

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

General Education

The purpose of General Education (Gen Ed) courses in the Ontario college system is to develop educated citizens who are aware of the diversity, complexity and richness of human life and are able to contribute thoughtfully, creatively and positively to the society in which they live and work.

Gen Ed courses provide opportunities for learners to explore questions related to the issues and values raised by the subject matter, along with their application to contemporary life, covering at least two of the following:

- ethics and values
- historical context
- theoretical origins

General Education Themes

Depending on their length, Algonquin College programs typically include one or two general education online electives. [General Education courses](#) cover areas of general interest and are divided into five themes:

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

Check your program of study to determine which of the above themes are available to you within your program. This will help you decide which Student Resource Guide to use as you apply for credit through the PLAR process.

Theme 3: Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013)

Rationale

Knowing the patterns of the past helps people to develop awareness of their place in contemporary culture and society. Such knowledge may also explain the main currents of one's own culture and that of others in history in order to place your own personal experience in the group that constitutes culture at large.

Content

Courses in this area deal with major social and cultural themes that define people and events historically and geographically. Many of them focus on the various ways that historical and contemporary events may be interpreted through available evidence. Students thus develop an appreciation for, and an understanding of, the impact of socio-cultural, ethnic and religious influences on individuals and groups.

Objectives

Here are the learning outcomes associated with courses within the Social and Cultural Understanding Gen Ed theme.

Past and Present – Here, There, and Everywhere

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

1. Identify the patterns and examples of the past that help people develop awareness of their place in contemporary culture and society.
2. Examine the main currents of your own culture and that of others across time in order to place your personal experience in today's culture at large.
3. Outline the major social and cultural themes that define people and events historically and geographically.

Making Sense of It All

4. Analyze the various ways that historical and contemporary events may be interpreted through available evidence.
5. Evaluate the impact of socio-cultural, economic, ethical, ethnic and/or religious forces on groups, individuals and yourself.

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

Are You Eligible for PLAR Credit under Theme 3? Self-Assessment

Complete the following self-evaluation to determine which past experiences you have that might qualify you for a Social and Cultural Understanding Theme (GED0013) PLAR credit.

Before you devote your time and financial resources to this PLAR application, please answer **Yes** or **No** to the following four questions to determine if your application in Gen Ed Theme 3 is likely to succeed.

Have you ever...

1. lived in a non-English-speaking country (for example, in military service)?
2. taught diverse learners (perhaps ESL)?
3. lived and worked alongside indigenous populations?
4. studied history and/or other cultures on your own or academically?

If you answered **No** to all of the above, please visit the [PLAR website](#) to choose a more appropriate General Education Theme to PLAR.

If you answered **Yes** to any of the above, ask yourself if your experience and prior learning is of suitable depth for a successful PLAR application. Your application will have a good chance of succeeding if your social and cultural life experience:

1. lasted for months or years rather than a few days or weeks (Duration)
2. helped you reflect on new ideas about yourself, your community, and the world (Impact)
3. exposed you to new concepts, especially related to theory, history, and ethics (Learning)
4. provided you with a depth of life experience beyond mere facts and skills (Experience)

Here are some life experience examples that would NOT result in a successful Gen Ed Theme 3 PLAR:

- ✗ *"I backpacked around Australia for a month when I was 24. Good times!"*
- ✗ *"I'm into Japanese samurai stuff and have 4-5 manga comics and a few anime DVDs."*
- ✗ *"I had a First Nations friend in high school."*

On the other hand, the following experiences MAY result in a successful Gen Ed Theme 3 PLAR:

- ✓ *"I was stationed in Kandahar province for active duty from 2004 to 2006 as part of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. I learned a lot about the various local tribes as we helped them try to rebuild a country ravaged by decades of war."*
- ✓ *"Though born and raised in Canada, I'm ethnically Nigerian. For years I've studied West African history and culture in all of its richness. I hope to visit one day."*
- ✓ *"I worked at CBC North in Yellowknife from the late '90s to early 2000s and made a lot of friends living and working closely with the Dene First Nations folk."*

If you believe your experiences are of a suitable depth, please answer the four self-assessment questions again, this time using the [online self-assessment form](#). If you are able to provide evidence of learning for all four questions in any one section, you may be a good candidate to proceed with the PLAR process.

