

General Education Exit Competencies

To provide direction for the future, AIS' General Education department adopted its own mission statement in 1998.

The mission of AIS' General Education Department is to provide a competency-based, learner-centered curriculum in the major areas of knowledge that support the overall mission of the Art Institutes International and The Art Institute of Seattle. The General Education curriculum builds a solid foundation for the fundamental skills and knowledge needed for success in the marketplace. The curriculum is committed to elements of literacy and critical thinking. It broadens and deepens the student's understanding of people, cultures, and human discoveries, and enables students to draw upon this knowledge and integrate it with their technical expertise. The goal of the General Education Department is to contribute to the student's personal and career development by fostering an attitude of intellectual inquiry and an appreciation of lifelong learning.

The original Related Instruction outcomes resulted from a collaborative effort among Academic Directors of the degree programs and the Director of Curriculum Development. Each Academic Director was surveyed as to how related instruction could best benefit his/her respective department. From this feedback, the Director of Related Instruction and the Director of Curriculum Development created a set of objectives for each class. Further input was taken from the faculty within Related Instruction for the purposes of refinement.

Since the re-definition of the department to General Education, outcomes are currently being overhauled again and revised according to the Educational Delivery System plan (see Standard Two, Introduction) with motivations to do so stemming entirely from faculty research. Two primary emphases exist; to assure a level comparable to freshman levels of other higher education institutions and to remain supportive of the overall AIS mission. To achieve this goal, outcomes of similar institutions have been collected, including regional colleges and sister schools within AII. The following models of general education outcomes have been reviewed by the director and the faculty as part of this process:

- Program and course competencies of the Art Institutes International
- General Education outcomes for the Seattle Community Colleges
- Course outcomes for Edmonds Community College
- Course outcomes for Shoreline Community College
- Course outcomes for Bellevue Community College
- Course objectives for Western Washington University
- Course objectives for the University of Washington

In fiscal year of 2000, AIS' General Education Department plans to organize the program and course competencies into a set of program exit competencies which will function to help students transition into the workforce. These program exit competencies will then be submitted to a local board of advisors consisting of industry professionals who are knowledgeable in the areas in which the AIS mission directs its graduates. Thereafter, the general education competencies will be submitted to the program directors for review and the Dean of Education for approval. Each level of submission may require further refinement in the competencies. These general education exit competencies will hopefully become an integral component of the degree program portfolios. Presently, all degree programs include general education competencies to a greater or lesser degree, however, they have not yet received the in-depth scrutiny necessary to assure their validity. The eventual integration of general education exit competencies will not only assure accountability for the General Education Department, it will also solidify the role of general education within AIS curricula.

At the time of this submission, faculty within the general education department continue to refine competencies developed during the Fall Quarter of 1998. This work is done primarily through department

meetings and memoranda requiring feedback. The global outcomes of the department have been divided into individual course enabling competencies. These enabling competencies are subsets of each of the global outcomes created for the department as a whole. Once the course enabling competencies are defined, a group of exit competencies for the program will be decided upon which reflect the duality of fulfilling the general education mission statement and of being crucial to students' transition into the workforce which reflects the overall AIS mission.

Listed below are the enabling competencies of each of the five required and two elective courses offered by the general education department as of March 1, 1999.

Required Courses

Communications and Critical Thinking

A student will be able to:

1. Develop critical thinking skills.
2. Verbally demonstrate the ability to clearly reason and present an argument.
3. Prepare writing assignments demonstrating an organized approach to problem-solving and reasoning.
4. Demonstrate the ability to support diverse perspectives with reason and evidence.
5. Identify the steps in analytical reading and writing.
6. Participate in active learning exercises to demonstrate problem-solving and team building skills.
7. Examine emotional appeals (pathos) and logical reasoning (logos) as effective communication tools.

Method of Evaluation: Essay tests, papers, oral presentations, projects

English Composition

A student will be able to:

1. Retrieve, organize, store and manipulate information using a variety of resources (e.g., library, Internet).
2. Recognize that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision-making.
3. Develop the analytical skills necessary to evaluate audience, purpose, and subject.
4. Use correctly the parts of speech, verb forms, punctuation and rules of spelling and word choice to construct complete, clear sentences.
5. Generate and support ideas in writing.
6. Revise and proofread all elements of a document for use in final form.

Method of Evaluation: Essay tests, performance tests, papers, portfolio

Introduction to Algebra

A student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of basic principles of arithmetic, unaided by the use of a calculator.
2. Convert measurements in a given measurement system to another measurement system.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of ratios and proportions.
4. Apply introductory concepts of algebra and geometry in problem-solving.
5. Read and interpret graphs correctly.
5. Compile and analyze statistical data, and represent such data in the form of various types of graphs.
6. Analyze rate-of-change problems by graphing functions.
7. Relate problem-solving skills to applications of individual programs of study at The Art Institute of Seattle.
8. Improve analytical skills relating to abstract quantities and their interrelationships.

