# FINAL GENERAL EDUCATION III PROPOSAL
**Approved by the Curriculum Committee on 4-4-02**
**Approved by the Academic Senate on 4-5-02**
**Approved by the Faculty on 4-12-02**

## Executive Summary

A General Education III Task Force, including faculty, professional staff, and students, was convened in Fall 1998 in accordance with faculty governance guidelines for the purpose of reviewing and revising General Education at SUNY New Paltz.  The following proposal is the result of this nearly four-year effort.

## I.  Process of Development

In developing this program, the Task Force consulted a variety of resources. In Fall 2001, members of the Task Force met with students, administrators, professional staff, and every academic department.   The following themes emerged from those conversations:

- The breadth of the current General Education program is valued.  Faculty and students alike wanted to retain the exposure to traditional academic disciplines (science, math, history, arts), while also continuing our particular emphasis on diversity and global perspectives.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on developing the writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills of incoming students; General Education is the logical place for this development to begin.

- Our current program is too large, creating a burden for students in high-credit majors and limiting the flexibility of other students.  Consequently, reducing the size and improving the coherence and integration of General Education became a primary goal of GE III.

- The general sentiment expressed about General Education is that it has become something to be "gotten out of the way" and does not adequately prepare students for advanced coursework.

The Task Force also read widely on the theory and pedagogy of General Education and reviewed models from across the country.  Three important themes in the research have informed the development of the GE III Program Proposal:  1) The underlying philosophy and goals for a General Education program should be made explicit to promote greater understanding about its purpose for both students and faculty; 2) pedagogy in General Education courses should be attentive to the developmental aspects of student learning; and 3) a General Education program requires sustained attention from faculty to remain dynamic.

## II.  The Proposed Program

Three defining features of GEIII make it distinct from our current General Education program**:** 1) an explicit attention to the goals of General Education at New Paltz; 2) the infusion of critical thinking competencies into the curriculum; and 3) a re-configuration of the knowledge areas to promote coherence and inter-disciplinarity.

General Education Goals

The underlying philosophy of a General Education program should reflect important aspects of campus culture. Our mission statement and strategic plan suggest that the goal of General Education at SUNY New Paltz is to provide its graduates with the ability and skills to be informed and active citizens. A program in General education must therefore be "accessible" to entering students while striving to develop their skills and abilities at increasingly sophisticated levels. In order for General Education to provide the foundation of knowledge and skills necessary for the major, we are proposing that a majority of courses in General Education be taught at the lower-division level.

General Education Competencies
The key feature of GEIII that differentiates it from our current GE program is the explicit attention to a multi-dimensional concept of critical thinking. Critical thinking comprises four competencies: Effective Expression, Systematic Inquiry, Information Literacy, and Ethical Reflection. The GE III program integrates these competencies into the curriculum by requiring that each GE course emphasize at least one of the competencies.

General Education Knowledge Areas
Four broad knowledge areas are presented in this framework: Arts and Humanities, Scientific Investigations, The United States and Its Traditions, and Global Perspectives. These four knowledge areas preserve features from the current GE and incorporate the categories mandated by the SUNY Board of Trustees. The organization of the knowledge areas in GE III serves to improve the coherence of the program and create opportunities for interdisciplinary connection among courses.


## III. Sustainability and Implementation

The first phase of implementation will be the submission of courses for approval. All courses must address one knowledge area and at least one competency. Subsequently, attention must be given to faculty development, sustaining the integrity of the program, and assessing its effectiveness.

In order to address these issues we also propose:

- that any substantive changes to the GE III Program, required as a result of the implementation process, come before the faculty for approval, and

- that a standing sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee be created to assist in implementation, promote faculty development opportunities, and be charged with the on-going oversight of General Education.

# Program Proposal for General Education III

## I.        The Goals of General Education III

The General Education III Program was developed collaboratively by the faculty and students of SUNY New Paltz.  It reflects the mission and characteristics of the university and an appreciation for the changing conditions of knowledge, pedagogy, and the contemporary world. The program exposes students to the areas of knowledge that characterize a broadly educated person and it is designed to assist them in developing a global perspective as well as an understanding of the traditions and complexities of a democratic society.  Balancing learning experiences in four different knowledge areas—Arts and Humanities, Scientific Investigations, The United States and Its Traditions, and Global Perspectives—the General Education program provides both discipline-based and interdisciplinary opportunities for advancing knowledge. A defining feature of General Education III is its attention to developing the capacities of students to think critically while providing them with the breadth and depth of knowledge that will allow them to become active citizens and productive members of their society. Students develop the capacity for critical thinking as their competencies in the areas of Effective Expression, Systematic Inquiry, Information Literacy, and Ethical Reflection are addressed in both lower-division and upper-division courses throughout the program.