The next step is to [apply online for a PLAR](#), and attach your completed [self-assessment form](#).

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR



The academic area will confirm whether you are a good candidate for this PLAR. It is recommended that you do not begin working on your Portfolio until your candidacy has been approved.

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

Portfolio Submission Guidelines

Once your candidacy for PLAR has been confirmed, you can begin working on your Portfolio.

There are three essential components of the Portfolio:

1. Cover Letter

Your one-page cover letter must:

- a) begin with a paragraph that states the purpose of the application (i.e., to obtain credit in GED0013: General Education Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding) and introduces you by explaining what you are doing now and which goal a successful PLAR will help you achieve.
- b) in your main body paragraph, explain why you feel you qualify for this PLAR theme by summarizing how you have the related learning and prior experience to meet the Social and Cultural Understanding Theme Objectives on pages 1-2 above. You may also want to provide more detailed answers to the four questions above (in the “Have You Ever?” section).
- c) conclude with a statement verifying that you own all the evidence included in the enclosed Portfolio.
- d) follow the detailed instructions in the “PLAR Portfolio Instructions and Rubric” section starting on the next page.
- e) be written in a narrative form (without bullet points) and proofread for spelling and grammar.
- f) not exceed one 8.5 by 11” page in length.

2. Social and Cultural Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report

This key Portfolio component showcases your cultural experience or interests and shows your ability to distinguish between workplace/life experience (the act of doing something) and the significant learning that results from it. To address Theme 3 Objectives (pages 1-2 above), this section must include a title, introduction, and either:

- a) a photo essay with at least ten items showcasing your experience of another culture abroad or within Canada (e.g., an indigenous population), each featuring you and accompanied by a written summary of learning derived from the particular experience;

OR

- b) evidence of a strong interest in or study of history or other cultures in the form of 5 past or present written commentaries (for instance, on news items), blogs, analytical essays, critical reviews, correspondence (such as your part of an email exchange), or links to other media that you have produced, along with a written summary of the learning you gained from each writing sample.

3. Personal Reflection Essays

- a) Write a two-page essay explaining the role and impact of the type of experience you showcased in your Summary Report in culture and society, focusing especially on addressing Theme 3 Objectives 1, 3 and 4 (pages 1-2 above).
- b) Write a one-page reflection on how your social and cultural interests have affected you over time. To focus on addressing Theme 3 Objectives 2 and 5, summarize:

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

1. how your cultural experience has affected your general outlook on life
2. the influence that your cultural experience has had on your own self-awareness
3. the influence that history and culture has had on your personal and professional development
4. how you participate in the main currents (such as economic or ethnic) of culture at large

The **PLAR Portfolio – Instructions and Rubric** on the following pages provide more detailed instructions.

Note on your submission: once you have completed your Portfolio, submit an electronic copy to the PLAR Office while keeping original documents for possible future use.

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

PLAR Portfolio – Instructions and Rubric

Assessment of Your Portfolio

The instructions and rubrics below explain the assessment for each of the three parts of your Portfolio:

- Cover Letter
- Social and Cultural Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report Cover Letter
- Personal Reflection Essay

To ensure a successful PLAR Portfolio, please follow the description given under the “Excellent” heading for each of the three portfolio components of the rubric. Avoid the mistakes listed under the “Unsatisfactory” level of achievement.

The success of your Portfolio depends on achieving a minimum score as noted at the bottom of each of the three individual component rubrics. By doing so, you will meet or exceed the required **minimum total of 65 out of 130 possible points** for all three parts combined.

1. Cover Letter

Format

Please use the following formatting guidelines for your cover letter.

1. Your street address
2. Date line
3. Recipient address
4. Subject line
5. Recipient salutation
6. Body consisting of three blocked paragraphs
7. Closing goodwill statement
8. Your signature and full printed name
9. All on one 8.5” by 11” page with single-spaced lines, double between items 1-8, and a consistent font.

