

UC Merced General Education Program: Introduction

This document provides a detailed description of UC Merced's new General Education program. The General Education program and the curriculum requirements it establishes were the result of four years of effort by Senate entities, especially the General Education Subcommittee (GESC) of Undergraduate Council (UGC), as well as many faculty and staff members. These efforts included:

- academic program review of the General Education program (AY 2014-2015) (<https://ue.ucmerced.edu/ge/key-steps-process>);
- faculty and staff retreats (May 2014 and June 2015) that developed *Hallmarks of UC Merced Baccalaureate Degrees* (<https://ue.ucmerced.edu/ge/hallmarks-baccalaureate-degrees>), and a Mission and Program Learning Outcomes for GE at UC Merced (https://ue.ucmerced.edu/sites/ue.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/mission_and_program_learning_outcomes_04.26.16.pdf); and
- ongoing formal and informal faculty and staff feedback regarding multiple iterations of the proposed new GE curriculum.

On April 27, 2017, the GESC submitted a final *Proposal for a New General Education Program* for a vote by the UC Merced faculty; the vote took place between May 1 and May 5, 2017. At its meeting on May 25, 2017, the Divisional Council of the Academic Senate voted to endorse UGC's approval of the *Proposal for a New General Education Program*, effective fall 2018. That approval followed the affirmative vote of the faculty and considered comments from CAPRA and the Natural Sciences Executive Committee, as well as from UGC.

UC Merced General Education Program: Overview

UC Merced's General Education program engages students with the values, practices, and contributions of a research university to provide a framework for integrative learning in the context of the culturally and economically diverse Central Valley. In tandem with the major and the co-curriculum, General Education supports students in achieving the Hallmarks of the Baccalaureate Degree at UC Merced. It nurtures the spirit of inquiry, building students' knowledge of disciplines, cultures, and perspectives. General Education (GE) fosters collaboration, communication, and ethical action. It empowers students to share their learning and skills to address the local and global challenges of an interconnected, changing world.

The GE program is designed to extend over four years for all UC Merced undergraduates, regardless of major, and there is some point of student contact with GE in every year:

- *Year One:* Students will take a Spark seminar, which explores the nature of inquiry through multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives and experiences.
- *Year Two:* As part of their "jumpstart" meeting with their academic advisor, students will propose a plan for meeting their educational goals, including coursework in GE,

their major, minor, as well as co-curricular experiences. This encourages students to take ownership of their own intellectual growth.

- *Year Three:* Students will take an upper division “Crossroads” course that brings the perspectives of two disciplines to bear on a particular topic. The Crossroads course allows students to see how two different disciplines approach a shared issue or problem, from evidence to evaluation.
- *Year Four:* Students have a culminating integrative experience in their major. The culminating experience in the major provides an opportunity to integrate students’ studies in GE and in the major. The culminating experience may include, but is not limited to, a capstone class, a senior seminar, a service learning project, a portfolio, or a thesis.

The common courses in the first and third years provide a foundation for integrative work across the curriculum and for more focused study in the major. These shared courses are supplemented by courses that introduce students to major *Approaches to Knowledge*, and a range of *Intellectual Experience Badges* that allow students to engage with a range of topics and analytical methods.

All of the curricular and co-curricular elements of the GE program are designed to achieve one or more of the five *General Education Program Learning Outcomes*:

1. *Life at the Research University: Asking Questions*

UC Merced graduates take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world that reflects engagement with the mission and values of our research university:

- They can articulate the benefits of attending a research university for their development as scholars, citizens, life-long learners;
- They generate questions, identify problems, and formulate answers by applying appropriate theoretical, evidentiary, analytical and ethical frameworks from multiple intellectual perspectives;
- They demonstrate intellectual curiosity and an understanding of the nature of knowledge and of themselves as learners;
- They identify and act on their own values and talents through self-reflection; and
- They are at ease with the ambiguity that is inherent in the process of discovery.

