

Criteria for Liberal Arts and Science Courses

Approved by L&S Curriculum Committee December 5, 2005

Courses requested for Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) credit should encourage students in one or more of the three “habits of the mind” of liberal arts education, as specified by the College of Letters and Science. These include:

1. Skilled written and verbal communication, excelling in formulating and expressing a point of view, reflecting and questioning current knowledge through reading, research and consideration of the views of others.

This criterion includes:

- a. fluency in reading, writing, and oral communication
 - b. ability to understand and use prose, analyze documents
 - c. ability to use quantitative information to understand, develop and respond to arguments
 - d. critical and reflective quantitative, reading, and communication skills
 - e. reasoned, well-organized, and sustained discussions of important issues or questions, including the ability to explain and evaluate different or opposing perspectives evenhandedly and dispassionately
2. The ability to draw flexibly upon and apply the modes of thought of the major areas of knowledge.

This criterion includes:

- a. understanding and application of the fundamental theory, methods of inquiry, and patterns of reasoning that characterize fields of knowledge within the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences, including the basic principles of logical, mathematical, and scientific reasoning
- b. recognizing and evaluating new information, integrating that information into existing frameworks of knowledge, and adapting those frameworks as necessary or appropriate, using standards of intellectual rigor or precision appropriate to different subject areas
- c. posing meaningful questions that advance knowledge and understanding
- d. analyzing arguments, evaluating the evidence supporting them, and framing reasonable and persuasive counter-arguments; similarly, constructing arguments, supporting them with relevant evidence, and anticipating likely counter-arguments
- e. connecting theory and application through analysis of research or conducting research
- f. making connections among diverse subject areas and modes of thinking
- g. applying the major areas of knowledge to the solution of individual and community problems

3. Knowledge of our basic cultural heritage as a multifaceted and often contested history.

This criterion includes:

- a. the ability to place key decisions and developments in broader social, cultural, and historical context
- b. self-critical appreciation of cultural and personal values.

Proposed courses, including those designed to convey technical skills or specialized pre-professional training, must have extensive coverage of these aspects of the liberal arts and sciences. Although no single course will cover all of these aspects, the Curriculum Committee will look for evidence that liberal arts aspects are woven throughout a course. Course design must clearly encourage and emphasize analytical, conceptual, and creative thinking. Liberal arts learning should be heavily represented in the course objectives, list of topics covered, requirements, and assessment. The syllabus must indicate in detail how and where the liberal arts aspects of the course are integrated into the course and specify how the assessment of students incorporates the liberal arts features of the course.