

Definitions and Criteria of WCU General Education Distributive Areas

Date proposed: 9/30/21

Date Recommended by CAPC: 9/30/21

Date Approved by Provost: 4/14/22

Background: The General Education 2019 Program takes a student learning outcomes (SLOs) approach. Unlike higher-level goals (e.g., communicate effectively), SLOs identify the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities students should possess and be able to demonstrate upon completion of a course (e.g., express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms). The SLOs approach focuses both instructors and students on learning activities that result in desirable competencies and skills, as reflected in the SLOs and measured by assessment artifacts (e.g., assignments). Making such explicit links between learning activities, SLOs, and assessments is considered to be a pedagogical best practice in higher education, because it encourages instructors to more deeply consider the value of individual learning activities and assignments and allows students to see the purpose for learning activities and assessments in supporting the desired competencies and skills. One benefit of this approach at WCU is that the General Education program is no longer strictly “prefix” based, allowing for better integration of General Education across the curriculum, in turn leading to a more robust and well-rounded liberal education for our students. That said, it is not CAPC’s intention to dilute students’ opportunity to problem-see and problem-solve through traditional disciplinary lenses. Disciplines do exist in academe. We must help our students understand them—to understand that, even when they address similar content and problems, different disciplines have different goals and perspectives, and use different methods and styles of inquiry. Regardless of where a course is housed, to be a compelling WCU General Education Distributive course, it should be clear from the syllabus that the course not only covers ART, BSS, HUM, or SCI content and issues, but also *that it does so through the lens of one of the typical disciplines in these areas. The use of that lens should be integral to the course.*

General Notes:

1. The purpose of the Distributives component of Gen Ed is to expose students to a broad range of ideas and perspectives. It encourages (in some cases, forces) students to think outside their comfort zone—their focal area of study—to become more well-rounded and thoughtful citizens. These courses are expected to be open to a wide range of students without assuming particular prior knowledge in the area. Distributive courses, with rare and well-justified exception, should not carry pre-requisites. Nor should they assume accumulated specialized knowledge (e.g., the ability to read music, knowledge of how to take a blood pressure, how to prepare a complex compound). Thus, Distributive courses should be thought of as broad (as opposed to overly specialized) and foundational (as opposed to advanced), tending toward the pure rather than the applied (but not precluding the applied). If this were the only course a student takes in a Distributive area, they should leave WCU with an idea of what that area’s work is about, their methods, theories, approaches, styles of inquiry, etc.
2. We use the language “traditional” or “typical” disciplines in this document acknowledging that there are disciplines that cross boundaries (e.g., History can variously be viewed as a Social Science or a Humanity). In determining if such a proposal meets the definition of a WCU Distributive category, CAPC will be looking for evidence that the course is *teaching students to problem-see and problem-solve through the lens of one of the disciplines housed in the relevant Distributive area, that this lens is integral to the course content and assignments, and that students are given appropriate and adequate learning activities and assignments to ensure they develop accurate perceptions of the relevant distributive area (relevant methods, theories, approaches, styles of inquiry), in addition to adequately meeting the appropriate SLOs.*

3. Preparers, as well as their deans and chairs, should carefully consider the intended target audience for the course, bearing in mind that students cannot take Gen Ed Distributive courses within their discipline. Sometimes “discipline” equates simply with “major” or “department” by prefix (e.g., PHY, WOS). In some cases, however, “discipline” needs to be more broadly construed (e.g., an English BA major cannot take as their Distributive courses those with prefixes ENG, LIT, CLS, etc.; no Biology major, regardless of the prefix of their concentration can use BIO110 as their SCI distributive; no ART majors can use ART/ARH courses as their ART Distributive). These examples are not intended to be exhaustive, rather to illustrate that the spirit of this policy is to *emphasize as strongly as possible that **Distributive courses are intended to provide breadth for students outside their focal area of study*** and across the many ART, BSS, HUM, and SCI disciplines represented at our university.
4. All General Education Distributive courses must meet at least one SLO from Goal #1 *and* one SLO from Goal #2, in addition to the relevant Goal/SLOs for that Distributive Area:
 - Goal #1. Communicate effectively
 - a) Express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms
 - b) Revise and improve written and/or presentations
 - c) Express oneself effectively in presentations
 - d) Demonstrate comprehension of and ability to explain information and ideas accessed through reading
 - Goal #2. Think critically and analytically
 - a) Use relevant evidence gathered through accepted scholarly methods, and properly acknowledge sources of information, to support an idea
 - b) Construct and/or analyze arguments in terms of their premises, assumptions, contexts, conclusions, and anticipated counterarguments
 - c) Reach sound conclusions based on a logical analysis of evidence
 - d) Develop creative or innovative approaches to assignments or projects
5. For all relevant Gen Ed Goals, the relevant SLOs should be enumerated and expressed as they are in the [2019 Gen Ed Program](#), to allow students to identify them and see similarities and differences across their Gen Ed curriculum. The relevant SLOs must be linked *explicitly* in the syllabus to at least one assessment (more is not necessarily better). If it is not abundantly clear how the assignment assesses the relevant SLO it should be explained briefly. If it is a required course, each SLO also should be linked explicitly to program goals. Reviewers will examine the syllabus to ensure that course content and assessments appropriately address each of the relevant SLO for all of the attributes associated with the course.