Recognizing that students come to SUNY New Paltz with a variety of experiences, expectations, abilities, and interests, the General Education III Program provides a full and flexible foundation for a shared experience of learning, inquiry, and exploration.  The program attempts to accommodate and encourage independent thinking, while providing the personal, intellectual, and creative resources that prepare students for the depth and focus required in a major area of study.

## II.       Knowledge Areas

Four knowledge areas serve to integrate the disciplines, encouraging students to make linkages between ideas as they assimilate knowledge.  An appreciation for artistic, literary, and philosophical endeavors is developed through **Arts and Humanities**.  Knowledge of the natural and social sciences, as well as mathematical ideas and models, are explored in **Scientific Investigations**.  **The United States and Its Traditions** focuses on knowledge of political, economic and social processes in the United States, on the formative influence of the Western tradition, and on the rich multi-cultural heritages which continually influence the nation.  Lastly, an understanding of a wide range of world civilizations and cultures is fostered in **Global Perspectives**, as is an appreciation for cultural and individual differences.

Although 300 level courses may be appropriate for General Education, the majority of GE courses should be accessible to freshman and sophomore students.  Hence, most GE courses should be at the 100 and 200 levels.  Course requirements mentioned below refer to courses of at least three credits.  Although two-credit performance courses are acceptable in the Arts category, students must complete four credits of these courses in order to satisfy the three-credit minimum for the category.

## Arts and Humanities (12 credits minimum)

### *Composition (two courses)*

The first-year writing requirement, which consists of two composition courses taken in sequence, focuses on the composing process, critical reading, critical thinking, and forms of academic writing. Students develop their writing ability as they learn to use writing as a mode of inquiry and learning.

### *Humanities (one course)*

Courses in the Humanities category will introduce students to the conventions and methods used in the study of literature, philosophy and the arts.

### *Arts (one course)*

Courses in the Arts category will introduce students to various forms of artistic expression, as well as their historical, social and cultural contexts, to the creative process, and to the aesthetic dimensions of sound, movement, texts, and images.

> *Note: Scholarly histories of the arts are approvable for either the Humanities or Arts categories, but not both. Performance courses are appropriate for Arts only.*

## Scientific Investigations (12 credits minimum)

### *Mathematics (one college level math course)*
*College level math is defined as mathematics that goes beyond the material covered by Regents Math Exam B.*

Courses in the Mathematics category will provide students with an understanding of:
- Fundamental notation and the ability to construct valid mathematical arguments.
- The problems to which mathematics can be applied.
- Mathematical relationships and the ability to interpret them in a visual portrayal.

### *Natural Sciences (two courses)*

Courses in the Natural Sciences category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The methods scientists use to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, and evaluation of evidence.
- How to apply scientific data, concepts, and models.
- How scientific arguments are formed, utilized, and evaluated.
- Ongoing developments in science.

> *Note: Lab courses are acceptable for this requirement, but are not mandatory.*

### *Social Sciences (one course)*

Courses in the Social Sciences category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The methods social scientists use to explore human interaction and social institutions, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis.
- The major concepts, models, and issues of at least one social science discipline.

## The United States and Its Traditions (9 credits minimum)

### *United States Studies (one course)*

Courses in the United States Studies category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The historical and social context of political, economic, and cultural developments in the United States.
- The common institutions in the United States and how they have affected various ethnic, racial and gender groups in differing ways.
- The United States' evolving relationship with the rest of the world.

### *Western Civilization (one course)*

Courses in the Western Civilization category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, and culture of Western Civilization;
- The development of Western Civilization relative to that of other regions of the world.

### *Diversity (one course)*

Courses in the Diversity category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The historical, political, economic, or social experiences of at least one cultural, ethnic, or historically underrepresented group in the United States;
- The perspectives of these groups toward the development and institutions of U.S. society.

## Global Perspectives  (6 - 9 credits minimum)

### *World Civilizations and Cultures (one course)*

Courses in the World Civilizations and Cultures category will provide students with an understanding of:
- The interaction of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities in the increasingly globalized context of human civilization.
- The distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, and culture of at least one non-western civilization.

*Foreign Language (one or two courses)*
*Students who take language courses at the elementary level must take two courses. Students who take language courses at the Intermediate or Advanced levels must take one course.*

Courses in the Foreign Language category will provide students with the ability to communicate in a language other than English as well as introduce them to the societies and cultures which are associated with that language.

