

GENERAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

According to its "Statement of Purpose,"¹ The College of William and Mary is an institution of "liberal education." Since the College is committed to assessing the degree to which its students are receiving a "liberal education," it is important to articulate that concept. Part I presents such a statement.

In addition to endorsing the general ideal of a "liberal education," the College's mission statement also enumerates specific aims which constitute elements of a liberal education. Since these aims are too general to be used as the basis for assessment, Part II presents goals which can serve the assessment process and are consistent with the aims agreed upon in the Statement of Purpose.²

Both parts of the following statement of purposes and goals are based upon several assumptions:

1. They discuss only the general education aspects of liberal education, omitting the specialized skills and knowledge that fall within the purview of the fields of academic concentration. However, general education takes place throughout the college experience, including courses within the concentration, and is definitely not confined to specific non-concentration courses nor to the first two years of the curriculum.
2. Every liberally educated graduating student should possess the skills, knowledge, and values enumerated in the statement. Setting these goals, therefore, has been guided by a level of expectation which every student can be reasonably expected to meet. This will clearly set significant limitations on the depth of knowledge and the degree of proficiency which the student must meet in each area. For that reason, for example, the statement specifies that the student should be required to know only the most significant and important ideas drawn from the wide range of listed subjects, and this point is illustrated by the use of representative examples. It is definitely not the case that the student would be expected to take a college level course in each of the specified fields.
3. The four-year college curriculum does not bear the full burden of preparing students to meet these goals. Most students will bring much of the required skills, values, and knowledge with them upon entrance. In addition, liberal education takes place not only in the classroom, but also in the broader academic community mentioned so prominently in the Statement of Purpose. As a residential college, William and Mary contributes to the education of our students at lectures, in the library, with informal student and faculty meetings, at cultural events, and in a vast range of other extra-curricular activities.

PART I - PURPOSES OF GENERAL EDUCATION IN A "LIBERAL EDUCATION"

- A. Individual Autonomy: To prepare for life as an individual capable of making open-minded, reasoned, and informed choices of one's values, goals, and career. In support of this ideal, liberal education broadens one's perspective, making possible the evaluation of personal beliefs and values in the light of alternative points of view.

- B. Social Responsibility: To acquire a sensitivity to the consequences of one's life and conduct for other people and for our natural and social environments.
- C. Personal Fulfillment: To prepare for a fulfilling life, one rich in the satisfactions derived from art, music, literature, science, and the other achievements of culture. A liberally educated person experiences the joy of learning and discovery in all realms of life.
- D. Cultural Literacy: To gain the background knowledge and other skills necessary for understanding written and oral communication from a wide range of sources, particularly those which are recognized as constituting the main-stream of our political, cultural, business, and artistic worlds. Similarly, to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for communication to such an audience.
- E. Political Autonomy: To prepare for responsible citizenship in a democracy. This requires understanding of the issues to be decided by the political process and an ability to make informed, rational choices among alternative policies, either directly or by election of representatives committed to those goals. Ideally, many individuals will have the desire and the ability to participate personally in governance at some level, which would require the aforementioned skills to a high degree along with the ability to communicate one's views effectively and persuasively to others.
- F. Life and Career Enhancement: To acquire the broad-based, non-professional, higher-order skills that enable the individual to flourish in a wide range of careers or other endeavors. With these skills, the liberally educated graduate:
 - 1. can perform particularly well within specific jobs or professions,
 - 2. can adapt to new developments within those vocations,
 - 3. can enter completely new fields,--thus enhancing his or her occupational options and prospects, and
 - 4. can similarly flourish in and adapt to new social and other non-professional environments.

PART II- SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND VALUES³

To achieve the aims of liberal education, the College has set general goals, which are identified in the Statement of Purpose. Since the William and Mary assessment program emphasizes the evaluation of student outcomes, it is necessary to restate these aims as more specific knowledge, skills, and values objectives.

A. Knowledge Objectives⁴

- 1. A general understanding of the world of nature and the major achievements of astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and physics.

Examples: the major features of modern evolutionary theory and genetics and the ability to describe our solar system, galaxy, and universe with knowledge of their size and time scales.

2. An understanding of individual and social behavior and the fundamental concepts employed in anthropology, economics, political science, sociology, and psychology as they contribute to that understanding.

Examples: the principal concepts of Marxist and capitalist economic theory, of twentieth century psychology, i.e., neuroses, repression, sublimation, and the fundamental insights of some influential social and political theorists.

3. A general historical knowledge of seminal events, movements, and ideas that have shaped Western civilization and our nation.

Examples: ancient Greek democracy, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the American and French revolutions, the American Civil Rights movement, the Women's Rights movement.

4. Acquaintance with a non-Western cultural tradition, for example, classical China, and African tribal society, or India in the twentieth century.

Examples: India during the Golden (Gupta) Age, China in the T'ang and Sung dynasties, the Aztec civilization, Japan under the Shoguns.

5. A general knowledge of masterworks, genres, and movements in art, music, and literature.

Examples: Classical and Gothic architecture; Baroque and Romantic music; Neo-Classical, Impressionist, and Cubist painting; and selected works of Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Moliere, and Jane Austin.

6. A general knowledge of major philosophical and religious systems which seek to define what it means to be human, including visions of the good life and of our human destiny.

Examples: the contributions of the Hebrew prophets, Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Gautama Buddha, Rousseau, and Nietzsche.