The Arts defined at WCU

I. General Education Goals

In addition to Goals #1 & 2, an **ARTS** Distributive course must also fulfill Goal #6 (Understand varied historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions), and address at least two of the SLOs:

- a) Demonstrate the ability to analyze, critique, and interpret works of art and culture
- b) Identify connections among diverse human artistic and cultural productions across time and/or space
- c) Articulate the importance of artistic and cultural production to what it means to be human

II. Definition

The central concern of Arts Distributive courses at WCU is to introduce students to art scholarship and to develop students’ ability to think critically and analytically about form,

function, and the creative process.

III. Criteria

Approved Arts Distributive courses should be taught by faculty trained in the traditions of an area of the visual or performing arts. The courses should teach students to problem-see and problem-solve from the perspective of the visual or performing arts, and to understand the methods, theories, practices, approaches, and styles of inquiry of the visual and/or performing arts. Use of a visual or performing art lens should be integral to the course. The syllabus should state which field of study and/or disciplinary lens was used to develop the course goals and how it is incorporated in the course learning activities, and which theoretical, methodological, and/or philosophical approach(es) recognized in that field students will come to appreciate. Arts courses must emphasize the cognitive skills of critical thought, creativity, analysis, and synthesis that are central to a foundation in general education. Arts Distributive courses may be theoretical or historical and will be supported by an applied component. Arts Distributive courses may be comparative or integrative and should emphasize interrelationships within the arts and connections to the humanities. Assessment of Arts Distributive courses should include artifacts that allow discussion and understanding of the artistic tradition.

The Behavioral and Social Sciences defined at WCU

I. General Education Goals

In addition to Goals #1 & 2, a **BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES** Distributive course must also fulfill Goal #3 (Employ quantitative concepts and mathematical methods) and/or Goal #6 (Understand varied historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions), and address both of the SLOs for the relevant goal:

Goal #3:

- a) Employ qualitative and/or quantitative methods to examine the patterns and processes of human activities
- b) Apply the basic methods and thought processes of the scientific method to understand human activity

Goal #6:

- c) Demonstrate the ability to understand human activity in cultural and/or social context
- d) Demonstrate an understanding of varied historical, cultural, and/or philosophical traditions

II. Definition

The central concern of Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses at WCU is to engage students in behavioral and social science scholarship and to develop students' ability to employ qualitative and/or quantitative methods in examining the patterns and processes of human activities and/or their ability to understand human activity in cultural and/or social context.

III. Criteria

Approved Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses should be taught by faculty trained in the

traditions of an area of the behavioral and social sciences. The courses should teach students to problem-see and problem-solve from the perspective of the behavioral or social sciences, and to understand the methods, theories, practices, approaches, and styles of inquiry of one of the disciplines typically housed in this area at WCU: anthropology, economics, human geography, political science, psychology, and/or sociology. Use of a behavioral or social science lens should be integral to the courses. The syllabus should state which field of study and/or disciplinary lens was used to develop the course goals and how it is incorporated in the course learning activities, and which theoretical, methodological, and/or philosophical approach(es) recognized in that field students will come to appreciate. Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses must emphasize the cognitive skills of critical thought, creativity, analysis, and synthesis that are central to a foundation in general education. Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses should have content directed largely toward human behavior, systems that humans create, and the various forces at work in modern society. This does not preclude related themes from areas such as health or ecology/sustainability *if approached from a behavioral or social science perspective and that is clearly conveyed throughout the course materials*. Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses must employ a systematic method of inquiry into human behavior that uses qualitative and/or quantitative analysis and situates this behavior in social, cultural, or historical context. Assessment of Behavioral and Social Science Distributive courses should include artifacts that allow discussion and understanding of the behavioral and social science tradition.