> *Note: Consistent with SUNY Board of Trustees guidelines, American Sign Language will be an option for satisfying the foreign language requirement for students in education curricula or in majors leading to careers in health or social service agencies where there is likely to be significant contact with the hearing impaired.*

## III. CRITICAL THINKING COMPETENCIES

Critical thinking is the fundamental skill we expect all students to develop as they progress through a new curriculum in General Education. Critical thinking involves an intellectual disposition for investigation and argumentation when one considers a subject matter. It entails a normative appreciation of influences and consequences when one communicates an understanding of a subject matter. Students develop the intellectual disposition and normative appreciation of critical thinking when they practice the interrelated competencies of systematic inquiry (SI), effective expression (EE), information literacy (IL), and ethical reflection (ER) in their coursework.

The interrelated competencies of critical thinking apply to coursework in each of the knowledge areas of General Education, although their practice can vary both within and between these knowledge areas. Each course in the new curriculum of General Education will address one or more of these competencies, utilizing approaches that are appropriate to the instructors and the departments/programs of each course.

Recognizing that these competencies are developed over time, and at increasing levels of sophistication, course level and competency level should be explicitly addressed in course proposals. [*] We do not propose to have an explicit mechanism to insure that students take particular numbers of courses focusing on each competency. We intend instead that the competencies will be spread throughout the General Education requirements, and that substantive efforts be made to develop students' competencies in all General Education courses.

## Systematic Inquiry (SI)

Systematic inquiry includes:

- the practice of asking appropriate questions about a subject,
- investigating arguments for fallacies or other flaws,
- evaluating the validity and reliability of information,
- arriving at conclusions or inferences from information,
- acknowledging the limitations in a particular methodology, and
- facilitating further study of a subject.

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[*] Freshmen are expected to enter New Paltz with a basic level of critical thinking. Through an assessment given at orientation, those who are deemed to need assistance in attaining this level of proficiency are placed into a non-credit-bearing Critical Thinking course.

The logic of systematic inquiry may be inductive, deductive, or interpretive and it may be pursued through quantitative or qualitative methodologies.   Quantitative analysis includes working with symbolic notation, expressing relationships between essential elements in quantitative terms, examining the sources, types, and relevance of numerical information for authenticity, validity and reliability, and interpreting results and advancing conclusions.  Qualitative analysis, embodied in traditions such as hermeneutics, grounded theory, and discourse analysis, involves attention to context, how individuals construct meaning, an understanding of the complex relationships between the "whole" and its "'parts," and an appreciation of the historical and social basis of interpretation.

## Effective Expression (EE)

Writing and public speaking are complex processes that involve translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts; written and oral discourse are the means by which a person discovers as well as communicates knowledge. Written and oral discourse are modes of learning that empower the student, not simply by means of testing.  The pedagogy employed in Effective Expression courses acknowledges that the mastery of any subject is greatly facilitated by the process of writing and public speaking.  Although the pedagogy will vary by discipline, the common assumptions for Effective Expression courses are that writing and public speaking are ongoing activities throughout the course and that students need opportunities to work on stages/drafts of assignments, to receive comments from peers as well as the instructor, and to revise their work.  In Effective Expression courses students will learn to:

- write coherent texts,
- research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details,
- develop proficiency in oral discourse, and
- learn to critique the oral and written work of their peers.

## Information Literacy (IL)

In the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices – in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives.  Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the Internet – and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability.  The uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information pose large challenges for society.  The sheer abundance of information will not in itself create a more informed citizenry without a complementary cluster of information literacy skills that enable individuals to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning.  It is common to all disciplines and enables learners to master content, extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.

While information literacy encompasses more than information technology, acquiring certain technological skills, including learning hardware and software applications, understanding the underlying concepts of technology, and applying problem-solving and critical thinking to the use of technology, are necessary in order to become proficient in information literacy.

Information literacy and information technology are appropriately taught across the curriculum, affording students repeated opportunities for seeking, evaluating, and managing information gathered from multiple sources and discipline-specific research methods.  In General Education, courses throughout the Knowledge Areas will teach students to:

- Determine information needs for a variety of purposes**,**
- Understand the underlying concepts of information technology,
- Access information effectively and efficiently**,**
- Use hardware and software applications effectively, including campus-specific technology services**,**
- Critically evaluate information and sources**,**
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose**,** and
- Access and use information ethically and legally.

