

On the Role of the Syllabus in General Education Courses

In the course of reviewing General Education course proposals, one of the recurring themes is the role of the syllabus. This is particularly relevant when it comes to articulating the goals of the course relative to the General Education Curriculum. One of the clear purposes for last revision of the General Education Curriculum was to produce a structure that was more educative. General Education Committee desires the educative nature of the curriculum to extend from the overarching structure into the courses that comprise it. To this end, the General Education Committee is looking for two things in each syllabus approved for the General Education Curriculum.

1. **A statement, apologetic if you will, for the role of the General Education category within the curriculum.** What is it, for example, that an exposure to abstract reasoning will do for a student of the Liberal Arts? How should a student expect that knowledge of biological science will inform and direct future disciplinary studies, thinking in other General Education courses, and function as a citizen? What is the role of Biblical Studies in equipping one to address fundamental questions in other disciplines and in forming a coherent worldview?
2. **A presentation of the ways in which the particular course addresses the issues relevant to the General Education category.** By what specific activities or intellectual investigations does the course address the goals of the G.E. category? Ideally, these would be identified both in the course overview and at the individual assignment level. At a minimum, such an apologetic should appear as part of the portrayal of the larger objectives and major activities of the course.

Presumably, we are thinking about these and related issues on an ongoing basis during course formulation and in departmental reviews. The discipline of translating these ideas into words in our syllabi should be a beneficial exercise in sharpening our thinking. The effort of careful articulation will benefit us as instructors as we become clearer in our goals and will benefit our students who will be aided in developing a more coherent and integrative view of their coursework at Westmont.