B. Skills Objectives⁵

1. Critical Thinking Skills

- a. To demonstrate an ability to reason deductively (as in mathematics and formal logic).

- b. To demonstrate an ability to reason inductively (as in formulation of general laws of science, informal generalization, sound use of statistics).
- c. To demonstrate sensitivity to typical forms of fallacious reasoning (such as guilt by association, over-reliance on authority, ad hominem reasoning, and equivocation).

2. Verbal Skills

- a. To write clear and effective prose, with sub-skills of:
 - i. writing informatively
 - ii. writing persuasively
 - iii. observing grammatical and stylistic norms
 - iv. following canons of sound reasoning.
- b. To speak clearly and communicate effectively.
- c. To understand the communications of others.
- d. To understand levels of meaning (such as literal, figurative, and mythological).

3. Quantitative Skills

- a. To use mathematics to solve problems and support arguments, with sub-skills of:
 - i. using algebra in the solution of problems
 - ii. understanding the concepts of similarity and proportionality
 - iii. using graphs and charts to represent numerical data
 - iv. understanding the elementary concepts of statistical analysis and probability.
- b. To understand arguments of others that are based upon numerical information, concepts of algebra or elementary statistics.

4. Scientific Skills

- a. To demonstrate the ability to distinguish conjectures that are testable by scientific methods from those that are not, and to suggest appropriate experiments or observations.
- b. To apply the principles of experimental design, including:
 - i. a reduction in the number of variables
 - ii. the elimination of uncontrolled variables
 - iii. constructing and testing hypotheses.

5. Aesthetic Skills

To demonstrate a familiarity with the products of artistic traditions, an awareness of critical standards, and an understanding of creative processes and media.

6. Historical Inquiry Skills

To demonstrate the ability to apply the principles of historical inquiry, which emphasize verification through critical analysis and comparison of texts and archives.

7. Language Skills

To demonstrate proficiency in at least one foreign language.

8. Information Acquisition Skills

- a. To determine the kind and amount of information needed for an inquiry.
- b. To locate useful information through the use of libraries and other resources, such as computerized data-bases.

9. Computer Literacy

To understand the capabilities of computers for word processing, analysis of data, and simulation.

C. Attitudes and Values Objectives⁶

1. Intellectual Values

- a. Intellectual integrity.
- b. Intellectual curiosity and commitment to continued learning.
- c. Openness to a diversity of viewpoints.
- d. Disposition to seek and assess appropriate evidence for assertions.
- e. Recognition of the limits of human knowledge and reasoning, and a willingness to act where rational certainty is unavailable.
- f. Respect for various intellectual modes of inquiry and of understanding.
- g. Disposition to employ multidisciplinary knowledge and skills to analyze complex issues.

2. Social and Civic Values

- a. Commitment to social and civic responsibility.
- b. Tolerance and respect for diversity in society (i.e., disposition to respond with fairness, compassion, and open-mindedness to individuals and groups with different characteristics, such as race, religion, gender, and social status).
- c. Respect for the role of legitimate rules and processes within a democratic society that protect individual and group rights.
- d. Sensitivity to the importance of the natural environment.
- e. Disposition toward social interactions which enhance a sense of community.

3. Personal Attitudes and Values

- a. Development of autonomously held and rationally defensible moral values.
- b. Development of aesthetic sensibilities and concerns.
- c. Positive sense of self and personal identity.
- d. Attitudes and habits conducive to physical and psychological health.

3/1/91

NOTES

1. As part of the 1984 Self-Study, the College of William and Mary adopted a "Statement of Purpose." This mission statement was formally approved by each of the faculties, the Student Association Council, the Board of Directors of the Society of the Alumni, and the Board of Visitors. The statement was printed in the Report of Self-Study and also appears in each edition of the Undergraduate Program Catalog.
2. To demonstrate the relationship of the items on the new list to those enumerated in the present "Statement of Purpose," the correspondence of each of the goals to those mentioned in the current Statement is noted in endnotes.
3. The following list of knowledge, skills, and values outcomes constitutes a continuum of overlapping and generally inseparable attributes that we believe characterize a liberally educated person. They are listed separately here only to facilitate discussion and the design of measurement instruments.
4. These knowledge objectives are derived from the following general aims of the College's "Statement of Purpose": "The curriculum makes accessible to students the substance of existing knowledge and the contemporary disciplines of thought and investigation by which knowledge is required." "Participation in the community results...in a breadth of view that comprehends what each discipline means to the others."
5. These skills objectives are derived from the following general aims of the College's "Statement of Purpose": "... the curriculum seeks to develop those abilities that characterize a liberally education mind: literacy, a command of language and sound argumentation in speech and writing; mathematical and scientific methodology ... appreciation of the creative arts as an ordering and expression of human perceptions ..." "... the undergraduate program fosters the aim of liberal education: the development of that critical and creative intelligence through which men and women realize their human potentialities ..." "Research, a fundamental activity of the community, is...integral to the student's program." "The life of the community depends upon ... essential resources of learning, such as libraries, laboratories, studios, and computers."
6. These values objectives are derived from the following general aims of the College's "Statement of Purpose": "The curriculum seeks to develop ... the ability to recognize and examine the values which infuse thought and action." "An athletic program emphasizing the development of each student's physical skills and sense of sportsmanship complements a program of liberal education."