

General Education Requirements

Most colleges require students to fulfill some form of general education requirements, designed to ensure that the student has demonstrated breadth in learning across the curriculum. **The General Education (GenEd) Program at UMass Amherst helps you develop critical thinking, communication, and learning skills** that will benefit you not just in college, but for a lifetime.

What do employers report they value most highly in new employees? They say: a) excellent communications skills, b) exceptional analytic skills, and c) the ability to understand and think critically about complex issues.

The following statements, drawn from the UMass GenEd website <http://www.umass.edu/gened/>, describe the intent of the program:

The purpose of the General Education requirement is to stretch students' minds, broaden their experiences, and prepare them for:

- Their college experiences and subsequent professional training
- Their careers and productive lives
- Community engagement and informed citizenship
- A diverse and rapidly changing world
- A lifetime of learning

The General Education curriculum does this by engaging students in:

- Fundamental questions, ideas, and methods of analysis in the humanities and fine arts, social sciences, mathematics, and natural and physical sciences;
- The application and integration of these methods of analysis to real world problems and contexts;
- Creative, analytical, quantitative, and critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving and synthesis;
- Pluralistic perspective-taking and awareness of the relationship among culture, self, and others;
- Understanding and evaluating the consequences of one's choices and the implications of one's actions.
- Opportunities to develop and practice the skills of critical thinking, reasoning, communication, and integration of knowledge and perspectives, including:
 - Communicating persuasively and effectively orally and in writing;
 - Working effectively and collaboratively (in groups, across perspectives);
 - Developing information and technological literacy

For more information, go to www.umass.edu/gened/

How do I know what to take?

For an overview of GenEd requirements, check out the [General Education Course Planning Guide](#), found in this text and on the UMass website (*note that the requirements are different for people who entered UMass BEFORE Fall 2010 and AFTER*). Completion of Gen Ed requirements will take up to thirteen classes, depending on factors such as placement exams and course selections.

How do I know what courses count for GenEd?

GenEd designations are assigned to courses, based on what experiences and learning objectives the course delivers. For instance, the PS designation - Physical Sciences - labels all GenEd courses that involve students in asking and using the fundamental questions of a scientific discipline to build skills in critical thinking, analysis, mathematical application, and scientific communication. *Note: not all courses get GenEd designations – e.g. not all History courses satisfy the HS designation.*

How do I find GenEd courses?

Search SPIRE for the most current information about course listings in any given semester. SPIRE also allows you to search by Gen Ed designation. *Click on the "Search Schedule/Browse Catalog link."* Choose the semester term. Under "Class Search Criteria," leave the "Subject" field blank, for "Course Career" choose "Undergraduate," choose the appropriate "Session," and click on the Gen Ed designation that you are looking for. Pay attention to whether the courses are 3- or 4-credit, and know what your Gen Ed requirements stipulate. NOTE: The exception to this approach is that you cannot search for IE (Integrative Experience) courses on SPIRE – but you can go to your ARR (Academic Requirements Report), scroll down to the IE listing, and click to see any IE course that will meet your major's requirement.

What if I can't get into a GenEd class I want?

Some popular Gen Ed courses fill early. Plan your Gen Ed courses carefully - with the help of your advisor - so that you take classes that interest you and that will create a unifying experience. Don't plan to complete all of your Gen Ed courses in your first semester or year - distribute them throughout your four years. Put off a sought-after GenEd course until later, when as an upper-class student you earn an earlier registration date. Know what your first choice GenEds are, and be ready to take them when you can . . . and keep a list of acceptable alternatives if you need to take them.

Things to keep in mind:

- To meet a 4-credit requirement (Biological/Physical Sciences and Social World), you either need to take ONE 4-credit course or TWO 3-credit courses from the same required area.
- To monitor your Gen Ed progress, go to your SPIRE homepage, and choose 'Academic Requirements' from the 'other academics' dropdown menu.
- When you declare or change your major, your GenEds may shift. For example, as an exploratory track student you may be counting both ECON103 & ECON104 as GenEds, but if you become an ECON major, you may only count one of them as a GenEd and the other would need to be replaced by another course.
- Gen Ed courses (completed after enrollment at UMass) cannot be taken Pass/Fail.
- Only one course from your major department may count toward GenEd requirements, and one additional course may fulfill a Diversity requirement.
- No more than three I or SI courses will count toward Gen Ed and Diversity requirements.
- The Social & Cultural Diversity requirements can be combined with Social World requirements.