Method of Evaluation: Performance tests, multiple choice tests, and oral presentations

World Civilization

A student will be able to:

1. Identify and articulate global events, trends, and issues.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the idea that history is constructed.
3. Relate historical events and cultural perspectives to contemporary situations and issues.
4. Identify key themes in the economical, social, intellectual and political development of the world.
5. Compare and contrast ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences that have shaped human history and culture.

Method of Evaluation: Performance tests, oral presentations, projects

Computer Applications

A student will be able to:

1. Define terms used in the operation of computer systems and software applications.
2. Recognize the role played by computer technology in today's business world and global society.
3. Apply basic file management, information and data management principles for a variety of computer storage media and system software applications.
4. Recognize the basic difference between the various computer platforms and software applications commonly used.
5. Produce complex documents applicable to business and communications using word processing and spreadsheet applications.
6. Access information from World Wide Web search engines and Internet.

Method of Evaluation: Performance tests, multiple choice tests, projects

Elective Courses

Psychology

A student will be able to:

1. Define psychology and give its purpose.
2. Describe the scientific method and its application to psychology.
3. Explain biological and environmental contributions to human development and behavior.
4. Describe stereotypical, physiological, and psychological aspects of sexuality.
5. Define consciousness and describe how it varies in quality and accuracy.
6. Define personality and explain how common experiences, unique experiences, and biological make-up interact to shape personality.
7. Describe theories established by individuals who have contributed to the study of psychology.
8. Compare and contrast emotional attachments and social ties. Explain interdependence in relationships.

Method of Evaluation: Multiple choice tests, essay tests, oral presentations, projects

From these course competencies, a subset will be proposed as part of the portfolio which exemplify the prevailing needs of student development prior to graduation. A likely proportion for current degree program portfolio requirements would be to establish a 20% minimum of general education competencies because this amount reflects the proportion of required credits in general education.

Accountability remains a central issue for the general education department. The current quarterly student survey does not separate teaching into categories of degree programs or general education. The Academic Director is investigating other avenues to provide direct evidence of accountability. One alternative is involving the faculty with portfolio evaluation because portfolios directly affect the employment and salaries of graduating students. A second alternative is to investigate the validity of comparable questions on teacher evaluation surveys.

Grade Distribution in General Education Courses

Indirectly, accountability is evidenced by the credentials and teaching experience of the faculty. Sixty-three percent of the faculty have master's degrees and the remaining thirty-seven percent have bachelor's degrees. Two faculty of the department, including the director, have post-graduate credentials.

Grade Inflation

Another point of contention in the General Education Department concerns grades. In the 1997 report of the visiting team for the NW Association of Schools and Colleges, students were cited as saying that the courses in the then Related Instruction Department were easier than they had anticipated. This statement implied a degree of grade inflation. In subsequent General Education faculty meetings, the faculty questioned the accuracy of this assertion for the general student population. The following analysis and graph shows the distribution of grades for individual courses and averaged across sections and instructors. It can be seen that the results indicate that grade inflation seems to be occurring for three courses within the department: Computer Applications, Communications, and World Civilization. On the contrary, English Composition, Introduction to Algebra, and Psychology have a noticeable percentage of lower grades.

The results of the grade distributions for Fall Quarter of 1998 were discussed with faculty in a departmental meeting of March 30, 1999. Several factors were mentioned as possible contributors. It was agreed that the results for Computer Applications implicate a complex situation concerning not only the grading procedures of the course, but also the knowledge base of entering students of this content and the availability of proficiency testing to waive the course. Students from the region generally have some experience with computers, if not quite a bit of experience at the high school level because of the influence of software companies both in the educational systems, and within the general marketing of the region. Proficiency testing is conducted only in the week prior to the start of the quarter, or, in the sixth week of the quarter. Students are not overly successful in attending these testing times, and in addition, they are reluctant to withdraw from the course unless advised to do so by the instructors. From an instructors point of view, it is difficult to assess improper placement within the course given the brevity of contact during the first week and the need to begin lessons for meeting objectives of the course. Having said this, it is also noteworthy that two of eight instructors of this course had an A- as the average grade for all students in their sections.

Other courses did not show such as obvious inflation as Computer Applications. Psychology was an interesting case because of its high number of failures. It is the only elective course among the general education courses. The sample size of this course is relatively small and may indicate that the students were unusual in their motivation in the course. The students' attendance records were not significantly different from other courses in general education. Until further analysis is done for an entire year, one can only speculate without a baseline reference with this smaller sample size. It was concluded among the faculty that future department meetings devote time to the question of how to achieve a more normal stratification in their grading schemas.