

# **The General Education Program at Sweet Briar College**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of the General Education Program at Sweet Briar College is to provide all students with a common pattern of skills, experiences and knowledge, which prepares them to be informed, active members of the world community. The program goals include: to help students develop strong skills in communication and quantitative reasoning, to provide experiences that enhance the academic program, to clarify the basis for a broad liberal arts background, to encourage students to reflect upon their goals and progress, and to integrate the various aspects of a Sweet Briar education in a comprehensive program. Students benefit more from the college experience if they understand the value of a liberal arts curriculum and actively cultivate, in and out of the classroom, their intellectual, cultural, physical, social, and creative potential to prepare for a life of continual growth, responsibility, and fulfillment. Students will be more confident of their ability to express their ideas, more competent to make decisions based on their enhanced knowledge of themselves and the world, and thus better able to derive the maximum benefits from their Sweet Briar education.

Students begin the General Education Program during their first year and follow it throughout their college career. The program is designed so that every student progresses beyond the skills, experiences and knowledge with which she entered Sweet Briar. The requirements are not completely separate—in many cases these areas will overlap and will coincide with the major and minor requirements.

The General Education Program has four components: the First-Year Writing Requirement, a Skills Requirement, a Physical Activity Requirement, and a Knowledge Areas Requirement. Faculty are encouraged to emphasize whenever possible the relationships between the different aspects of the General Education Program and their application across the curriculum, especially in the requirements for the respective majors. In this way the General Education Program and the major programs form a coherent, integrated educational experience.

## **First-Year Writing Requirement**

During their first semester at Sweet Briar College, unless exempted from the first-year writing requirement, all students will be placed in ENGL 100 or ENGL 104 or, if they qualify after Departmental review, in a 100-level writing-intensive literature course in the English Department. Students exempted from the first-year writing requirement will be encouraged but not required to take a writing-intensive course in the fall. Students who are placed in ENGL 100 must enroll in ENGL 104 the following semester.

## **Skills Requirement**

### **Rationale**

The knowledge of different academic disciplines is not sufficient to prepare a student to function successfully in the world outside of college. The college graduate must also possess the oral, written and quantitative reasoning skills with which to express ideas and interpret information. The difference between success and failure in the classroom, in the workplace and in our personal interactions is often the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

Quantitative reasoning skills also are essential at the personal and professional level in a world that is increasingly technological and analytical. Because oral, written and quantitative reasoning skills are invaluable in any discipline, the teaching of these skills is a job that is shared by the whole faculty. Training and practice can make an enormous difference in our ability to make our meaning understood and our ability to understand what others are saying. This training should not end when a student completes her high school education or her first year of college. Development of these skills will continue throughout the college years, culminating whenever possible in the refinement of the skills in the major.

A course designated as "skill intensive" is one in which the skill itself is a focus of the class and not just one of the requirements. In a skill-intensive course, activities directly related to the skill should constitute a significant amount of class time. A course may fulfill more than one skill requirement. Courses that are skill intensive may also fulfill "Knowledge Area" requirements and may fit within a chosen major or minor. Skill-intensive courses will be indicated as such in the Catalog and Schedule of Courses. Because of the great amount of work demanded of instructors and students, skill-intensive courses should have a maximum of 15 students. Faculty who teach 4-credit courses have the option of raising the enrollment cap to 20.

Skills courses can be met by transfer courses for the equivalent of the following Sweet Briar courses: ENGL 106 for written communication; THTR 102, 152, and 189 for oral communications; and MATH 106, 123, 124, PSYC 219, CHEM 131, 132 for quantitative reasoning; other courses may be accepted after evaluation by the Registrar's Office in consultation as needed with departments and the Instruction Committee. The criteria for acceptance of these courses are: (1) by definition, the course must have a skills component that is an integral and substantial element of the course content; and (2) the skills component of such a course is essentially the same, regardless of the institution which offers it.

**Oral Communications Requirement** To increase her proficiency in oral communications, a student is required to pass at least two oral-intensive courses (for a total of at least 6 credit hours) at least one of which must be a course taken for her major (or, in the case of multiple major, for each of her majors).

