

General Education Requirements

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The Progressive Learning in Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) General Education Program at Northern Illinois University provides foundational skills and breadth of knowledge through study in a broad variety of disciplines. Together with course work in the major and co-curricular experiences, general education provides students with opportunities to develop competencies in NIU's baccalaureate student learning outcomes. The baccalaureate experience at Northern Illinois University challenges students to think critically, create, and communicate by participating in a progressive, engaged learning environment. Major area studies, general education, and co-curricular experiences prepare students to become productive members of a culturally and globally diverse society, and lifelong learners ready to meet the challenges of a dynamic career. See: "The Baccalaureate Experience" for a listing of the baccalaureate outcomes.

Framework

The PLUS General Education Program consists of two types of course work.

First, Foundational Studies courses develop the competencies necessary to succeed academically and personally. They emphasize students' abilities to: (1) think critically and creatively; (2) reason quantitatively and qualitatively; (3) communicate clearly and effectively; and (4) work collaboratively across disciplines.

Second, Knowledge Domain courses continue to develop foundational competencies, as well as assure exposure to a broad array of ideas, disciplines, and ways of obtaining and interpreting information. The three knowledge domains are Creativity and Critical Analysis, Society and Culture, and Nature and Technology. Knowledge Domain courses emphasize students' abilities to: (1) connect human life to the natural world; (2) understand and respect diverse cultures; (3) integrate knowledge of global interconnections; and (4) synthesize knowledge and skills.

Knowledge Domain requirements may optionally be fulfilled by a set of PLUS Pathways courses. A Pathway is a body of coursework drawn from all three Knowledge Domains that examines a theme from different disciplinary perspectives. The Pathways take the disciplinary breadth inherent in the Knowledge Domain component of general education, and comprise courses that address a set of common questions. The purpose of a Pathway is to provide coherence and relevance to general education, and allow students to choose a general education experience that aligns with their interests and goals. Pathways will further enhance content integration and will give students and instructors greater opportunities to develop the skill of collaborating effectively across disciplines.

Foundational Studies

Through Foundational Studies, students will begin to develop the fundamental skills of written communication, oral communication, and numeracy, all of which are required for academic, professional, and personal success. Students will learn to: (1) write skillfully with a thorough awareness of context, audience, and purpose; (2) communicate effectively through speaking, presenting, and debating, with an awareness of the specific practices in different disciplines; (3) perform basic numerical computations, display facility with using formal and quantitative reasoning analysis and problem solving, and interpret mathematical models and statistical information; and (4) work collaboratively with peers from different backgrounds.

The Foundational Studies general education requirements consist of two courses in Writing Composition, one course in Oral Communication, and one course in Quantitative Literacy. Foundational Studies courses do not count toward general education Knowledge Domain requirements.

All students must satisfy the Foundational Studies requirements in Writing Composition, Oral Communication, and Quantitative Literacy for 3-12 semester hours of general education credit.

The requirements in the Foundational Studies can be met by completing the designated course, by transfer credit, by passing a competency examination, or, for some Foundation Studies, through credit by examination. (See “Credit by Examination.”) Although passing a competency examination fulfills the requirement for the Foundational Studies, it does not result in the awarding of NIU course credit (i.e., it reduces the required number of general education hours but does not reduce the number of hours required for a degree.) Students with strong academic credentials are encouraged to attempt the competency examinations. Information on competency examinations is available from the Office of Testing Services.

The specific ways to satisfy the Foundational Studies requirements are listed below.

Foundational Studies

Foundational Studies Writing Requirements (0-6)

- 100-level Rhetoric and Composition (0-3 semester hours). Writing and revising argumentative and analytical essays. This requirement can be satisfied by:
 - Obtaining a grade of C or better in ENGL 103 or an equivalent course, or
 - Obtaining equivalent transfer credit, or
 - Passing the Writing Composition Foundational Studies Competency Examination, or
 - Obtaining credit for ENGL 103 through examination by credit (Advanced Placement).

- 200-level Writing in the Domains (3 semester hours). Writing and revising argumentative and analytical essays; analyze, evaluate, and synthesize material from a variety of sources; incorporate knowledge domain-appropriate writing and rhetorical styles as well as documentation styles. This requirement can be satisfied by:
 - Obtaining a grade of C or better in ENGL 203, ENGL 204, or an equivalent course, or
 - Obtaining equivalent transfer credit.

Foundational Studies Oral Communication Requirements (0-3)

This requirement can be satisfied by:

- Passing COMS 100, or an equivalent course, or
- Obtaining equivalent transfer credit, or
- Passing the Oral Communication Foundational Studies Competency Examination.