Excellent	All 9 format components are included in the required order.	5 points
Satisfactory	Some of the 9 format components are absent, presented in the wrong order or incomplete.	3-4 points
Improvable	Many of the 9 format components are absent, presented in the wrong order or incomplete.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	No cover letter provided, or none of the 9 format components followed.	0 points

Opening Paragraph

State:

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

1. the purpose of the application (to obtain credit in GED0013: General Education Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding);
2. introduce yourself by explaining what you are doing now; and
3. describe what ultimate goal this application will help you achieve.

Excellent	All three of the required points are stated clearly in the given order.	5 points
Satisfactory	Two or three of the three required points are stated clearly, but one or two are unclear, in the wrong order and/or mixed with some irrelevant, redundant or repeated detail.	3-4 points
Improvable	One or two of the three required points are stated clearly, but the others are absent, unclear, in the wrong order and/or mixed with some irrelevant, redundant or repeated detail.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	Cover letter omits an opening paragraph, or it covers none of the three required points.	0 points

Main Body Paragraph

Summarize the learning and prior experiences you have acquired to meet some or most of the five Social and Cultural Understanding Theme objectives on pages 1-2 above.

Excellent	Paragraph convincingly, clearly, concisely and coherently summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet most (7-10) of the Theme Objectives.	9-10 points
Satisfactory	Paragraph summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet some (4-6) of the Theme Objectives. There may also be minor problems with clarity, coherence and conciseness.	6-8 points
Improvable	Paragraph summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet 1-3 of the Theme Objectives. The paragraph may also be incoherent (e.g., sentences jump around and run off-topic), too short or too long, with off-topic details and a general lack of clarity.	3-5 points
Unsatisfactory	There is no discernible main body paragraph, or it barely summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet any of the Theme Objectives. Most of the sentences lack clarity and coherence, and/or are riddled with off-topic details.	0-2 points

Closing Sentences

Clear statement verifying that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed portfolio, as well as a goodwill expression of thanks to the assessor for considering your application.

Excellent	Closing sentences clearly and concisely state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed	5 points
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Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

	portfolio, as well as thank the assessor for considering your application.	
Satisfactory	Closing sentences state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the portfolio and thank the assessor, but there are minor problems with the clarity and conciseness of expression.	3-4 points
Improvable	Closing sentences state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included but don't thank the assessor or vice versa. There may also be problems with the clarity and conciseness of expression.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	Closing is either absent, or doesn't clearly and concisely state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed portfolio, nor does it express thanks to the assessor for considering the application.	0 points

Quality of Writing

Letter content is correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and is generally professional in style throughout.

Excellent	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
Satisfactory	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
Improvable	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Cover Letter must score a minimum of 15 out of 30 points.

Points Total	/ 30
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Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

2. Social and Cultural Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report

Format

All work is contained in a single document with a descriptive title, introduction, and pages that combine learning summary statements, along with photos or writing samples on each page, with a professional overall appearance, a document title and a consistent use of font type/size and headings throughout.

Excellent	The report is titled descriptively, has an introduction page, followed by pages that combine titled learning summary statements and photos or writing samples. The report appears professional, with a consistently-applied font type and size, heading styles and spacing throughout.	5 points
Satisfactory	The report has a title that is not descriptive, the introduction is not on a page of its own, and/or the report has some minor inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles, spacing, and/or organization of learning summary statements and photos or writing samples.	3-4 points
Improvable	The report's title is misleading or absent, the introduction is not on a page of its own, the report has many inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles and spacing, and lacks organization in its presentation of learning summary statements combined with photos or writing samples.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	The report lacks a title, has many inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles and spacing, and lacks organization in its learning summary statements combination with photos or writing samples.	0 points

Introduction

A brief (at least a paragraph but no more than one page) introduction that explains the purpose of the Report and the occasion for its being written, and gives a brief overview of its contents.

