

The General Education at James Madison University mission is four-fold:

- to graduate students who will be informed citizens, well prepared to participate in public life and public decision-making;
- to provide students with critical skills in reasoning, communication, and technology that build a strong foundation for course work at JMU as well as for their lives and careers after college;
- to introduce students to core areas of knowledge that are central to the history of western civilization, including its interactions with other traditions within the global community; and
- to invite students to know themselves intellectually, emotionally, and physically and to consider the connections between values and behavior.

### ***The Overall Structure of the General Education***

*One set of courses in each of Five Clusters:* The Human Community provides fundamental knowledge and skills across the breadth of traditional disciplines so that students learn how to

- think and communicate effectively (Cluster One);
- appreciate the arts and humanities as an essential component of the human experience (Cluster Two);
- recognize the relevance of science and mathematics in the world they inhabit (Cluster Three);
- identify ways in which political, social and economic forces shape American and global experiences (Cluster Four); and
- understand themselves both as individuals and members of various groups in society (Cluster Five).

Program structure is intended to assist students to make connections among disciplines while satisfying all of the learning objectives of each cluster. Because Cluster One provides the necessary college-level skills of critical thinking, writing, and speech, all students are expected to complete this cluster by the end of their first year. All students should complete Cluster Three: The Natural World by the end of their second year.

#### Original Structure of Cluster One

Cluster One, Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is the cornerstone of *The Human Community* at James Madison University. This nine to twelve credit-hour cluster emphasizes competencies in the areas of oral and written communication, critical thinking, technology used for interpersonal communication, and information retrieval and evaluation. Competence in these areas is fundamental to general education and to subsequent study in major and professional programs. Therefore, all students complete Cluster One in their freshman year.

Cluster One of General Education advances the following nineteen learning objectives, and after completing Cluster One: Skills for the 21st Century, students should be able to:

- Evaluate information sources in terms of accuracy, authority, bias, and relevance in written and oral contexts;
- Use information effectively by adapting it to a communicative purpose, organizing it, and acknowledging and properly documenting sources;
- Describe and employ the components of communication theories and the variables involved in the process of human communication;
- Use standard conventions of written and spoken English to communicate information and ideas, using rhetorical strategies appropriate to purpose, audience, and content;
- Use oral and written communication to analyze critically thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions;

- Display interpersonal communication skills in groups by defining problems, eliciting and recognizing member contributions, synthesizing opinions, mediating conflicts, and reaching consensus;
- Demonstrate dyadic interaction skills including how to negotiate and resolve conflicts;
- Identify and employ inductive and deductive reasoning and evaluate the application of each;
- In any written or oral message, identify, paraphrase, and evaluate the thesis, the essential supporting evidence and assumptions, the unstated assumptions, and the conclusions;
- Paraphrase oral and written messages to demonstrate listening and reading skills;
- Use oral and written language to create a text that includes a clear, strong, and significant thesis; adequate and relevant supporting evidence; appropriate documentation; and clear and valid assumptions and conclusion;
- Distinguish and analyze various forms of oral and written discourse (questions, exclamations, commands, declarative, such as description, explanation, argument) and their roles in critical thinking;
- Identify and evaluate typical fallacies in oral and written communication;
- Demonstrate the mastery of writing and speaking processes including such essential practices as invention, arrangement, revision, and editing;
- Use computer technology to create a document that contains textual, tabular, and graphical or pictorial elements;
- Use computers to communicate interactively both locally and globally;
- Speak publicly using presentational software and technology;
- Formulate and conduct an information search that includes a variety of reference sources, such as encyclopedias, library catalogs, indexes, bibliographies, statistics sources, government publications, and resources available on the Internet, and
- Demonstrate effective and appropriate self-analysis and self-directed learning skills (see *Undergraduate Catalog*, 2001-02, p. 69).

The basic requirement for the cluster are as follows:

Complete **GWRIT 101** or receive credit through AP or IB tests or transfer credit. Exemption is given for an SAT II Writing score of 540 or higher.

Complete one Cluster One package (Credit for **GWRIT 102A**, **102B**, or **102D** is received through AP or IB tests or transfer credit. An exemption is given with an SAT II Writing score of 670 or higher).

Demonstrate competency in information retrieval and evaluation by passing the JMU Information Seeking Skills Test (ISST).

- Demonstrate competency in basic technology skills by passing the JMU technology test (Tech Level I) (see *Undergraduate Catalog*, 2001-02, p. 68).

Cluster One were organized into packages (i.e., groupings of courses). Packages were designed to support the efforts of the cluster in achieving its goals and objectives of providing students skills and knowledge that will make them effective citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Cluster One's essential theme is to foster students' abilities "to think and communicate effectively". Cluster One requirements were fulfilled by completion of one of four packages. All packages

included instruction in four college-level skill areas, including oral communication, writing, critical thinking, and technology. The academic units supporting and involved in the Cluster One packages were: the College of Business, the School of Communication Studies, the Department of History, the School of Media Arts & Design, the Department of Philosophy and Religion, and the Writing Program. The four packages were labeled by letter designation, and were identified as Packages A, B, D, and E.

*Package A: Effective Arguments.* This package consists of a course in basic human communication (**GCOM 121A**), a critical thinking course (**GPHIL 120A**), and a reading and composition course (**GWRIT 102A**), and is offered by the units of Communication Studies, Philosophy, and Writing respectively. Courses in this package may be taken in any sequence (see Package A: Effective Arguments, Objectives Coverage).

