



The AGLS General Education Leader's Playbook

WHY DO WE HAVE OR NEED GENERAL EDUCATION?

<p><i>Who might ask this question?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student balancing credit-heavy major requirements, a job, and co-curricular activities ● Parent concerned about tuition cost and time-to-degree ● Instructor tasked with teaching a large, non-major introductory course ● Administrator who would not mind freeing up gen ed funding for faculty lines or other university initiatives ● Legislator concerned about transferability from other institutions and passionate about workforce development 	<p><i>Where might this question arise?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student advising session ● Campus admission tour ● Faculty meeting ● Institutional board/regent meeting ● Floor of the state senate
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THE BUZZER BEATER: WHEN YOU NEED ONE PLAY FOR THE WIN

General Education provides students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences that will ensure their success during and after college, and in their professional, personal, and civic lives. No single major can provide a student with all the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful and fulfilled; it is General Education that provides students with the skills they cannot gain from their majors. General Education deepens students' understanding of the world around them and of themselves as human beings, opening their eyes to other worlds and other perspectives. Through General Education, students become ready to engage as citizens to make a difference in a diverse democracy.

Play 1: DEVELOP SKILLS TO TACKLE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD

General education helps students develop valuable skills for college, the workplace, the community, and life. Examples of these skills include communication, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, knowledge integration, and many more. Twenty-first century problems are messy and involve several overlapping cultural systems. They require the integration of multiple perspectives and disciplines. Through the general education program, students not only learn those perspectives but make the connections that are critical to solving today's challenging problems.

Play 2: BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

With a strong general education base, students develop skills, perspectives, and a mindset for lifelong learning. This foundation is essential because learning does not stop at graduation. It is impossible for students to learn in college everything they will need to know throughout their lives, and some of that knowledge has yet to be discovered. Through courses in General Education, students learn to recognize when they need to seek knowledge, to locate and evaluate sources, and to apply newly learned knowledge appropriately and ethically to the task at hand. General education programs are opportunities to explore, to follow interests and passions, and eventually to find their own power to lead a fulfilled life.

Play 3: DISCOVER NEW PERSPECTIVES AND A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITY

General Education introduces students to a variety of perspectives, worldviews, and viewpoints of the human experience, allowing them to examine the world through the eyes of others and to re-examine their own conceptions. Through General Education courses students develop skills in ethical and moral reasoning and gain empathy for others. General education provides a foundation to build ‘the good life’ for themselves, their communities, and the world - however one defines it.

Play 4: PREPARE FOR [LONG-TERM?] PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

Surveys of employers reveal that most are looking to hire graduates who have completed general education programs. Employers consider the ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems to be more important than the specific undergraduate major of a prospective employee. To be successful in a rapidly evolving, multi-career future, students will need to take resources, ideas, and perspectives from varied sources and of all kinds, use them in creative and innovative ways, and effectively communicate ideas to others. The most valuable workers are those able to solve unstructured problems and effectively analyze multi-layered information. They are people who look beyond – not technicians of what has come before. Professional success also requires the ability to understand and collaborate respectfully and equitably with persons from different backgrounds and with different perspectives and approaches. The abilities sought by employers are considered core competencies in General Education programs, and by engaging students in courses from multiple disciplines, General Education programs provide students with the diverse ways of knowing how to tackle complex problems. By including courses that explore other cultures, other perspectives, and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, General Education programs prepare students to work successfully in an increasingly diverse world. In addition, research clearly illustrates that students with these skills and experiences will not only be well-positioned for career success, but that many of them will be poised to become our nation’s next leaders.

Play 5: BECOME AN ENGAGED CITIZEN IN A STRONG DEMOCRACY

Since general education is the single shared academic experience for all students, students from a variety of majors, backgrounds, and experiences can come together to gain and practice the skills to work across difference, explore other cultures and perspectives, and participate in the democratic process.

