

Strategic Plan, 2015-2020 General Education Program

The Mission

Appalachian State University's General Education program offers a rigorous liberal education that includes 44 semester hours of courses from across the university, plus two courses in the major program that address the General Education goals of critical and creative thinking; effective communication; making local-to-global connections; and understanding the responsibilities of community membership.

Our General Education curriculum aligns with the University's Strategic Plan directive to create a transformational educational experience by: facilitating interdisciplinary and integrative approaches to teaching and learning; enhancing academic quality and improving student retention and success; and engaging students in diverse experiences to increase their intercultural competence and cultivate engaged global citizenship.

Appalachian's General Education curriculum also aligns with national best practices that empower students, regardless of their chosen major, with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement for responsible global citizenship. Furthermore, our curriculum has addressed for several years the recently approved UNC system core competencies of critical thinking and written communication. We respond to the demands of the 21st century for broadly educated, informed, and engaged citizens. We prepare college graduates with higher levels of learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to navigate this more demanding environment successfully and responsibly.

The Vision

To empower students with the habits of mind essential for making positive contributions as engaged citizens in an interconnected world.

Core Values

The core values of our General Education program are centered on the ideals and value of a liberal education. The goal of a liberal education—to help shape minds that are free to think for themselves and are able to make their own informed choices—is the same that drives the learning goals for our General Education curriculum. The value of that curriculum is evident in a number of important ways:

- Students ought to be inspired with the joy of learning new things. As Jeremiah Day, president of Yale University in the 1820s, declared: "Those branches of study should be prescribed and those modes of instruction adopted, which are best calculated to teach the art of fixing the attention, directing the train of thought, analyzing a subject proposed for investigation; following, with accurate discrimination, the course of argument; balancing nicely the evidence presented to the judgment; wakening, elevating, and

controlling the imagination; arranging, with skill, the treasures which memory gathers; rousing and guiding the powers of genius.”

- Our General Education curriculum assists students in developing broad, interdisciplinary outlooks and understanding the value of integrative learning.
- Critical and creative thinking and effective communication assist students in achieving success not only at the university, but also in life as informed and participatory citizens.
- Understanding local-to-global connections and responsibilities of community membership are vital for students who find themselves in an increasingly interdependent, globalized world requiring the sustainable use of scarce resources. Developing an intercultural competence is also essential for operating within today’s multicultural society.
- A curriculum founded on the values of a liberal education is also valuable in terms of its practical benefit for developing our students to become effective members of the nation’s economy. In recent years, U.S. employers regularly report that, regardless of their major, every college student should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences. In addition, employers regularly agree that a candidate’s capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.

Strategic Plan Goal 1: Organize student-learning experiences around four core proficiencies by administering an effective faculty driven General Education curriculum.

General Education at Appalachian State University focuses on four core proficiencies: critical and creative thinking; effective communication; making local-to-global connections; and understanding the responsibilities of community membership. The General Education Office exists to assist faculty members in establishing the thematic groupings and individual courses that make up the General Education curriculum and to monitor the effectiveness of that curriculum in addressing those core proficiencies.

Initiatives:

1. Maintain formal faculty oversight bodies (specifically the faculty coordinating committees and the General Education Council) governing curriculum change, proposal reviews, and revisions for each component of the General Education curriculum.

2. Monitor the balance of courses and classroom seats supporting each of the goals in General Education through a continual process of curriculum mapping.

Measurements:

Initiative 1: All nominations, elections, and meeting times for faculty coordinating committees and the General Education Council are handled in a timely and effective fashion.

Initiative 2: Provide a report that (a) indicates whether the numbers of General Education courses and classroom seats participating in each goal are at least 25% of the total courses and seats, and (b) indicates whether at least 75% of non-transfer students by their second semester of their second year of General Education had multiple encounters with all four learning goals within their General Education courses.

Strategic Plan Goal 2: Collaborate with faculty, staff, and administrators in the realization of General Education goals.

The General Education Office coordinates with the Academic Advising and Orientation Center, Division of Enrollment Management, University Libraries, and individual colleges to ensure that both freshman and transfer students successfully navigate the curricular requirements. The office also works with faculty and academic departments for faculty and curricular development.

Initiatives:

1. Foster continuity of faculty preparedness for teaching and departmental preparedness for assessing General Education courses by consulting with faculty and departments about their particular needs and responding with an appropriate combination of workshops, meetings with individual faculty and departments, and resources embedded on the General Education Program website.
2. Coordinate with Advising and Enrollment Management offices on the establishment of policies and procedures for the General Education curriculum.
3. Work with academic departments and curriculum committees in developing, proposing, and vetting courses for the General Education curriculum.

Measurements:

Initiative 1: Keep track of total number of workshops and meetings (and number of participants) with faculty and departments, and total number of visits to our

website materials offered by the General Education Office each year. As much as possible, encourage follow-up reports from those faculty and departments who make use of these opportunities to track the impact of their participation on their teaching and assessment activities. Adjust General Education offerings in each of these areas every year depending on needs, demand, and effectiveness.

Initiative 2: Track meetings and initiatives with Advising and Enrollment Management Offices.