Foundational Studies Quantitative Literacy Requirement (0-3)

This requirement can be satisfied by:

- passing MATH 101 or equivalent course, or
- obtaining a C or better in MATH 155, MATH 201, MATH 206, MATH 210, MATH 211, or MATH 229, or an equivalent course,
- obtaining credit for one of the mathematics courses listed above, except MATH 101, through credit by examination (Advanced Placement), or
- obtaining a grade of C or better in STAT 100, STAT 300, or ISYE 335; and obtaining
 - a grade of C or better in MATH 110, or
 - an ACT mathematics score of at least 24, or
 - an SAT mathematics score of at least 560, or
 - an A- or B-level placement on the mathematics placement examination
- obtaining equivalent transfer credit, or
- passing the Mathematics Competency Examination.

Knowledge Domain Requirements and Course Descriptions

There is a required minimum of 21 semester hours in the three General Education Knowledge Domains. The three General Education Knowledge Domains are areas of human endeavor (Creativity and Critical Analysis; Nature and Technology; Society and Culture) and will: (1) help students attain a sound liberal education and acquire sufficient general knowledge and intellectual versatility to become productive and resourceful members of society, (2) explore human thought and relations in order to understand and respect cultural heritage, (3) provide an understanding of the scientific method and the application of scientific facts and principles pertaining to the natural and technological worlds, and (4) examine the role of knowledge in promoting human welfare.

The required minimum of 21 semester hours in Knowledge Domain studies cannot include more than two courses in any one department. (A course with an affiliated laboratory course shall be counted as a single course.)

A maximum of two approved general education courses in the student's major department may be used to fulfill general education requirements. (A course with an affiliated laboratory course shall be counted as a single course.)

The 21 general education semester hours required in the three Knowledge Domains can be earned by: (1) successful completion of designated courses; (2) general education credit articulation; (3) transfer articulation; or (4) credit by examination.

Foundational Studies courses do not count toward general education Knowledge Domain requirements. Any single course cannot count towards fulfilling more than one Knowledge Domain requirement.

Creativity and Critical Analysis (a minimum of 6 semester hours)

Courses in Creativity and Critical Analysis will challenge students to develop the skills involved in critical reflection and creative expression. Students will: (1) become acquainted with methods for analyzing primary sources and critically evaluating the ideas, events, traditions, and belief systems that have shaped human experience and expression; (2) explore fundamental modes of aesthetic and creative expression; and (3) understand and evaluate the diversity of humanity's most notable cultural achievements from artistic, historical, linguistic, literary, and philosophical perspectives.

[Course list includes options in anthropology, English, history, languages, education, business, philosophy, theater, art, and communication, political science—course selection is based on content, not discipline]

Nature and Technology (a minimum of 6 semester hours)

Courses in Nature and Technology will develop students' understanding of the role of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and their relevance to societal issues. This domain encompasses human activities through which we observe, measure, model, and interpret the natural world and physical universe. Courses will explore the process of scientific discovery and how the resulting knowledge is applied to understand technological and societal change. Students will: (1) be able to articulate society's connections to, and responsibility towards, the natural world; and (2) learn to apply the scientific method, including assessing empirical data, investigating the predictions of existing theories, and developing experimentally testable hypotheses.

[Course list includes options in anthropology, biology, chemistry, environmental health science, geography, history, philosophy, physics, psychology]

Society and Culture (a minimum of 6 semester hours)

Courses in Society and Culture will develop understanding of the methods of inquiry used to study humanity, from individual behavior to how people organize and govern nations, societies, and cultures. Students will: (1) learn the role, principles, and methods of social and behavioral science in understanding individual and collective behavior in society; (2) hone the reasoning skills required to understand theories of human behavior and social phenomena; and (3) develop the ability to understand and evaluate the communication of results in the social and behavioral sciences.

[Course list includes options in anthropology, art, biology, communication, economics, English, business, geography, human development, history, nutrition, political science, human services, sociology]

Elective from any Knowledge Domain (1 course, a minimum of 3 semester hours)

Notes:

This plan only has 33 hours; total hours required for graduation is 120

Additional requirements for graduation include one class or cocurricular experience in human diversity and two upper-level writing infused courses

BA requires two years of language courses or equivalent

BS requires more science and math

University offers the opportunity for cocurricular experience notations for artistry, work experience (internship), experiential learning, leadership, service learning, and undergraduate research. These go through an application process and require a critical reflection and they hold showcase days for the different areas.