All oral-intensive courses must devote a significant amount of the classroom instruction to the development of oral skills. Effective oral communication in the classroom will vary and will require a range of simple to more complex skills according to different classroom environments. Examples of oral skills to be cultivated and oral skills activities are given in Appendix I.

**Written Communications Requirement** To increase her proficiency in writing, a student is required to pass: the first-year writing requirement (unless exempted) plus at least 3 other writing-intensive courses (for a total of at least 9 credit hours) including at least one course taken for her major (or, in the case of multiple majors, for each of her majors). While grammar is an important part of writing, a writing-intensive course is not a class in remedial grammar, but rather one whose larger aim is to help the student express herself clearly and forcefully in her writing. Because writing is a concern for the entire college, faculty are encouraged to refer students to the Academic Resource Center for additional assistance with writing skills.

Transfer students must complete the first-year writing requirement. In addition, transfer students are required to take one writing-intensive course for each year they attend Sweet Briar College.

### **1. First-Year Writing Requirement**

This course should focus on the connection between reading critically and writing critically. Students should be able to read and evaluate a text, listen to an argument, and write about what they

have learned through these activities. Students should begin to learn how to incorporate information from outside sources into their writing.

## **2. Other General-Education Courses that are Writing-Intensive**

Introductory and interdisciplinary courses that are writing intensive should adopt the general recommendations above, but may modify them according to the discipline and course content as long as a significant amount of the classroom instruction is devoted to student writing. At this level, for example, students may be expected to research and write a paper appropriate to a specific discipline that is subject to review and subsequent revisions. Examples of activities for the development of writing skills are given in Appendix II.

## **3. Writing-Intensive Courses Within the Major**

Students apply their writing skills to assignments that are appropriate to particular disciplines. Most often, these involve doing research within the discipline and may include the following: the use of bibliographical resources; the description and analysis of data; the synthesis of ideas and arguments; and the use of organization, prose style, and documentation appropriate to the discipline. Once again, a significant amount of the classroom instruction should be devoted to student writing, but because the kind of writing required may vary from discipline to discipline, departments are encouraged to develop their own writing requirement.

**Quantitative Reasoning Requirement** To increase her proficiency in using and analyzing quantitative information, a student is required to pass at least two courses (for a total of at least 6 credit hours) in which quantitative reasoning is itself a focus of the class. A significant amount of classroom instruction should be devoted to the training and practice of quantitative reasoning. While mathematics is an important part of quantitative reasoning, a course that targets quantitative reasoning is not a class in remedial mathematics.

Quantitative reasoning includes the development of quantitative ability (arithmetic and data analysis), problem solving and logical reasoning. A course that fulfills the quantitative reasoning requirement will include at least two of the following:

- Arithmetic Analysis includes arithmetic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and powers) on real numbers, roots, estimation, percent, absolute value, properties of numbers.
- Data Analysis includes basic descriptive statistics (such as mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation, and percentiles), interpretation of data given in graphs and tables, elementary probability, and the ability to synthesize information.
- Problem Solving uses arithmetic and data analysis to make correct inferences about data to select appropriate data for answering a question, and to determine whether or not the data provided are sufficient to answer a given question.
- Logical Reasoning is the ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate arguments. No knowledge of the terminology of formal logic is required.

# Physical Activity Requirement

## Descriptions and requirements

### Rationale

It is through movement that the student explores her physical self, abilities and limits. The process of discovery is as important as the end product, and may be experienced through organized sports, skills and fitness activities, outdoor adventures or dance.

*Requirement:* 2 credit hours of coursework in Physical Education, Riding, or Dance, emphasizing physical movement. The requirement may also be met by certain non-credit experiences, with approval of the appropriate department.

The non-credit experience must be completed during the undergraduate years. In order to fulfill one quarter of the requirement, it must be comparable to a ½-credit Activities Course. Examples are: coursework at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), Outward Bound experience, off-campus sports teams or competition, master classes in dance, or workshops in movement (*e.g.*, Alexander Technique, yoga).