2. *Reasoning: Thinking Critically*

UC Merced graduates are equipped with multiple tools of analysis that enable them to formulate or assess an opinion or conclusion:

- They use analytical tools from scientific, social scientific, and humanistic disciplines;

- They are able to identify and evaluate sources of information; and
- They identify, interpret and evaluate multiple kinds of data, including texts, media, observations, and experimental results.

3. Communication: Explaining and Persuading

UC Merced graduates communicate in a variety of ways to diverse audiences:

- They use written, visual, oral and numerical modes of communication to explore and convey ideas;
- They can adjust their communications depending on occasion, purpose and audience; and
- They can work both independently and collaboratively.

4. Cultural and Global Awareness: Engaging with Differences

UC Merced graduates see themselves in relation to local and global cultures and systems of power, past and present:

- They engage with multiple belief systems, social structures, and ways of thinking through attention to societies, languages and cultures of the past and the present;
- They can identify the ways in which cultural, political, economic, technological, and environmental dimensions of society interact;
- They can place their own experiences in relevant analytical frameworks through attention to the relationships of diverse cultures to each other; and
- They gain emotional maturity and resilience by understanding themselves in the world.

5. Citizenship: Contributing to the Public Good

UC Merced graduates are engaged with their communities for the benefit of society:

- They are engaged citizens, having contributed to the building of academic and co-curricular communities at UC Merced;
- They understand and work in diverse communities;
- They engage with the ethical dimensions of their various roles; and
- They can articulate and act on their responsibilities to the multiple communities in which they participate.

UC Merced General Education Program Requirements

Lower Division Common Course Requirements [12-21 Units]

I. *Spark Seminar* [4 Units]

The Spark Seminar introduces students to life at a research university. They ask students to focus on the nature of inquiry by exploring a particular topic over the course of the semester, engaging with campus and local resources,

generating research questions, and presenting original ideas in writing and other forms of communication. Topics will be broad enough to be viewed from multiple perspectives, but focused enough to engage with the issues of the topic in some depth. Topics will be related to an area of research and/or interest to the instructor allowing students to engage with a faculty member who is sharing his or her expertise and passions. Spark seminars may be taken concurrently with either WRI 001 or WRI 010. Spark seminars may not be used to count toward any other course requirements (e.g., GE, minor, major, concentration). *PLO1, PLO2, PLO3*

II. *Written Communication* [4 Units]

Designed to help students develop college-level skills in effective use of language, analysis and argumentation, organization, and strategies for creation, revision and editing. *PLO3*

III. *Quantitative Reasoning* [4-5 Units]

For some students, mathematics and statistics will be an essential tool for mastering a field in depth. Others will build ability to understand how quantitative methods are applied in society to support arguments and solve problems. *PLO2*

IV. *Language* [0-8 Units]

The study of language exposes students to different ways of structuring thought. Students can complete the language requirement one of four ways. *PLO3, PLO4*

1. *Coursework*: Complete one of the following courses:

- CHN 002: Elementary Chinese II
- FRE 002: Elementary French II
- JPN 002: Elementary Japanese II
- SPAN 002: Elementary Spanish II
- CSE 021: Introduction to Computing II
- ME 021: Engineering Computing
- BIOE 021: Computing for Bioengineers

2. *Campus based test*: Passing the campus-administered Foreign Language test demonstrating proficiency equivalent of one year of college foreign language.

3. *Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate Exams:* Earning appropriate scores on an AP/IB Exam.
 - Score of 3, 4 or 5 on one of the following College Board AP exams: Chinese Language and Culture, French Language and Culture, German Language and Culture, Italian Language and Culture, Japanese Language and Culture, and Spanish Language and Culture; or
 - Score of 5, 6 or 7 on one of the Higher Level IB exam in a foreign language or literature; or
 - Score of 4 or 5 on the College Board AP Exam in Computer Science A.
4. *High School Coursework:* Completing the third year of one language in high school with a course GPA of at least C.