The Humanities defined at WCU

I. General Education Goals

In addition to Goals #1 & 2, a **HUMANITIES** Distributive course must also fulfill Goal #6 (Understand varied historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions), and address both of the SLOs:

- a) Analyze, define, and explore what it means to be human (including how language, thought, and creative expression speak to an individual's values, beliefs, and traditions)
- b) Demonstrate an understanding of varied historical, cultural, and/or philosophical traditions

II. Definition

The central concern of Humanities Distributive courses at WCU is to engage students in humanities scholarship, to develop students' ability to describe, analyze, imagine, and explore what it means to be human, and to understand varied historical, cultural, and/or philosophical traditions.

III. Criteria

Approved Humanities Distributive courses should be taught by faculty trained in the traditions of an area of the humanities. The courses should teach students to problem-see and problem-solve from a humanities perspective, and to understand the methods, theories, practices, approaches, and styles of inquiry of one of the disciplines typically housed in this area at WCU: communications and media studies, history, languages and cultures, English studies and Rhetoric, philosophy, women and gender studies. Use of a humanities lens should be integral to the courses. The syllabus should state which field of study and/or disciplinary lens was used to develop the course goals and is incorporated in the course learning activities, and which theoretical, methodological, and/or philosophical approach(es) recognized in that field students will come to appreciate. Humanities Distributive courses must emphasize the cognitive skills of critical thought, creativity, analysis, and synthesis that are central to a foundation in general education. Humanities Distributive courses should have content directed largely toward the study of language, texts, thought, and culture; their definition, interpretation, and historical development; and their reflection of human values, beliefs, and traditions. This does not preclude

related themes from areas such as economics or science *if approached from a humanities perspective and this is clear throughout the course materials*. Assessment of Humanities Distributive courses should include artifacts that allow discussion and understanding of the humanities tradition.

The Sciences defined at WCU

I. General Education Goals

In addition to Goals #1 & 2, a **SCIENCE** Distributive course must also fulfill Goal #3 (Employ quantitative concepts and mathematical methods), and address both of the SLOs:

- a) Employ quantitative methods to examine a problem in the natural or physical world
- b) Apply the basic methods and thought processes of the scientific method for natural/physical science in a particular discipline

II. Definition

The central concern of Science Distributive courses at WCU is to expose students to the world-views and toolset of traditional science disciplines. This includes teaching students to observe and to gather and analyze quantitative data, to gain experience with graphical or tabular presentations of quantitative information, and to use quantitative methods to support or refute a hypothesis, as they examine the natural or physical world.

III. Criteria

Approved Science Distributive courses should be taught by faculty trained in the traditions of an area of the natural or physical sciences. The courses should teach students to problem-see and problem-solve from a physical or life science perspective, and to understand the methods, theories, practices, approaches, and styles of inquiry of one of the disciplines typically housed in this area at WCU: biology, chemistry, computer science, earth and space science/geoscience, physics. Use of a science lens should be integral to the courses. The syllabus should explicitly state which field of study and/or disciplinary lens was used to develop the course goals and how it is incorporated in the course learning activities, and which theoretical, methodological, and/or philosophical approach(es) recognized in that field students will come to appreciate. Science courses must emphasize the cognitive skills of critical thought, creativity, analysis, and synthesis that are central to a foundation in general education. Science distributive courses should have content directed largely toward the experimental study of the natural or physical world using the commonly accepted methods of science. This does not preclude related themes such as nutrition or the environment *if approached from a scientific perspective and this is clear throughout the course materials*. Science Distributive courses must have significant coverage of the scientific method (both general and those specific to the discipline) and scientific evidence for the underlying theories. The evaluation of students must require demonstration of quantitative reasoning, and scientific analytical thinking. In addition, students should learn the role of theory and the importance of falsifiability in scientific theory, to draw plausible inferences from observations, and to distinguish between science and pseudoscience. Assessment of Science Distributive courses should include artifacts that allow discussion and understanding of the physical/natural science tradition.