University Studies: The Basics

Starting in 2012-2013, incoming students and transfer students with 24 or fewer credits will complete the University Studies program instead of the older Gen Ed requirements (in 2013-2014, transfer students with 48 or fewer courses will fall under University Studies). The new curriculum is similar to the old one in many ways, but there are some key differences. This guide provides information about the University Studies program to assist faculty in advising students.

Like the Gen Ed program, University Studies requires students to complete a set of courses across various areas. The curriculum has 14 requirements, which are organized into five clusters:

1. Foundations for Engagement: Skills for the 21st Century
   A. Critical Writing and Reading I – ENL 101 (3 credits)
   B. Critical Writing and Reading II – ENL 102 (3 credits)
   C. Intermediate Writing (3 credits)
   D. Mathematics (3 credits)
   E. Foundation for Learning through Engagement (variable credit)

2. The Natural World: Scientific Inquiry and Understanding
   A. Science of the Natural World (3 credits)
   B. Science in the Engaged Community (3 credits)

3. The Cultural World: Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding
   A. Literature (3 credits)
   B. Visual and Performing Arts (3 credits)

4. The Social World: Humanity and Society
   A. Human Questions and Contexts (3 credits)
   B. The Nature of US Society (3 credits)
   C. The Nature of the Global Society (3 credits)

5. The Educated and Engaged Citizen: Integrating the UMD Experience
   A. Capstone Study (3 credits)
   B. Learning Through Engagement (variable credit)
Advising Issues

One key difference from Gen Ed is that each course that fulfills a University Studies requirement must seek and receive approval from the General Education Committee (which reviews the courses for fidelity to the intended learning outcomes for that requirement). As a result, there are no departmental designators that have been given “blanket approval” for a requirement. For example, not all Chemistry courses count for the 2A or 2B requirement, not all Art History courses count for the 3B requirement, and so forth. The new system works much like the G, D and E requirements did with Gen Ed—only a certain set of approved courses fulfill the requirement. Under the new curriculum, all requirements operate this way.

An up-to-date list of all approved courses is maintained on the University Studies website:

http://www.umassd.edu/universitystudies/approvedcourses/

In addition, the updated Advisement Report will also display all of the courses that students can use to satisfy each requirement.

One implication of this change is that the overlap between College requirements and University Studies may not be the same as it was under Gen Ed. Courses that students previously used to fulfill their College and Gen Ed requirements may no longer “double count” under University Studies. Again, it is important to check the Approved Courses list to see what fulfills the requirements.

It is also important to note that some courses are being designated “compound,” which means they fulfill more than one University Studies requirement simultaneously—they double count. Other courses are designated “flexible,” which means they can fill one OR another University Studies requirement (i.e., no double counting). The list of Approved Courses on the website indicates which courses have these designations. If COIN has placed a flexible course in the position of fulfilling one requirement and the student would like it to fulfill the other, an email to Keith Coutu (kcoutu@umassd.edu) in the Registrar’s Office can convey a request for the change.

When advising your students, you should be aware of some requirements in Clusters 1 and 5 that are unusual in some way because they don’t operate exactly like the regular distribution requirements found in Clusters 2, 3 and 4.

- Requirements 1A and 1B are fulfilled by ENL 101 and ENL 102 only; there are no other options for these two requirements.
- Requirement 1C – Intermediate Writing is meant to be fulfilled by a “disciplinary writing” course. This is a key difference from the Gen Ed program, in which students could fulfill their W requirement by taking one of any number of courses in various departments. Advisors should inform themselves of their department’s plan for the 1C requirement and advise their students accordingly.
- Requirement 1E – Foundation for Learning Through Engagement is meant to be housed within the “foundation,” first-year courses provided by each College (CAS 101, EGR 101, FOU 101, MIS 101, etc.). This requirement will be deemed completed for transfer students who enter with more than 24 credits.
- Requirement 5A – Capstone Study is, like 1C – Intermediate Writing, meant to be housed within the major program of each department. Again, plans for Capstone Study are ongoing this academic year, and advisors should check with their
departments about how to advise students regarding plans for Capstone Study. This course is meant to be taken in the senior year, so students will not be considering this course for registration in 2013-2014.

- Requirement 5B – Learning Through Engagement is a requirement that involves students in an active learning experience such as an internship, study abroad, independent research, practica, etc. Some departments may choose to deliver this to their students within the major curriculum, for example in a required course such as the Capstone. Alternatively, students may find another 5B course in a different department, perhaps even in a course that fulfills another University Studies requirement. For advising purposes, at this point there is still uncertainty about 5B, and again departments may want to discuss how to address this element of the curriculum with their advisees.

Do note that courses only count for students if they enroll after the course has been approved. Because the Gen Ed Committee is still actively approving courses, this may create problems. For example, students who took a course prior to its approval may get the mistaken impression, by looking at their transcript and the approved courses list, that the course meets a requirement. For this reason, a transcript alone cannot be used to determine whether students have met the University Studies requirements. The Advisement Report, however, will accurately track this for advisors and students.

The Rationale and Purpose of University Studies

While a key purpose of academic advising is to help students understand the practical and logistical issues of selecting courses and completing their degree, when discussing University Studies it is also important that advisors help students understand the rationale and purpose of the program. Surveys of students at UMass Dartmouth have revealed a prevailing attitude that Gen Ed courses are just requirements that students have to “get out of the way” in order to focus on their major courses. When the new University Studies curriculum was created, a commitment was made to continually reinforce with students why the requirements are in place and how they will help them develop the skills and capacities they need to be successful.

To help communicate the rationale and purpose of University Studies, consider the following approach:

Provide them a copy of the Commitment to Student Learning. The outcomes described there are part of a liberal education, which is one that is not just practical or useful—it goes beyond basic job training and embraces learning for its own sake. A liberal education helps students adapt to a rapidly evolving job market while also giving them the perspectives and habits of mind to have reflective and engaged lives.

Explain that the University makes good on its Commitment through four sets of experiences. First, students engage beyond the classroom in the various activities that don’t carry course credit but can have transformative effects. These include dorm life, student groups and clubs, on-campus programming and even student employment. Second, students declare a major in a specific field of study. The major is an important part of the university experience, as it provides an opportunity
for comprehensive and integrative learning. But, the major is not the only part of the academic curriculum that helps students achieve the outcomes to which UMass Dartmouth is committed. A third set of experiences comes from curricular requirements in each of the Colleges, which relate to the special demands and competencies in different areas of the university.

The fourth, and perhaps the most important, way in which the University helps its students achieve these outcomes is through the University Studies program. By its design, University Studies introduces students to a breadth of learning, teaches them to think analytically and critically, guides them toward mastery of communication, develops their ability to research and learn independently and provides the foundation to engage in their communities in constructive ways throughout their lives.

---

For more information:

http://www.umassd.edu/universitystudies/

Doug Roscoe, Director of General Education, droscoe@umassd.edu

Tom Boone, Cluster 1 Director, tboone@umassd.edu

Tara Rajaniemi, Cluster 2 Director, trajaniemi@umassd.edu

Thomas Stubblefield, Cluster 3 Director, tstubblefield@umassd.edu

Matt Sneider, Cluster 4 Director, msneider@umassd.edu

Keith Coutu, Assistant Registrar (for COIN questions), kcoutu@umassd.edu