

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY GEN ED PROGRAM

The Gen Ed program at Portland State is extremely innovative, and it is very exciting to read about it. It extends over the entire four years of students study, and is integrated more than any other program we have seen. It is called University Studies . The Council for Higher Education Accreditation has awarded the 2010 CHEA Award for Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes to Portland State University (OR), one of four institutions that will receive the award in 2010.

This program is comprehensive. Implementation began in 2008 (after a number of years in development), and it is ongoing. Twenty-five new faculty lines were called for across the academic units, and 20 have been funded thus far. During the yearlong freshman level course (Freshman Inquiry) and term-long sophomore level courses (Sophomore Inquiry), upper-division undergraduate and graduate "peer mentors" are partnered with faculty to deliver courses. FRINQ courses are small, with no more than 36 students per class. Faculty-led sessions meet twice weekly and are augmented twice per week by mentored inquiry sessions led by student [peer mentors](#).

All information for this display is lifted in its entirety from the following website

<http://www.pdx.edu/unst/unst-introduction>

University Studies: The Secret Behind Our Students' Success

Our innovative, award-winning general education program teaches you how to learn.

University Studies provides students with integrated, connected learning experiences that lay the foundation for lifelong intellectual development. Extending through all four years, the program teaches you how to think critically, communicate effectively, and gain a broad awareness of the human experience to instill a deep sense of responsibility to yourself, your peers and your community.

University Studies Chart

<p><u>Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ)</u></p> <p>UNST 100-level class A year-long, theme-based course with a mentor section that corresponds with the class.</p>		
<p><u>Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ)</u></p> <p>UNST 200-level classes One-term courses with a mentor section that corresponds with the class.</p>		
Sophomore Inquiry	Sophomore Inquiry	Sophomore Inquiry
<p><u>Upper Division Cluster</u></p> <p>Classes designated with a "U" offered by academic departments. Three courses in one cluster linked to one of the Sophomore Inquiry courses.</p>		
Cluster Course One	Cluster Course Two	Cluster Course Three
<p><u>Senior Capstone</u></p> <p>UNST 400-level class A 6-credit, community-based learning</p>		

Freshman Inquiry Course Themes

When students complete Freshman Inquiry, they will be expected to be able to apply writing, quantitative literacy, speech, visual/graphic skills, and current information technologies to problems requiring analysis and discovery. Freshman Inquiry will prepare students to move on to increasingly rigorous and sophisticated levels of inquiry, with the skills and habits of mind necessary for academic success and life-long learning in a society where the ability to think across disciplinary boundaries is increasingly required.

2009-2010 Themes

Freshman Inquiry: The Constructed Self

This interdisciplinary year-long course is designed to examine the ways in which we as individuals, as human beings and as social/cultural groups, create and communicate a sense of identity. Each quarter we will examine a different aspect of "The Constructed Self." Through reading fiction, viewing films and television programs, reading case studies, and doing field research we will explore the many complex "faces" of identity.

CYBORG MILLENNIUM 20TH century revolutions in quantum physics, information technology and genetics have profoundly altered the human experience of the 21ST century. This course explores the impact of computers, genetics engineering, particle physics and new imaging technologies on, among other things, concepts of humanity, society, privacy and cultural identity. Through stories, films, case studies, field research, art, books and original projects, students will have a wide range of outlets through which to explore and express their own questions and ideas, and to mediate among differing viewpoints.

DESIGN & SOCIETY Designers influence the creation of products, images, infrastructure and environments surrounding us, both virtual and real. Acting in a deliberate manner, designers engage with the problems facing their communities, and act to solve them by developing pragmatic, creative and innovative solutions. This course will use designers' activities as an analogy for individuals in other disciplines; in the end, everyone is a designer as they determine the context and direction of their life. *While this course uses hands-on activities as part of the teaching and learning process there is significant amount of reading and writing expected.*

FAITH AND REASON What is the reason for the human condition? Where do we look for a moral compass? How do we find truth? Human beings throughout history have sought to answer these questions through faith and reason. In this course, we will look at how the complex dichotomy between faith and reason has played out in human history. We will consider how our concepts of faith and reason, and the institutions of science and religion, shape both our intellectual landscapes and our efforts to develop our own moral characters.

HUMAN/NATURE The human animal is considered to be both a part of and yet distinct from nature. This relationship between our human selves and the natural world we inhabit is complicated and perplexing. This theme explores the complex connections between humans and nature. In what ways are we humans "natural"? Is there such a thing as human nature, and if so, what is it? Over the course of the year we will attempt to answer these questions, drawing on the resources of the social and biological sciences, history, literature and the arts.

ON DEMOCRACY: THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA "(Democracy) is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten because that history has yet to be enacted." Walt Whitman, American poet. In January 2005, the world was riveted by images of Iraqis lining up to cast votes in a free election. Their actions were accompanied by many commentaries on the power of democracy. But what is democracy? In addition to the reading and written analyses the course will ask students to organize and present their conclusions in oral and visual form, to engage in statistical analysis the use of charts and tables to examine experience of democracy, to debate various aspects of the democratic project, and to explore democratic practice through projects in the local community.

PORTLAND How do our surroundings shape our lives? How do we shape our surroundings? In this course, the complex relationship between people and the places in which we live, recreate and work will be explored. We will specifically focus on Portland places: its place as a context for human development and cultural expression; its place as an urban area of diverse communities; its place within the natural, material, and social environment of the Pacific Northwest. We will provide opportunity for students to ground their understanding with applied experience by encouraging and supporting student interactions and field research within and among the communities and spaces of greater Portland.

RACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE Most people in the United States value equality of opportunity. In reality, however, our social and economic system perpetuates various inequalities, including inequalities between socially defined racial groups Gunnar Myrdal, an architect of the Swedish social welfare system, wrote in 1955 that this "American Dilemma" would ultimately prevent the United States from building a society that would successfully put its values into action. This course will seek to address Myrdal's "American Dilemma" on two levels.

SUSTAINABILITY There is growing evidence that human activity is significantly transforming the natural systems that sustain us. Although we may often think of the natural world as something separate from our largely urban lives, our most basic needs such as nutritious food to eat, clean air to breathe, and clean water to drink depend on the health of the natural systems of which we are a part. The focus of this course will be on exploring the possibility of maintaining a sustainable relationship between human communities and the natural world. Throughout the course students will be encouraged to read and research widely on these issues, report on their findings, participate actively in discussions, and develop a deeper sense of responsibility for their own habits and choices.

WAYS OF KNOWING How do artists, scientists, writers, social scientists know and also shape their knowledge of the world? This course explores the foundational questions in three major areas of academic inquiry: the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences. Each quarter will closely examine the ways in which people create knowledge in these areas and the ways that "disciplines" shape the questions we ask. There will be a particular emphasis on the investigative methods used in these three areas and the ways that these methodologies animate the subjects in question. Students in this course will travel the year together but work with three different faculty members, each of whom represents a particular area of disciplinary expertise. This is a rotational course, students in different sections will take the introductions in different sequences.

THE WORK OF ART Approaching art from a dance of disciplines, this course examines how the work of art shapes, reflects, disguises and complicates our personal and cultural identities. Throughout the year, we will think "the work of art," both what it might be as an object or experience and what it might do as a possible agent for social, political or personal change. How can we use the arts to build community? What can the arts reveal about ourselves, our cultures and our societies? What is the relationship between the aesthetic and the political?

Freshman Inquiry Mentor Sessions

A crucial part of the Freshman Inquiry course is the mentor session, where students work closely with a [peer mentor](#) to understand and apply material from the main class session, and practice the skills and knowledge needed to create high quality individual and group work. The small size of mentor sessions (12 students) creates an interactive environment where students get hands-on experience in developing skills in research, writing, communication, and computer technologies. Students learn how to effectively access the Internet, to judge the quality of internet sites, and to use technology to communicate with faculty and other students in class.

Sophomore Inquiry & Upper Division Clusters

Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) courses are gateway classes that introduce students to the concepts, questions, methods, and other content that are to be further explored in the Upper Division Cluster (described below). In these courses, students continue to build on the skills developed in Freshman Inquiry and offer an opportunity for students to explore topics of interest that are different from, yet complementary to, the students' majors. Once SINQ courses have been completed, students choose classes from among the Upper Division Cluster offerings that correspond to the SINQ the student found of most interest. These courses do not need to be taken in any specific order.

Upper Division Clusters

Upper Division Clusters are comprised of courses from a variety of disciplines. The courses call upon the skills and knowledge students have developed in their lower division University Studies courses, FRINQ and SINQ. By this time in their academic careers, students are expected to be increasingly proficient in writing, research, discussion, computer and inquiry skills. In Upper Division Cluster courses, students gain a rich, in-depth study of the thematic lines of inquiry introduced in SINQ. Additionally, through their choice of Cluster courses in this part of the University Studies program, students can design an individualized plan of study based on the theme they found most interesting in their Sophomore Inquiry courses, and what will best support their overall academic goals.

Senior Capstone Courses

Portland State University has forged strong ties with the surrounding community and tailors its courses to prepare students for the multitude of exciting challenges that await them in college and beyond. Each 6-credit, community-based learning course is designed by a Portland State faculty member to provide students with the opportunity to apply, in a team context, what they have learned in their major and in their other University Studies courses to a real challenge emanating from the metropolitan community. Interdisciplinary teams of students address these real challenges and produce a summation product under the instruction of a PSU faculty member.

International Capstones

1) Health and Aging in Nicaragua SPRING TERM

This spring-term course held at Portland State University and subsequent two-week study abroad program in Nicaragua will provide students with meaningful experiences in an international context.

2) African Studies Overseas Experience: Ghana

This six credit summer 2009 program will offer students opportunities to experience aspects of African history and culture through the lens of the Ghanaian cultural experience.

3) Costa Rica

This capstone provides an opportunity to learn about Costa Rica and immerse yourself in the culture. The course includes a 2 week service-learning experience in the city of Turrialba, Costa Rica. In Turrialba, you will conduct daily service in a community-based setting such as a school, national park, or social service

4) Health and Migration in Oaxaca, Mexico

This capstone course takes students to Oaxaca, Mexico to study the cultural, economic and social forces that impact health in both sending and receiving communities. We focus particular attention on diabetes and other chronic illnesses related to changes in diet and activity patterns among this translational population, but students will also have the opportunity to learn about the relationship between migration and HIV, and to visit with organizations that work on prevention in this area.

5) Environmental Activism and Community Engagement in Mexico

This international capstone explores how Mexican families and communities are demonstrating environmental awareness by opting for sustainable approaches to maintain clean water, local food production, and a healthy environment in the face of political and economic challenges. Students will travel to Oaxaca, Mexico August 29 – September 12 to live with local families and participate in environmental activism.

6) Environmental Issues In Nicaragua-ESR

Catalog description: Students will learn about the environmental and technical characteristics for a range of small-scale, sustainable energy alternatives (photovoltaics, direct solar, micro-hydro and wind). The students will participate in a study-tour on sustainable energy development in Nicaragua community service on an example project. They will develop a proposal for funding and implementing community-based power generation that is suitable for submission to a NGO or local agency to fund continuing work.