

Guidelines for General Education Courses



Lifesaver #5

INTRODUCTION

General Education is included in the Ontario college curriculum to help graduates gain insight into the diversity, complexity, and richness of human experience. By expanding their aesthetic, cultural, historical, scientific, and philosophical awareness, graduates are equipped to participate actively and fully in society and to recognize the values of social responsibility and good citizenship.

To support these goals, general education at Algonquin College will be delivered via discrete courses that address one of the following five themes:

1. Arts in Society
2. Civic Life
3. Social and Cultural Understanding
4. Personal Understanding
5. Science and Technology

GENERAL EDUCATION THEMES – ONTARIO ¹

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 theme group lead to an understanding of the importance of visual and creative arts in human affairs, of artists' and writers' 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

¹ The material in this section comes from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' *Policy on General Education* that was approved in October 2004.

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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.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION

Post-secondary programs at Algonquin College must include a general education component to comply with Ministry policies. Although the number of required courses depends on the length of the program, the length of each course must be equivalent to 45 normative hours of study.

Programs may include general education courses that are mandated by the program of study or that are selected by students from a designated pool of electives. The following chart summarizes general education course requirements according to the type of credential earned:

General Education Requirement	Program Credential				
	Algonquin College Certificate	Ontario College Certificate	Ontario College Diploma including NSDP	Ontario College Advanced Diploma	Ontario College Graduate Certificate
Courses required	NA	1	3	5	NA
Courses that may be mandated	NA	1	2	3	NA
Minimum Themes learners must cover	NA	1	2	2	NA
Minimum Themes available to learners	NA	1	5	5	NA

*NSDP = Non-Semestered Diploma Program

- **Apprenticeship Programs and Algonquin College Certificate Programs** are not required to include general education courses in their programs of study.
- **Ontario College Certificate Programs** must include **one** general education course of 45 hours that may be mandated.
- **Ontario College Diploma Programs (both 4 terms and Non-Semestered Ontario College Diploma Programs)** must include **three** general education courses of 45 hours each. Two of the courses may be mandated; at least one course should be chosen from an elective pool by the student. Overall, courses must cover a minimum of two theme areas.
- **Ontario College Advanced Diploma Programs (6 terms)** must include **five** general education courses of 45 hours each. Three of the courses may be mandated; at least two courses should be chosen from an elective pool by the student. Overall, courses must cover a minimum of two theme areas.
- **Ontario College Graduate Certificate Programs** do not require general education courses in their programs of study.
- **Mandated General Education Courses** are developed, loaded, scheduled, and delivered by the department responsible for the subject area they address. Students have no choice in the selection of these courses as they are essential components

of a program of study. Mandated general education courses may be provided as service courses to other departments.

- **Elective General Education Courses** are developed, loaded, scheduled, and delivered by the department responsible for the course. However, central coordination and monitoring of the pool of elective courses will be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice President, Academic. Wherever possible, general education electives will use elearning as the delivery mode, and students will have some choice from courses in the designated pool.

THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The General Education Committee reviews new general education courses to ensure that college programming meets the provincial guidelines and that the general education and theme designations for the course are valid. The General Education Committee is a sub-committee of the Curriculum Review Committee. Any new or revised general education course must be submitted to the General Education Committee for review before it is included in a program of study or added to the general education pool.

The General Education Committee also reviews, on a cyclical basis, the general education component of existing programs to ensure each program continues to meet general education requirements.

TRANSFER OF ACADEMIC CREDIT – GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

Students who have received academic credits from other post-secondary institutions may be eligible for a transfer

of credit and thus be exempted from their general education courses. The exemption process is different for mandated courses and elective courses:

Exemptions from Mandated Courses - Course managers will be responsible for assessing applications for transfer of credit. Approval for transfers of credit will be based on prior completion of a post-secondary course earned within the last five years that covers the same primary theme and meets similar course learning requirements.