Text in large measure from:  "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000.  <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilintro/html>

## Ethical Reflection (ER)

Recognizing that there is an ethical dimension to all fields and disciplines, to social policies and practices, and to the way knowledge is developed, communicated and used, it is essential that a college education equip students with the tools to engage in ethical reflection.  Ethical reflection refers to the basic principles of remaining fair-minded, offering informed commentary, and questioning claims of certainty. The practice of these basic principles includes abiding by the trans-disciplinary standards of impartiality, honesty, and sensitivity whenever students develop, communicate, or apply their understanding of a subject matter.  Students demonstrate competence in the practice of ethical reflection when they are capable of:

- evaluating the effects of any pre-judgments on their understanding of a subject matter,
- engaging in a critique of all those who influenced their understanding of the material, and
- discussing the tentativeness of their understanding when in conversation with others.

Students provide evidence of these four interrelated competencies when they can:

- identify the underlying assumptions of arguments and define the respective problems/issues they pose (**SI and EE**),

- evaluate the logic used in arguments, and how arguments are used to analyze problems and issues **(SI),**

- investigate the validity and applicability of arguments **(SI and EE),**

- interpret the meaning of this information and examine its reliability/validity (**IL**) ,

- articulate their understanding of information and draw conclusions or inferences from it in an expository manner (**SI and EE**),

- assess the sources of information for authenticity and relevance to the inquiry (**IL**),

- acknowledge the possible biases of subjectivity and cultural values on their choices of information and their interpretations of it  (**IL and ER**),

- cite all those who influence their inquiry, conclusions, or inferences  (**IL and ER**),

- refrain from inappropriate uses of the inquiry, its conclusions and inferences, to mislead others or intimidate them (**EE and ER**),

- respect those whose conclusions or inferences may differ from their own (**ER**).

## IV.  General Education III Model

| Critical Thinking Competencies | Each Course in a Knowledge Area will address one or more competencies | Knowledge Areas | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Arts & Humanities | Scientific Investigations | The United States and Its Traditions | Global Perspectives |
| Systematic Inquiry (SI) | → | Composition (two courses) | Mathematics (one course) | United States Studies (one course) | World Civilizations & Cultures (one course) |
| Effective Expression (EE) | → | Humanities (one course) | Natural Sciences (two courses) | Western Civilization (one course) | Foreign Language (one or two courses) |
| Information Literacy (IL) | → | | | | |
| Ethical Reflection (ER) | → | Arts (one course) | Social Sciences (one course) | Diversity (one course) | |
| | | **12 Credits minimum** | **12 Credits minimum** | **9 Credits minimum** | **6-9 Credits minimum** |

The Writing Intensive Requirement is a graduation requirement at New Paltz.  It will, therefore, continue as a requirement under GEIII.

## V.  Sustaining General Education as a Program

The GE III Task Force**,** through its reading of the General Education reform literature, attendance at the Asheville Institute on General Education, and perusal of several campus organizational arrangements**,** has also identified the importance of creating mechanisms and processes that create sustained attention to General Education as a program.  While programs in the major acquire sustained attention through the disciplinary and departmental emphases of our campus community, General Education has no such direct and sustained attention at present.   Ultimate approval for a general education course is clearly the province of the Curriculum Committee; however**,** in order to create sustained attention to General Education we propose the following:


1.  General Education Board:  The Task Force proposes the formation of a General Education Board as a standing sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee.  The GE Board will report to the Curriculum Committee and minutes of GE Board meetings will be sent to it. The GE Board would be charged with the ongoing oversight of general education and would assist in the process of course development and leverage opportunities for faculty development and mentoring (e.g. workshops, guest speakers), in concert with The Teaching and Learning Center. The General Education Board and the College Curriculum Committee will jointly develop a set of course approval guidelines.  The Board, whose sole focus would be the goals of the GE program, its pedagogy, and curriculum development, would be best able to ensure that the program remains vital. The General Education Board would also be charged with the continuous assessment of the General Education program and would propose modifications to the GE requirements, as the need arises.

2.  The composition of the General Education Board is as follows:
    Two members of the Curriculum Committee should serve on the Board; the Board should be representative of the college divisions and the knowledge areas of the General Education Program.

## VI.  Additional Information

The Task Force has developed a series of "Frequently Asked Questions" to provide more background on our process, research on national trends, comparison of our model to the Board of Trustees Mandates, and other pertinent topics. We encourage all faculty members to review this extensive document in conjunction with this proposal.  It can be found on the GE III Task Force web site at http://www.newpaltz.edu/GEIII/gefaqs.pdf.