# Knowledge Areas Requirement

### Rationale

A liberal arts education provides a breadth of knowledge spread throughout many disciplines. To this end, students will take courses in each of eight different areas that are grouped by similar approaches. The areas chosen follow closely the mission of the College, which specifies that students learn to be aware of the achievements of the past, learn an appreciation of the arts, understand the methods of science, and become responsible members of a world community that is diverse and constantly changing. Broad knowledge will prepare them for an evolving society, and equip them to take leadership in its formation.

### Areas

Knowledge Areas	Criteria for Courses	Requirement
1. Understand the cultures of Europe and the U.S. through a study of the past.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uses historical methods of study which reveal patterns and meanings in European and U.S. cultures.</li><li>• Takes an historical approach to political, social, or cultural events in either a broad or a narrow time period.</li></ul>	3 credit hours

<p><b>2.</b> Develop critical insights and extend experiences through the study of literature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes a range of literary works, either a broad survey, or a narrow and intensive focus on a few examples.</li> <li>• Examines both the form and the content of the work.</li> <li>• Teaches students to develop and defend critical judgments about the work.</li> </ul>	<p>3 credit hours</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Experience another culture through the study of a foreign language.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examines aspects of a culture, society, or literature, ancient or modern, that is taught in a foreign language in a course numbered 202 or above.</li> </ul>	<p>3 credit hours</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Understand the world beyond the cultures of Europe and the U.S.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduces students to alternate world views through the examination of the cultures of Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East.</li> </ul>	<p>6 credit hours</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Understand how such concepts as class, gender, ethnicity, and ethical and religious values affect world views and decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examines how concepts like race, class, and gender are understood in cultures, religions, and/or historical eras.</li> <li>• Alternatively, encourages students to appreciate and apply ethical reasoning in various contexts.</li> </ul>	<p>3 credit hours</p>
<p><b>6.</b> Understand creative expression through a) the study of fine arts, performing arts and visual arts and b) the practice of the arts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a. Introduces students to different examples of excellence and examines the criteria for evaluation of an art form.</li> <li>• a. Discusses the ideas expressed in specific works of art.</li> <li>• b. Teaches students to produce their own work in a specific art form, applying techniques and expressing ideas creatively.</li> </ul>	<p>4-6 credit hours <i>*Choose 1 course for 3 credit hours in "a" and 1 course for 1-3 credit hours in "b."</i></p>
<p><b>7.</b> Understand how economic, political, and legal systems shape the modern world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examines contemporary economic and political institutional systems and their impact on the global community.</li> <li>• Takes an analytical approach to specific political and economic problems at the national and/or international level.</li> </ul>	<p>3 credit hours</p>

<p><b>8. Understand the world through</b>  a) scientific theory and  b) scientific experiment and observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a. Introduces students to science through an examination of major ideas and discoveries by relating theories to the evidence upon which they are based.</li> <li>• b. Teaches students to conduct a controlled experiment and to evaluate critically the design and the results of the experiment.</li> </ul>	<p>7 credit hours  <i>*Choose 2 courses for 6 credit hours in "a" and a 1-credit lab for "b"; many 4-credit courses fulfill both "a" and "b." Knowledge Area 8b must be satisfied in conjunction with a Knowledge Area 8a course in biology, chemistry, engineering, environmental sciences, or physics</i></p>
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- No more than three knowledge areas may be satisfied by courses from one discipline. At least one course in the knowledge areas must be taken from the disciplines of anthropology, economics, government, or sociology.
- Courses taken to fulfill the "Knowledge Areas Requirement" may fulfill "Skills" requirements as well as major and minor requirements. A course may be listed in, and may be taken to fulfill, no more than two knowledge areas and one skill area or one knowledge area and two skills areas. Although instructors may request to change the areas in which a course is listed, these changes should be made very infrequently so that students may plan their academic program accurately.
- For some students Area 3 will require 6-12 hours because a minimum intermediate skill level is needed.
- A student for whom English is a second language may fulfill Knowledge Area V.3 by taking English 104 and one literature course in English that does not include translations of works in her native language.
- Many courses that fulfill Area 6.b. are more than one credit.
- The Catalog and Schedule of Courses will indicate what requirements a course satisfies.