**GCOM 121A.** Basic Human Communication  
**GPHIL 120A.** Critical Thinking  
**GWRIT 102A.** Reading and Composition

*Package B: Critical Skills in the World of Business.* This package consists of a course in business decision making (**GBUS 160B**), a basic human communication course (**GCOM 121B**), and a reading and composition course (**GWRIT 102B**), and is offered by the units of Business, Communication Studies, and Writing respectively. **GBUS160B** and **GCOM 121B** must be taken concurrently, while **GWRIT 102B** may be taken during another semester (see Package B: Critical Skills in the World of Business, Objectives Coverage).

**GBUS 160B.** Business Decision Making in a Modern Society  
**GCOM 121B.** Basic Human Communication  
**GWRIT 102B.** Reading and Composition

*Package D: Critical Skills and Historical Inquiry.* This package consists of a course in basic human communication (**GCOM 121D**), a critical issues in recent global history course (**GHIST 150D**), and a reading and composition course (**GWRIT 102D**), and is offered by the units of Communication Studies, History, and Writing respectively. Courses in Package D may be taken in any order (see Package D: Critical Skills and Historical Inquiry, Objectives Coverage).

**GCOM 121D.** Basic Human Communication  
**GHIST 150D.** Critical Issues in Recent Global History  
**GWRIT 102D.** Reading and Composition

*Package E: Media Literacy and Communication.* This package consists of a course in basic human communication (**GCOM 121E**), a course titled mediated communication: issues and skills (**GMAD 150E**), and a reading and composition course (**GWRIT 102E**), and is offered by the units of Communication Studies, Media Arts and Design, and Writing respectively. All three courses in this package must be taken in the same semester (see Package E: Media Literacy and Communication, Objectives Coverage).

**GCOM 121E.** Basic Human Communication  
**GMAD 150E.** Mediated Communication: Issues and Skills  
**GWRIT 102E.** Reading and Composition

## CURRENT STRUCTURE

Cluster One: Skills for the 21st Century (9 credits)

### **Catalog Description:**

Cluster One brings together the basic skills in reasoning, writing, and oral communication. Since ancient times, these skills have been recognized as the fundamental skills of educated persons and responsible citizens. Cluster One specifically emphasizes the critical knowledge and skills that students learn through the study of human discourse, argumentation, reasoning, and persuasion. As students examine issues they gain insight and understanding that knowledge rarely develops in isolation but within a larger interactive, and often complex, context. Cluster One also responds to the contemporary need for effective information literacy within diverse contexts of human communication and decision making.

**Requirements:** - (3 courses and 2 Information Literacy tests)

Cluster One consists of nine credits covering three areas, Critical Thinking, Human Communication, and Writing. Students complete one course in each area and the courses may be taken in any order. The information literacy competency exams are non-credit carrying requirements. Students are required to complete coursework and the information literacy competency exams during their first year at the university.

All students complete cluster one their first year. All Cluster One choices are designed for students in any major. Students may use AP credit, IB Higher Level credit, or transfer credit for GWRIT 103, Critical Reading and Writing, which meet the writing requirement for Cluster One. Students may be exempt from GWRIT 103 with an SAT II Writing score of 670 or higher.

*Information Literacy Requirement (two tests):*

Technology Competency Test (Tech Level I) deadline for freshmen completion is by the end of their first semester at JMU.

Information Seeking Skills Test (ISST) deadline for freshmen completion is by the end of their second semester at JMU.

*(Note: Transfer students must complete both Tech I and ISST by the end of their first year at JMU.)*

**Complete one course from each of the three areas below** (courses may be taken in any order):

**Critical Thinking** Choose one of the following:

GBUS 160 Business Decision Making in a Modern Society

GHIST 150 Critical Issues in Recent Global History

GMAD 150 Mediate Communication: Issues and Skills

GPHIL 120 Critical Thinking

**Human Communication** Choose one of the following

GCOM 121 Human Communication: Principles and Practices

GCOM 122 Human Communication: Individual Presentations

GCOM 123 Human Communication: Group Presentations

**Writing**

GWRIT 103 Critical Reading and Writing

### **Learning Objectives:**

After completing *Cluster One: Skills for the 21st Century*, students should be able to:

#### ***Critical Thinking***

Evaluate claims in terms of clarity, credibility, reliability, and accuracy

Demonstrate the ability to identify, analyze and generate claims, arguments, and positions

Identify and evaluate theses and conclusions, stated and unstated assumptions, and supporting evidence and arguments.

Apply these skills to one's own work and the work of others.

### ***Communication***

Understand and apply the fundamentals of audience analysis, message construction, development, organization, and presentation.

Deliver effective oral presentations in a variety of contexts

Identify, evaluate and employ critical and sensitive listening behaviors.

Identify and manage the verbal and nonverbal dimensions of communication in a variety of contexts.

Recognize and apply the influences of self-concept perception and culture on communication.

Identify, evaluate and utilize the nature and functions of power and the strategies of conflict negotiation.

### ***Writing***

Develop and support a relevant and informed thesis, or point of view, that is appropriate for its audience, purpose, and occasion.

Analyze and evaluate information to identify its argumentative, credible, and ethical elements.

Reflect on civic responsibility as it relates to written discourse (critical thinking, reading, and writing).

Demonstrate effective writing skills and processes by employing invention, research, critical analysis and evaluation, and revision for audience, purpose, and occasion.

Effectively incorporate and document appropriate sources to support a thesis and effectively utilize the conventions of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

### ***Information Literacy***

Demonstrate competency in information literacy by locating information and using a word processor, presentation software and spreadsheets.