Initiative 3: Track meetings, correspondence, and course proposals.

Strategic Plan Goal 3: Communicate with multiple audiences about the structure of the General Education curriculum and purpose of a liberal education.

Our quality General Education curriculum helps make Appalachian State University an attractive place to get an education. We therefore participate regularly in the efforts to recruit new students. We also communicate in a wide variety of ways with incoming freshmen and transfer students about the requirements of the curriculum. Finally, we communicate with new faculty and departmental leaders to acquaint them with the structure and purpose of General Education.

Initiatives:

1. Develop and update materials and resources for dissemination in Student Orientation programs.
2. Communicate directly with prospective and new students.
3. Communicate with coordinators, new faculty and new department chairs.
4. Create and participate in campus and national conversations related to General Education goals.

Measurements:

Initiative 1: List of new or updated student orientation materials (annual).

Initiative 2: List contact points (i.e., Open House, Website).

Initiative 3: Gather list of new General Education faculty and theme coordinators from participating departments and note how many we have contacted.

Initiative 4: General Education leadership team supports and attends relevant conferences, workshops, and other events.

Strategic Plan Goal 4: Support university-wide and departmental units' documentation of evidence-based student learning for the achievement of a well-rounded liberal education that emphasizes the core proficiencies of General Education.

The General Education Office provides the General Education Council with annual reports on the assessment processes and reports received by departmental units for the goals and components of the General Education Program. Assessment results are used to improve student learning across all General Education courses.

Initiatives:

1. Require departmental units seeking renewal of General Education courses, a rolling process that will begin in 2018, to provide at least one interim report within a five-year period on their assessment of student learning outcomes in the courses being renewed. Require reports to include the department's action steps and initiatives geared to improve student learning related to the General Education goals.
2. Seek student input via questions added to the Senior Survey to assess the students' learning experience relative to the integrative themes and the four General Education goals.
3. Stay updated and involved in State level General Education assessment initiatives.

Measurements:

Initiative 1: By 2021 at least 75% of the departments with courses in the General Education Program will submit at least one interim report describing how their courses are successfully contributing to the goals of General Education in terms of their own assessment benchmarks for the goals.

Initiative 2: Based on the Senior Survey at least 75% of the students will agree or strongly agree that their General Education courses supported integrative learning and the core competencies of thinking critically and creatively, communicating effectively, making local to global connections, and understanding the responsibilities of community membership.

Initiative 3: Attend State GEC meetings and conferences related to General Education and assessment. Participate in State level assessment initiatives and respond accordingly to State level benchmarks for student learning based on our campus results.

Strategic Plan Goal 5: Contribute to a high quality first-year experience through First Year Seminar that supports the broader General Education objectives and University mission.

All Appalachian State University students completing the General Education program, with the exception of transfer students with 30 or more hours of prior credit, are required to take a 3-credit First Year Seminar. Each unique topic taught through FYS introduces all four General Education learning goals as well as the University's global learning initiative. FYS also introduces students to the goals of a liberal education, connects them to the faculty, campus, and community, and introduces them to the rigor of academic scholarship and learning.

Initiatives:

1. Maintain formal faculty oversight body that ensures high quality courses for First Year Seminar.
2. Improve student learning by setting benchmarks for student success in the common course goals of FYS, the four learning goals of General Education, and the learning goal of the Quality Enhancement Plan (GLO goal).
3. Cultivate a core group of FYS faculty dedicated to best practices of engaged teaching and learning around the General Education learning objectives.
4. Encourage FYS faculty and students to participate in campus-wide efforts for student achievement and retention.
5. Communicate directly with first-year students and stakeholders about the purpose of a liberal education and encouraging student success.

Measurements:

Initiative 1: The FYS Faculty Coordinating Committee will meet regularly to review course proposals and course renewals as well as make recommendations for any new policies governing the teaching and learning process in FYS.

Initiative 2: At least 75% of FYS students who complete the FYS course evaluations will agree or strongly agree that their FYS course addressed the common course goals, the General Education learning goals, and the QEP GLO goal. In addition, at least 75% of FYS student work sampled will show introductory-level knowledge of the learning outcomes. Finally, at least 75% of students will demonstrate introductory-level proficiency in information literacy skills by completing the online library tutorials will do so with passing scores on the accompanying library quizzes.

Initiative 3: Annual financial support for four FYS faculty to attend local and national opportunities to participate in professional conversations about best

pedagogical practices. Increased leadership and peer mentoring efforts among all full-time FYS lecturers (e.g., at workshops, retreats, published teaching materials, etc.), and full-time FYS faculty conducting at least two FYS teaching peer reviews annually.

Initiative 4: FYS Faculty Coordinator attends at least one regional or national best practices conference, symposium, or training, and makes effective collaborations between FYS and campus offices concerned with student achievement (e.g., Offices of Residence Life, Counseling, Student Success and Retention, Learning Assistance Programs, etc.).

Initiative 5: Increased number of visits to resources on the FYS website and FYS blog; increased use of posters, flyers, and other relevant informational materials; and increased attendance at co-curricular events and workshops by all stakeholders (e.g., FYS faculty, FYS students, and staff in advising, orientation, and recruitment).