

The Nature and Role of General Education/Liberal Learning at The College of New Jersey

Note: During academic year 2003-2004, The College of New Jersey is in the process of transformative curricular change which will result in changes in the general education program described below. Students should consult their advisors when planning their course of study and also consult supplements to this online bulletin that will be available on a regular basis.

Students at The College of New Jersey receive both intensive instruction in a major program of study and extensive grounding in general education/liberal learning. The major enables students to become familiar with the content and methods of a particular discipline, preparing them for careers, graduate studies, or professional school. Liberal learning is of value to students whatever careers or advanced degrees they may pursue.

The College's undergraduate curriculum helps bring about exchanges among faculty and students that challenge students to high levels of achievement and independent thinking. The general education/liberal learning program encourages students to develop habits of mind that inform their work and lives, not only at the College, but as lifelong learners. These habits include:

- Asking penetrating questions to get to the heart of an issue or problem.
- Seeing issues or cultures in context; taking an opposing perspective and gaining distance from what we take for granted.
- Reflecting on and expressing imaginatively the wonder and pathos of the human experience.
- Discerning, gathering, and analyzing information that matters most when making difficult decisions.
- Recognizing patterns and connections across disparate topics.
- Being curious about the world across a broad range of perspectives and point of view.
- Possessing tools for oral and written communication, and for quantitative and problem solving activities.

The three parts of the College's general education/liberal learning program--Intellectual Skills, the First Year Interdisciplinary Course, and Perspectives on the World--are designed to help students to achieve these goals.

Intellectual Skills help provide the tools that students need to make the transition from high school to college and from college to lifelong learning. In order to do college-level work, all students need reasonable proficiency in writing, speaking, critical thinking, and mathematics.

As a requirement under the transformed curriculum, students take WRI 102/Academic Writing.* Within a framework of sophisticated readings, highly coordinated writing workshops, and instructor feedback, this course provides students with an opportunity to practice the modes of writing necessary to succeed in college. Students will develop their skills in the recognition of and composition of arguments, in critical thinking and reading, in text production, and in the use of information technologies. Students will cultivate habits of effective and ethical research and practice conventions of documentation appropriate to their own academic discipline or those of the instructor.

**Students may exempt this course if they have scored 4 or 5 on the AP English Language, English Literature, or History examinations.*

Degree candidates in the Schools of Art, Media, and Music; Culture and Society; and Science are also asked to achieve skills sufficient to enable them to comprehend, speak, read, and write a language other than English. By the time students graduate, they should be able to use these skills in the practice of their majors, for their own enrichment, and as means of advancement in their chosen professions.

The Interdisciplinary Course. Students take either the "First Year Seminar," which is part of the new transformed curriculum, or "Athens to New York." "The First Year Seminar" is designed to provide entering students with an intellectually exciting and challenging experience taught by full time faculty. Topics are selected by instructors and announced in advance so students can choose according to their interests. Classes are speaking and writing intensive and limited to fifteen students each. Above all, seminars pique students' intellectual curiosity as they are led by faculty members intellectually engaged with the questions at hand. Students participate in a free exchange of ideas through discussion and oral presentations, and are involved in independent and group research. Professors teaching first year seminars have a strong mentoring role and will assist students in thinking about charting a path through college that prepares them for life. A listing of First Year seminars and sections of "Athens to New York" being offered in Fall, 2003 can be found at <http://www.tcnj.edu/~gened/fye.htm>.

In “Athens to New York,” faculty members guide students in a virtual journey from ancient Greece to modern New York City, with at least one ‘stop’ in a non-Western location. Each professor’s course has its own sub-theme, charting a unique route from Athens to New York. The course is organized around four central questions:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What does it mean to be a member of a community?
- What does it mean to be moral, ethical, or just?
- How do individuals and communities respond to differences in race, class, ethnicity and gender?

Perspectives on the World courses provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge by deepening their acquaintance with the principles and practices of key intellectual and artistic disciplines:

- **Natural and Social Scientific Perspectives.** Since its emergence in the 17th century as a distinct way of investigating the world, scientific method has provided a powerful means for explaining and sometimes predicting natural and social phenomena. Courses approved for this requirement are designed to introduce students to the methods and contents of sciences that study nature, society, and the individual.
- **Humanistic and Artistic Perspectives.** Humanistic and artistic perspectives are as old as the human species and are integral parts of human history. As ways of investigating the world, the arts and humanities stress meanings and values rather than quantifiable data and predictive theories.

Among the most important features of education at The College of New Jersey is the understanding and appreciation of diversity. This emphasis is reinforced in general education’s diversity distribution, the requirement that at least one course a student selects from Perspectives on the World focus on a non-Western, Native-American, or Third-World culture, one course focus on some aspect of Western cultures, and one course focus on gender studies.