Play 6: DELIVER ON THE INSTITUTIONAL PROMISE

The general education program is a curricular symbol of an institution’s mission and values. It represents and influences the institutional structure (e.g. departments, schools), faculty and student makeup (e.g. hirings, enrollments), and operations (e.g. budgets, credits, degree requirements). It is the only curricular component with which every student, regardless of major, engages. Therefore, general education encompasses and elevates the institution’s most valued skills, knowledge, tools, and perspectives.

Play 7: DEMONSTRATE EXCELLENCE TO EXTERNAL FORCES

Every university must have a general education program to meet state and regional/national accreditation standards. These requirements vary, but often include a minimal credit requirement and some delineation of necessary content (e.g., oral communication). Legislation at the state and federal level have a greater influence than ever as institutions work to support transfer articulation and to achieve some consistency across programs. These legislative and accreditation demands influence the structure, funding, and administration of general education.

CHAPTER ONE PROMPT WORKSHEET

Every sport is based on basic moves and strategies that make up the game. Every coach has favorite plays to turn to in certain moments or suited to the team's strengths. Each play is often customized for optimum effect on the field of play.

Pages 1 & 2 of chapter 1 are a set of stock responses for you to use as needed – created from input from gen ed colleagues around the U.S. This page is designed to help you think about, create, or customize responses for the next time you are asked 'why do we have general education?' Use the questions below as your prompt. Spend some time thinking about and creating responses that are customized to unique features of and approaches found in your campus' general education program.

- Does the general education program on your campus have a mission statement (formal summary of the aims, values, and purpose)? If yes, include it here. If no, work with your team to create one!

- Often, gen ed administrators are thrust into the realm of marketing. Working with your campus external communications staff will help you with this and the next task! Think about a marketing slogan (the 'who, what and how' of your program's plan to achieve its mission). This can be a very brief statement – one well-constructed sentence can be enough!

- Think about a marketing slogan or tagline. Short, direct, and pointed of what the program aims to do is best. The most famous one is "Just do it."

- What responses to this question have worked for you in the past?

- What current affairs, world issues on your campus are a 'poster child' for the need for general education? What courses/components of your program engage these issues/affairs?

- Once you have worked on the above, here are some other questions to consider and answer, even if only for yourself or your team's consumption:
 - ✓ What is your and/or your team's role(s) in supporting gen ed on your campus?
 - ✓ Who are you typically talking to when are asked why do we have gen ed?
 - ✓ What is the common version of this question that you typically encounter when speaking to stakeholders?
 - ✓ What about your institution is unique that might help guide you?

- Create a short statement that can quickly answer this question when you need to provide a response fast. Think of this response as being equivalent to an elevator speech or book jacket blurb. A response that is less than 150 words or can explain your program in less than 30 seconds.

- Create a more detailed statement that between one page long (no more than 500 words) but no longer than 2 pages. When writing this version, write something that could easily be divided up into shorter blurbs for specific purposes. For example, the statement could be broken up into several smaller paragraphs for use in a tri-fold brochure!

- Depending on where you are in the development, history, or reform of your gen ed program – creating a longer detailed statement for an internal and external audience may be useful.

The responses and ideas here are not definitive. They are offered as a basis to create your own responses and ready to use materials. Of course, each time you asked this question – your answer should be specific to their concerns, which sometimes may not be what they are asking. By having on hand a set of prepared statements to serve as the foundation of a useful response, your job as a gen ed administrator will become easier.

ADVANCE PLAYS: This worksheet is designed to help you develop responses to the question posed. The next step may be to delineate some strategies to increase the value students, faculty, and staff place on general education. You want them to be your champions of gen ed, being able to answer the question this chapter poses. Once you have completed this chapter, consider what strategies might be effective at your institution to nurture gen ed champions on your campus.

Keep copies of your customized 'plays' for CHAPTER 1 in your gen ed playbook with this chapter.

SUCCESS IS WHERE PREPARATION AND OPPORTUNITY MEET.

~Bobby Unser