

GENERAL EDUCATION:  
Parameters and Building-Blocks

Because ours is a specialized age, faculty members are as likely to be confused by the notion of general education (these students should have learned this already!) as are their students (why do I have to take a philosophy course to be a stockbroker?). Defending general education in the classroom itself provides faculty members a golden opportunity to engage their students in the process of learning, but only if a definition of general education to which they and their students may aspire together has been adopted. In order for such a definition of general education to be adopted, it must be informed by the educational philosophy of the institution, so that it will indeed reflect a program of general education that has itself been integrated into the institution's curriculum. What, then, do we currently need at Prince George's Community College?

- (1) We need a philosophy of education
- (2) We need a definition of general education that reflects our educational philosophy
- (3) We need to integrate our defined program of general education into our curriculum

(1) The current preamble to the Core Learning Outcomes is a philosophy of education. Although it needs to be reworked, doing so with general education and its role in the curriculum as a whole foremost in mind is feasible. Though difficult and time-consuming, adopting such a philosophy will render the needs that flow from it (2&3) much easier to meet. As the departmental dialogues on College Enrichment Day reveal, moreover, faculty have tremendous energy surrounding this process and are more than willing to participate.

(2) Any definition we adopt must insist that general education provides a coherent, engaging, and rigorous intellectual experience for students and is deep enough in substance yet broad enough in scope to be of use to students in disciplines and programs above and beyond those in which any specific general education course is offered. Consider the definition offered by the task Force on General Education Requirements at PGCC, written in 1983.

“General Education is a common body of knowledge, skills, and values to which all Associate degree-seeking students, both part-time and full-time, should be exposed, and for which Prince George's Community College may determine certain levels of competency. This common learning experience should enable students to think and communicate intelligently and critically, thereby equipping them for rational decision-making in an increasingly complex society.”

(3) Even if we decide to use the Core Learning Outcomes currently in revision as the basis for assessing programs other than general education, these outcomes alone will not suffice to define our General Education Program. Similarly, assessing how well our students are applying the fundamental knowledge, skills, and values to which they have been exposed in their general education courses will not suffice to integrate this program into our curriculum.

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