

General Education and Exploratory



General Education Program

General Education, the Human Community, is the core academic program at James Madison University and is required of all students regardless of their major or professional program. The Human Community seeks to educate students in ways that have been fundamental to higher education for centuries. The program is committed to helping students develop their ability to reason and make ethical choices; to appreciate beauty and understand the natural and social worlds they live in; to recognize the importance of the past and work toward a better future.

The goal of the General Education program is to ensure students understand the historical and contemporary distinctions and interconnections among people, institutions, and communities that create, preserve, and transmit culture and knowledge in the arts, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and humanities.

Exploratory Program

Students who are undecided on which field of study to pursue are encouraged to take part in the Exploratory program. Exploratory students work closely with their advisors to discover their talents and interests, to learn more about potential areas of study and to develop an effective exploration plan to stay on track for a timely graduation. The goal of the Exploratory program is to assist students in finding a program or programs that they want to pursue further and allowing them to do so beyond the general education coursework.

Visit jmu.edu/gened for more Exploratory information including program requirements, goals and more.

Program Structure

In order to graduate, each student must complete the requirements for all five areas, which typically comprise one-third of a student's coursework, about 41 credit hours.

Madison Foundations

Madison Foundations, the cornerstone of the General Education Program, emphasizes those competencies critical to student success in all course work at JMU. Students take three courses focusing on communication, critical thinking and writing. Students must also demonstrate information literacy through a non-credit competency test. Students typically complete Madison Foundations in their first year at the university.

Arts and Humanities

Courses in this area rest on the belief that educated and enlightened citizens need a solid foundation in the arts and humanities. Students take three courses in these areas that engage them in enduring questions concerning human life, culture and history and that deepen their appreciation of the aesthetic and formal qualities of literary, visual and performing arts produced by local and global cultures.

The Natural World

Scientific information and mathematical approaches are essential components of solving the world's most pressing issues, as well as being critical to making informed decisions in our own lives. Students take one mathematics course and two science courses. A required laboratory experience can be met through one of the science courses or through an additional, stand-alone course.

American and Global Perspectives

American and Global Perspectives courses encourage students to explore the key social and cultural processes and structures that shape the human experience. Students take two courses in this area: one that examines social and cultural processes in a global context and one that examines these processes within the context of the United States.

Sociocultural and Wellness Area

In the Sociocultural and Wellness Area, students learn about themselves as individuals and as members of different communities. Students take one course in each of the wellness and socio-cultural domains, which explore how individuals develop and function in the social, psychological, emotional, intellectual, occupational, environmental, physical and spiritual dimensions.

For more information, contact
General Education Program
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