Upper Division Common Course Requirements [8-12 Units]

I. *Crossroads Course* [4 Units]

Like the Spark Seminar, the Crossroads course will focus on a specific topic but from an interdisciplinary perspective. It emphasizes different, yet complementary, disciplinary approaches, methods, and assumptions, and provides students with an opportunity for research and analysis. *PLO1, PLO2, PLO3, PLO4*

II. *Writing in the Discipline* [3-4 Units]

Students will take an upper division writing course, or a writing-intensive course in the major that focuses on how to write for a particular field. A one-credit lab course attached to another course may also satisfy this requirement if the primary focus of the lab is writing. *PLO3*

III. *Integrative Culminating Experience* [1-4 Units]

Intended to be completed as part of the major, the Integrative Culminating Experience requirement may be fulfilled through a traditional capstone course, senior or advanced seminar, service-learning course, portfolio, or other methods program faculty choose to integrate learning in the program. *PLO1, PLO2, PLO3, PLO4, PLO5*

Approaches to Knowledge [22-24 Units]

Courses in this area introduce students to the different ways disciplines (and broad branches of knowledge) ask questions and think about the world. All courses will include a project that can be uploaded to an ePortfolio. The Approaches to Knowledge requirement is divided into two

areas: Area A and Area B. Students are required to take three courses in each area, for a total of six courses. These courses are intended to also count towards major requirements. *PLO1, PLO2*

I. *AREA A: Natural and Engineering Science*

Students must take three courses in the area of Natural and Engineering Science. At least one course must be from Natural Sciences and one course must be from Engineering Sciences.

II. *AREA B: Social Science, Arts and Humanities*

Students must take three courses in the area of Social Science, Arts and Humanities. At least one course must be from Social Science and one course must be from Arts and Humanities.

Intellectual Experience Badges

These required Badges can be achieved in courses, including required Approaches to Knowledge courses, Crossroads courses, courses in the major, elective courses, and co-curricular activities. Courses and co-curricular activities can be used to satisfy more than one Intellectual Experiences Badges. The required Intellectual Experiences are:

a. *Scientific Method*

Learn how the scientific method leads to new knowledge about the natural world by correcting and integrating previous knowledge using empirical evidence. *PLO1, PLO2*

b. *Literary and Textual Analysis*

Learn how language creates meaning and ambiguity. *PLO1, PLO2, PLO3*

c. *Media and Visual Analysis*

Explore how media and images create, shape, and express meaning. *PLO1, PLO2, PLO3*

d. *Quantitative and Numerical Analysis*

Evaluate data and develop quantitative reasoning skills. *PLO2, PLO3*

e. *Societies and Cultures of the Past*

Explore the interactions between multiple dimensions of past societies. *PLO4*

f. *Diversity and Identity*

Consider how multiple kinds of difference—ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual—impact individuals and societies in the past and present. *PLO4, PLO5*

g. Global Awareness

Learn about environments, cultures, and issues in nations and regions outside the US. *PLO4, PLO5*

h. Sustainability

Explore the ways in which humans affect and are affected by the natural world. *PLO4, PLO5*

i. Practical and Applied Knowledge

Carry out field work, laboratory experimentation, or artistic practice. *PLO2*

j. Ethics

Investigate the ethical implications of research, policy, or behavior. *PLO1, PLO5*

k. Leadership, Community, and Engaging the World

Take work at UC Merced off the campus in one of multiple ways, including study abroad, UCDC, UC Sacramento, leadership in campus organization, community engaged research or service, or off-campus internships. *PLO5*

When a student completes an Intellectual Experience, regardless of whether this is through coursework or through the co-curriculum, the student will receive a 'Badge' certifying the achievement in MyDegreePath.

ePortfolio

Each student will compile an ePortfolio to keep track of learning in GE courses. The purpose of the ePortfolio (which is part of CatCourses) is to give students a chance to review the development of their education and also provides a means to assess GE learning outcomes. Every course that meets a GE requirement will have an assignment related to that requirement that students will upload into an ePortfolio on CatCourses. Students may add other projects if they wish. The portfolio will provide the basis for reflection on learning to be integrated into the culminating experience in the major; it will also be used to help students prepare for life after graduation. *PLO1*

Note: Courses must be taken for a letter grade and may not be taken on a pass/no pass basis unless the course is offered only on a pass/no pass basis. Students must complete all courses with a C-or better.