

Why Are General Education Courses in the Curriculum?

Hung Dao | Sports Editor

In many American colleges and universities, students are required to take many “general education” classes. These classes take on many names: general education courses (or “gen eds”), commons, or the Core Curriculum, as they are called at St. Norbert College. So, for what reasons do colleges require students to take gen ed courses, and how does St. Norbert approach its Core Curriculum?

Gen ed courses are, by nature, not confined to the student’s major. This is because colleges want their students to attain foundational knowledge in many areas of study. Awareness of other fields can spur creativity in problem solving by considering methods uncommon in one’s own field. They also expose students to many other people and their lives, which helps students develop empathy and strengthens interactive skills. Following that, students can learn different avenues to communicate, such as through presentations in a business class or through thoughtful writing in an English class. For undeclared students, gen ed courses can be a way to wade through different possible choices for a major, thus helping them to discern what they want to do with their studies.

The Core Curriculum at St. Norbert operates on very similar principles to the ones outlined above, but drawing from SNC’s Norbertine and Catholic tradition in addition to the liberal arts tradition, the Core differs from other gen ed requirements. The college recommends first-year students take a Theological Foundations and a Philosophical Foundations course. In addition to these two, SNC also designates for certain courses to fulfill the “Quantitative Reasoning” and “Writing Intensive” requirements set by the college. These courses form the foundation of education at SNC.

Then, there are General Cores, which are most similar to gen ed courses at other colleges. St. Norbert’s Cores are:

Beyond Borders, which expand students’ knowledge about different parts of the world;

Catholic Imagination, which helps students connect the actions of the Church to what happens in the world;

Difference and Diversity, which helps students understand how characteristics such as race, gender, religion, etc. affect lives;

Expression and Interpretation, which lets students appreciate the creativity of the human experience;

Individual and Society, which provides students with the methods and paradigms of social sciences to understand society;

Physical and Natural World, which educates students about the diversity of the world; and

Western Tradition, which introduces students to Western ideas and how they inform the modern world.

Additionally, a few upper-level courses are also designated as part of the Core, and they are labeled “Advanced Core” classes. These courses give students an intense and deep understanding of material that challenges them critically and creatively.

For all of these reasons, gen ed courses are important in the education of an undergraduate, and St. Norbert pushes the envelope by letting students choose from a variety of courses within the Core Curriculum. Through the Core Curriculum, students are brought to a high level of understanding of the different areas of academia.

Sources:

Southern New Hampshire University, St. Norbert College, Walden University