## Appendix I

### Oral Communication

**Oral communication skills should be cultivated to enhance student learning and contribute to the overall quality of classroom discussions:**

- a) listening for comprehension to understand the issues or gather information or facts;
- b) listening critically to evaluate the evidence and speaker's credibility;
- c) summarizing what has been heard;
- d) clarifying a concept or process;
- e) elaborating on an idea made by the instructor or another student;
- f) contributing new information, facts or viewpoints;
- g) establishing credibility and integrity with good research and accurate information;
- h) asking relevant questions so as to better understand information or another's viewpoint;
- i) relating discussion to another's ideas or to the facts presented;
- j) being aware of how personal biases or stereotypes can slant or distort factual information;
- k) understanding the laws of logical reasoning (both inductive and deductive);
- l) persuading others of a like or divergent viewpoint;
- m) arguing or debating a viewpoint, putting forth reasons for or against, based on supporting evidence; fielding questions and challenges to an argument, acknowledging error, when appropriate, and modifying a position accordingly;
- n) developing an excellent vocabulary and the ability to express ideas in grammatically correct, concise, and complete sentences;
- o) organizing thoughts around a primary thesis and main points;
- p) using eye contact, clarity and articulation, pace, body language, and enthusiasm to be an effective speaker;
- q) practicing the "art" of oral communication and public speaking so as to gain self-confidence, fluency and proficiency.

#### **Activities for the Development of Oral Communications Skills**

The following activities may be useful in the development of oral skills:

- a) *conduct a class session, introducing new material and leading discussion on assigned materials;*
- b) summarize the previous class discussion at the beginning of class;
- c) form debate teams that could be assigned topics and given opportunities to argue divergent viewpoints;
- d) form small groups (3-5 students) who organize an oral presentation into sections, with one member giving the introduction, other members giving the main points and finally, one member giving a summarizing closing statement. These would involve the sharing and discussion of research "findings" in preparation for the group presentation;
- e) split into small groups to predict the outcome of a lecture demonstration; the professor or a student would then do the demonstration, and the whole class would discuss the results;
- f) give peer evaluations of student oral presentations, in which the professor guides their assessment and asks for justification of their judgments;
- g) lead discussion for all or part of a class session and find creative ways to bring others into the discussion;
- h) be divided up into groups or "factions" representing different views on an issue or different ideas about the best way to resolve a problem or controversy; they could be evaluated in part on their

ability to qualify or modify their positions or proposals in response to those presented by the other groups, to compromise and negotiate as the group as a whole works toward a "settlement" or consensus;

- i) come up with questions on a particular reading or problem and the class as a whole could evaluate the questions as to which ones were the most clearly formulated, the most thought-provoking, the most productive, etc.;
- j) choose one of their papers or projects in a particular course and use it as the basis for a formal presentation to the class at the end of the term; be videotaped and subsequently evaluated by the student, the instructor or the class.

Techniques for Improving Oral Communication Skills:

<http://www.dean.sbc.edu/academicsecs/forms/oraltechniques/index.html>

## Appendix II

### Written Communication

#### Activities for the Development of Written Communication Skills

Each writing-intensive course is a cooperative venture between the student and the instructor, in which a variety of assignments, both formal and informal, may be used to develop the student's ability to write well. Among these activities, the instructor might have the student:

- a) write a major paper with multiple revisions;
- b) write a series of short papers, each undergoing review and revision;
- c) keep a journal of the reading, which can generate written questions to be discussed in class;
- d) make an outline, summary, or translation of the reading (either in class or outside it);
- e) translate mathematical problems into prose;
- f) write comments as postings for a Web Course-in-a-Box;
- g) complete a reader-response sheet on a particular assignment;
- h) write a short passage (one to five minutes) either at the beginning of class to address specific questions (or passages) for discussion or at the end of class to summarize the discussion for the day;
- i) take notes of a lecture or discussion to be shared with the rest of the class, or serve a turn as class secretary in taking notes;
- j) evaluate the rough draft of classmate's essay;
- k) revise sentences taken from the most recent set of student papers (one sentence for each student in the class);
- l) write a laboratory report or keep a notebook, both of which can generate written summaries and comments; describe the common errors or difficulties encountered in either problem solving or performing an experiment.