Excellent	The report has an introductory page with a clear title ("Introduction") and at least one paragraph that clearly and concisely explains the purpose of the Report and the occasion for its being written, and gives a brief overview of its contents.	5 points
Satisfactory	The report's Introduction is not appropriately titled and does not clearly and concisely explain either the purpose of the Report, the occasion for its being written, or its contents.	3-4 points
Improvable	The report's Introduction is not titled, is not on a page of its own, and/or does not clearly and concisely explain the purpose of the Report, the occasion for its being written and its contents.	1-2 points

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

Unsatisfactory	The report omits an Introduction, or includes one that meets none of the requirements.	0 points
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Learning Summary Statements

A title and introductory paragraph summary above each photo or writing sample explains the context and learning that resulted from social and cultural experiences or accomplishments, in relation to the Theme Objectives stated on pages 1-2 above.

Excellent	Above each of the 10 photos or 5 writing samples is a title and 1-2 paragraph summary explaining the context (time, place, people involved, occasion, importance, etc.) and learning that resulted from the social and experience or accomplishment, and the learning described relates to at least 4-5 of the Theme Objectives.	16-20 points
Satisfactory	The summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample are titled and good but there are slightly less than the number required, or they are all there but they lack clarity and focus when describing the context and learning that resulted, and they relate to only 1-2 of the Theme Objectives.	11-15 points
Improvable	The summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample are good but are untitled, there are too few of them, or they are mostly there but don't clearly describe the context and learning that resulted, they do only one of these, and/or they relate to only one or so of the Theme Objectives.	6-10 points
Unsatisfactory	There are no summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample, or they are untitled and so thin that they describe neither the context nor the learning that resulted, nor do they relate in any way to the Theme Objectives.	0-5 points

Photo Essay or Writing Samples

A *photo essay* chronicling your experience of another culture abroad or within Canada (e.g., an indigenous population), each featuring you (one photo per page); OR

Writing samples showcasing your strong interest in or study of history or other cultures in the form of five past or present written commentaries, blogs, analytical essays, critical reviews, correspondence, or links to other media that you have produced.

Excellent	A photo essay chronicling your experience of another culture abroad or within Canada (e.g., an indigenous population), each featuring you (one photo per page); OR Writing samples showcasing your strong interest in or study of history or other cultures in the form of five past or present written commentaries, blogs, analytical essays, critical reviews, correspondence, or links to other media that you have produced.	20-25 points
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Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

Satisfactory	You may only have 6 to 8 <i>photo essay</i> photos chronicling your experience of another culture abroad or within Canada (with an indigenous population), or you have 9 to 10 but they don't all feature you (perhaps you were behind the camera); OR You may only have 3 to 4 <i>writing samples</i> or you have 5 but they don't all convincingly demonstrate a strong interest in the study history or other cultures.	13-19 points
Improvable	You may only have 3 to 5 <i>photo essay</i> photos chronicling your experience of other cultures, or you have 6 to 8 but they don't all feature you or clearly illustrate what you describe in your accompanying learning summary statements. OR You may only have 1 to 2 <i>writing samples</i> or you have 3 to 4 but they don't all convincingly demonstrate a strong interest in the study of history or other cultures.	6-12 points
Unsatisfactory	There is no representative selection of evidence of social and cultural experience, accomplishment, or interest, or the evidence is minimal and presented in a manner that does not meet the requirements and Theme Objectives.	0-5 points

Quality of Writing

The Summary Report is correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and is generally professional in style throughout.

Excellent	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
Satisfactory	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
Improvable	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Summary Report must score a minimum of 30 out of 60 points.

Points Total	/ 60
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Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

3. Personal Reflection Essays

Format

The essays fill three single-spaced pages, have a descriptive title and a subheading for each of the two sections named below.

Excellent	The essays fill three single-spaced pages with the title given above and a subheading for each of the two sections named below; the font type and size, heading styles and spacing are consistent throughout.	5 points
Satisfactory	The essays deviate slightly from the format requirement (for example, the title is not the same as that given above), or has minor inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles or spacing.	3-4 points
Improvable	The essays are not single-spaced and are inconsistent in font type and size, heading styles and spacing.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	One or more of the essays is absent or disorganized, with too many format errors, such as no title or section headings, multiple line spacing or inconsistencies in font type or size, heading styles or character spacing.	0 points

Section A: Cultural Role and Impact

A two-page essay on (1) the role that the type of cultural experience you showcase in your Summary Report generally plays in culture at large, and (2) its impact on society historically and today, addressing Theme 3 Objectives 1, 3 and 4.

