the academic unit and academic unit head. The Area Coordinator will convene the Area committee to discuss the course and its possible addition to the General Education curriculum. The committee will vote on whether to include, or not include, the course in the General Education program. Approval by a majority of the Area committee membership is required to advance to the next step in the process. The Area Coordinator will vote in Curriculog and inform the GEC C&I chair of the decision.
7. If the Area committee approves the course for inclusion in the General Education curriculum, the GEC C&I chair will provide GEC with the Curriculog link to the course proposal for their review. The C&I chair will convene the GEC to discuss the course and its possible addition to the General Education curriculum. This step parallels the college-level review. Approval by a majority of the GEC membership is required to add the course to the General Education curriculum.
8. The GEC C&I chair will vote on the course proposal in Curriculog according to the decision of the GEC. This step is the college C&I chair level review.
9. The Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum will vote on the proposed course in Curriculog. This step is the dean’s-level review.
10. If there are concerns at the university level, the proposal is submitted to the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP). Questions and concerns raised in CAP are referred to the General Education Council for resolution.
11. The Vice Provost of Faculty and Curriculum reviews all course proposals. This is the final step before courses are entered into the undergraduate catalog though Acalog[[3]](#footnote-4).
12. Once the course is fully approved, it can be offered to fulfill a General Education requirement. The originator(s), academic unit head(s), and/or dean(s) working with the appropriate Area Coordinator will determine the number and size of sections offered based on the initial discussions at the start of the process. The academic unit head will oversee entry of the departmental course into MyMadison. The General Education program coordinates and manages enrollment access to the course. The General Education program will add the course to its website, academic planner, and advising resources.
13. After the course’s initial offering, the originator(s) meets with the Area Coordinator to evaluate how well the course met Area learning outcomes, program “Guiding Principles,” and General Education philosophy, as well as any practical issues of implementation, such as enrollment and resource issues. The Area’s annual report will include this information.

Fig 1. Parallel Approval Processes General Education

[Insert Figure 1 here]

#### Experimental Course Approval Process

Faculty can propose experimental courses for inclusion in the General Education program on a temporary basis. Such courses permit faculty to explore curricular innovation with minimal risk. These courses also allow faculty to determine student interest as well as refine course content. Experimental courses may be offered for up to two academic years (or four semesters) before undergoing the formal C&I process for course approval or be discontinued as a General Education course offering. Courses are designated with a capital “E” (i.e., PSYC 109E) and they do not appear in the course catalog. Faculty must offer an assessment of the course and its continuance after the first offering. Below is the process for proposing an experimental course in the General Education program.

1. Experimental course originator(s) must ensure the proposed course meets the Area learning outcomes. See: <https://www.jmu.edu/gened/about/learning-outcomes.shtml> <https://www.jmu.edu/gened/LearningOutcomes.shtml>
2. A faculty member interested in developing an experimental course for inclusion in the General Education curriculum should first consult with the relevant academic unit head(s) and Area Coordinator to assess its feasibility from each unit’s perspective. The program’s “Guiding Principles” must be adhered to. No course can be considered unless it has one or more home academic units willing to house and staff it. Originator(s) must receive authorization from both the academic unit head and appropriate Area Coordinator before beginning the proposal.
3. The proposed experimental course will follow the usual curriculum process in Curriculog, as the parallel General Education review process begins. Only experimental courses approved by the academic unit are eligible for inclusion in the General Education program. If either the academic unit or academic unit head declines the course, the proposal stops.
4. Course originator(s) should consult Curriculog training tutorials at <https://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/training/> because all experimental course proposals are entered in Curriculog. This site offers information in pdf and video formats. It also provides a link to Curriculog. Another link to Curriculog is: <https://jmu.curriculog.com/>
5. The originator(s) should initiate the proposed experimental course in Curriculog, beginning at Undergraduate Experimental Course and complete all required fields, including a rationale and resources needed.
6. The appropriate Area committee and Area Coordinator will review the experimental course proposal. This step parallels the unit level reviews by the academic unit and academic unit head. Approval by a majority of the Area committee membership is required to offer the course for General Education credit.
7. If the Area committee approves the experimental course for General Education credit, the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum will review the course and determine if it should receive General Education credit. This step is the dean’s-level review. GEC approval is not required for experimental courses.
8. If approved, the Area Coordinator will ensure proper notice is sent to University Advising for distribution to advisors and the Office of the Registrar, so students receive General Education credit for the course.
9. After the experimental course’s initial offering, an evaluation of the course must be conducted. The originator(s) meet with the Area Coordinator to evaluate how well the course met Area learning outcomes, program “Guiding Principles,” and General Education philosophy, as well as any practical issues of implementation, such as enrollment and resource issues. A decision must be reached regarding continued offerings of the course.
10. If, after offering the experimental course, the originator(s) seeks to propose the course as a permanent offering, they must begin the new course proposal process in the penultimate semester.