Exemptions from Elective Courses - The General Education Coordinator who serves the academic community in a central role is responsible for assessing requests and granting transfers of credit. Approval for transfers of credit for general education courses will be based on prior completion of a post-secondary course covering the same theme and meeting similar learning requirements to those outlined in the general education course checklist. While the five-year period is offered as a guideline, students whose credentials were earned outside the five-year period may apply to have their exemption request assessed. **For more details, please refer to College Directives E9 and E10.**

QUESTIONS??

For more information, contact your school General Education Representative or Learning & Teaching Services at ext. 5465.

DELIVERY AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

General education courses should include opportunities for learners to explore issues, and applications to contemporary life. The courses must be delivered in a way that encourages thoughtful reflection on the course content. To this end, learning activities and assessment strategies must address learners' understanding and application of the subject area rather than purely factual knowledge.

Appropriate learning activities or assessment strategies might include	Teaching Strategies that support the spirit of general education might include
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing essays • Keeping journals • Monitoring media coverage of course content • Engaging in discussions • Submitting questions as well as answers • Holding formal or informal debates • Participating in role-plays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining cases • Using hands-on exercises to make discoveries and make predictions • Linking course content to current events and to learners' personal lives • Interviewing experts • Conducting surveys • Making presentations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting discussion • Linking content to contemporary and personal issues and events • Encouraging problem-solving and application of content to broader contexts • Presenting various points of view on a subject • Demonstrating processes used in the field |
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GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS INTO A PROGRAM OF STUDY

Use the following checklists to make sure a proposed course meets the general education criteria for inclusion in a Program of Study.

Program of Study Checklist

Collectively, do the general education courses in this Program of Study...

- Serve a clear purpose that is distinct from the achievement of vocational learning outcomes?
- Ensure that graduates have exposure to a diversity of viewpoints, perspectives, traditions, and learning outside their field of vocational study?
- Provide learners with choice appropriate to the credential level?
 - Ontario College Certificate—no choice
 - Ontario College Diploma—one choice
 - Ontario College Advanced Diploma—two choices
- Provide breadth by ensuring learners have access to the maximum number of general education themes available to the program?
- Ensure that learners have successfully completed study in the required number of theme areas?
 - Ontario College Certificate—1 theme
 - Ontario College Diploma—2 themes
 - Ontario College Advanced Diploma—2 themes
- Incorporate the required number of General Education courses?
 - Ontario College Certificate—one 45-hour course
 - Ontario College Diploma—three 45-hour courses
 - Ontario College Advanced Diploma—five 45-hour courses

RESOURCES

Individuals looking for more information may find the following resources useful:

- Algonquin College's General Education site:
<http://elearning.algonquincollege.com/gened/>
- The Professor's Resource Site:
<http://elearning.algonquincollege.com/profres/>

PROFESSOR OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The content of this Lifesaver is related to the following Professor of the 21st Century Teaching Competency:

7. Designing Courses and Programs.

General Education Course Checklist

Within the Program of Study does each general education course...

- Include 45 hours of instruction?
- Contribute to learning that is clearly distinct from specific vocational skills?
- Enable college learners to meet more effectively the societal challenges that face them as they take their place in community, family, and contemporary life?
- Focus on content that is sufficiently broad to be of value to students regardless of their vocational interests?
- Deal with issues and values raised by the subject matter, and not just with mastery of the subject matter?
- Give learners opportunities to explore questions related to issues and values associated with the subject matter that cover at least two of the following three items:
 - Historical context
 - Theoretical bases
 - Ethics
- Include discussion of, demonstration of, or practice in the modes of inquiry used in this field. (For example, analysis, modeling, experimentation, assessments, inventories, critical thinking.)
- Include learning requirements and embedded knowledge & skills that reflect items 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6, 7 above?
- Incorporate assignments, evaluation tools, and teaching and learning methods that ensure general education outcomes (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 above) are met.
- Identify on the course outline which of the 5 themes is met?