Excellent	The essay is two pages in length and has a subheading called “The Role and Impact of [your chosen type of cultural experience—such as, living abroad] in Culture” and explains (1) the role played by the type of cultural experience you showcase in terms of culture at large and (2) its impact on culture historically and today. The essay addresses Theme 3 Objectives 1, 3, and 4 (see pages 4-5 above).	16-20 points
Satisfactory	The essay is only 1.5 pages in length, may not identify your chosen type of cultural experience in the subheading, covers topic (1) in more depth than (2) or vice versa, covers contemporary but not historical aspects for topics (1) or (2) or vice versa, runs slightly off-topic, and/or addresses only two of Theme 3 Objectives 1, 3, and 4 given on pages 4-5 above.	11-15 points
Improvable	The essay is a page or less in length, discusses culture in general rather than the specific type of experience you focus on in your Summary Report, fails to follow the required subheading name, covers topic (1) but not (or barely) topic (2) or vice versa, fails to clearly address historical or contemporary aspects for either topic, runs off-topic, and/or	6-10 points

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

	addresses only one of Theme 3 Objectives 1, 3, or 4 given on pages 1-2 above.	
Unsatisfactory	The document omits the Cultural Role and Impact essay or is less than a page in length, vaguely discusses cultural experience in general rather than the type you focus on in your Summary Report, omits a subheading, vaguely addresses only topic (1) or (2), fails to discuss the historical and contemporary aspects of either topic, largely ignores Theme 3 Objectives, runs off topic, and/or is plagiarized in whole or in part.	0-5 points

Section B: Personal Meaning

A one-page personal reflection on how your social and cultural experience or interests have affected you over time. It addresses Theme 3 Objectives 2 and 5 by summarizing (1) how your cultural experience has affected your worldview or general outlook on life, (2) the influence your cultural experience has had on your own self-awareness, (3) the influence that history and culture has had on your personal and professional development, and (4) how you participate in the main currents (e.g., economic, ethnic) of culture at large.

Excellent	The essay fills one full page with a reflection on how your cultural interests and/or experience have affected you over time, addresses Theme 3 Objectives 2 and 5 by summarizing (1) how your cultural experience has affected your general outlook on life, (2) the influence that your experience has had on your own self-awareness, (3) the influence of history and culture on your personal and professional development, and (4) what role you play in culture at large.	9-10 points
Satisfactory	The essay fills less than a page with a reflection on how your cultural interests and/or experience have impacted your life and addresses Theme 3 Objectives 2 and 5 by clearly and coherently summarizing three of the four topics suggested in the guidelines above, though the fourth topic and Theme Objective 2 or 5 may be unclear or limited by off-topic digressions.	6-8 points
Improvable	The essay fills half a page with a reflection on how your cultural interests and/or experience have impacted your life and addresses only Theme 3 Objective 2 or 5 by clearly and coherently summarizing at least half of the four topics suggested in the guidelines above, though some of the topics and the Theme Objective may be unclear or limited out by off-topic digressions.	3-5 points
Unsatisfactory	The document omits a reflection on how your cultural interests and/or experience have impacted your life, or it is less than half a page in length, barely addresses Theme Objective 2, 5 or the four topics suggested in the guidelines, adds off-topic digressions and/or is plagiarized in whole or in part.	0-2 points

Theme 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding (GED0013) PLAR

Quality of Writing

The Personal Reflection Essays are correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and are generally professional in style throughout.

Excellent	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
Satisfactory	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
Improvable	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
Unsatisfactory	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Personal Reflection Essays must score a minimum of 20 out of 40 points.

Points Total	/ 40
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To gain a PLAR credit, your complete PLAR Portfolio must score a minimum of 65 out of 130 points.

Portfolio Points Total	/ 130
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