#### Course Removal Process

A proposal to remove an approved course from the General Education program may originate in an Area committee, a contributing academic unit, or a College C&I Committee. Possible reasons for removal may include, for example, lack of faculty interest in offering it or a department’s removal of a course from their own curriculum.

* 1. The proposal originator(s) should first consult with the appropriate Area Coordinator and the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum.
  2. The originator(s) should consult Curriculog training tutorials at <https://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/training/> since all course removals are entered in Curriculog. This site offers information in pdf and video formats. It also provides a link to Curriculog. Another link to Curriculog is: <https://jmu.curriculog.com/>
  3. The originator(s) initiates the proposed course removal in Curriculog. The originator(s) must indicate the course is in the General Education curriculum.
  4. The Area Coordinator and the Area committee reviews the course removal proposal. They shoul solicit feedback from contributing academic units and other constituencies. A majority of the Area committee members must approve removing the course from the General Education program.
  5. If the Area committee approves course removal, then the Area Coordinator informs the GEC C&I Chair, who provides the course removal materials to the GEC for their review and decision. Approval by a majority of the GEC membership is required to delete the course from the General Education curriculum.
  6. The GEC C&I Chair votes to remove the course in Curriculog, as does the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum.

#### Program Structure Approval, Modification, or Deletion Process

Any change to the General Education program’s requirements or organization of an Area constitutes a change to its structure. A proposal to change the requirements or an Area’s organizational structure may originate in an Area committee, an academic unit, or a college C&I Committee. Examples of possible proposals include but are not limited to the following: the creation or deletion of a requirement; and the addition of non-credit bearing requirement.

* + 1. The proposal originator(s) should first consult with the appropriate Area Coordinator and the Senior Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum.
    2. The originator(s) should consult Curriculog training tutorials at <https://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/training/> since program modifications are entered in Curriculog. This site offers information in pdf and video formats. It also provides a link to Curriculog. Another link to Curriculog is: <https://jmu.curriculog.com/>
    3. The originator(s) posts a proposal to **Undergraduate Program Modify** in Curriculog.
    4. The Area Coordinator meets with the Area committee for thorough review and seeks feedback from contributing academic units and other constituencies. A majority of the Area committee members must approve the structural change or modification.
    5. If the Area committee votes to approve the proposal, then the Area Coordinator contacts the GEC C&I Chair, who provides the GEC with the materials for their review.
    6. A majority of the GEC membership must approve the structural change or modification.
    7. If the GEC approves the proposal, it moves to the Associate Vice Provost of University Programs for approval.
    8. The General Education program staff takes the necessary steps to make the change effective for fall of the next academic year.

Proposals that could significantly modify the General Education program, such as reconfiguring Areas or altering total number of program credit hours, must be submitted to the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) after approval by the GEC. The GEC and/or the appropriate Area committee must resolve in a timely manner any questions and concerns arising within CAP. If the CAP approves the proposal, then the Vice Provost for Faculty and Curriculum provides the final review.

1. The learning outcomes can be found at: <https://www.jmu.edu/gened/about/learning-outcomes.shtml.> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Curriculog is JMU's online system for curricular proposals (https://jmu.curriculog.com). Curriculog training tutorials are available at <https://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/training/> . This site offers information in pdf and video formats. It also provides a link to Curriculog. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Acalog is the JMU’s online system for catalog creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)