Core Model

General Education (13 courses, 37-38 hours)

Inner Core
5 courses, 13 hours
- Composition
  1 course, 3 hrs
- Oral Communication
  1 course, 3 hrs
- Quantitative Literacy
  1 course, 3 hrs
- New: 1st Year Seminar
  1 course, 1 hr
- 2nd Year Writing
  1 course, 3 hrs

Outer Core
8 courses, 24-25 hours
- PLUS Learning Electives (12-13 hrs)
courses from three different departments or disciplines
- PLUS Integrative Learning Cluster (9 hrs)
a set of three courses that examine a particular theme from different perspectives

Sample Cluster Themes
- Concepts of Self and Society
- Expressions of Belief and Belief Systems
- Good Chemistry: How it shapes our lives
- Ancient Worlds
- Privacy and Security
- Forms of Government
- Empire, Colonialism, and Globalization

1. A new one-hour 1st year thematic and integrative course with significant writing and presentation component.

2. Of the 24 Outer Core Elective and Cluster hours, students must complete at least three hours in each of these designations: Fine Arts; Historical Studies; Literary & Cultural Studies; Social Sciences. Students must also complete 6-7 hours in courses designated as: Science and Mathematical Inquiry. Cluster thematic categories will be approved by the General Education Committee.

3. One PLUS Cluster or Group course must also have an Enhanced Writing designation.

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<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>S1. Stresses SLO #1: writing/communication</td>
<td>C1. Gen Ed credit hours remain high</td>
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<td>S2. Common inner core experience</td>
<td>C2. Indirectly addresses the remaining seven SLOs</td>
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<td>S3. Tailored outer core experience</td>
<td>C3. Less flexible structure</td>
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<td>S4. Integration created through cluster</td>
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The Core model is an integrated general education and major studies program that provides NIU students with an effective education designed to provide the basis for essential lifetime learning. This will be accomplished through a combination of a concentrated Integrative Themed Learning experience complemented by an opportunity to selectively explore a wide range of courses in Liberal Studies and an expectation of a fundamental grounding in and understanding of methods and applications in sciences and quantitative reasoning. While it will be able to conserve and continue to use many current curricular offerings, it will also promote and require the development of more systematic efforts to integrate the study of important and thought-provoking themes into clusters of specifically selected courses. In addition, it will permit a wider range of intermediate to upper level courses to meet general education requirements.

This model requires incoming first-year students to complete 13 general education courses totaling 37-38 semester hours.

1. General Education Mission Statement

The Core program is the springboard for lifetime learning, career success, and a productive and well-lived life. Students who complete the general education program at NIU will take coursework through which they will gain a broad understanding of essential areas of human knowledge, including aspects of the arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics. This extensive study is complemented by more focused study of a particular theme in coordinated coursework. Through such thematic study students will acquire the ability recognize the interconnections between different fields of knowledge, how these relate to important issues and problems, how these have affected human life over time and throughout the world, and how they will shape their future. Throughout their coursework, as well as through opportunities for engaged learning and extracurricular activities, NIU students will think critically about key issues, use their increasingly integrated knowledge to generate new ideas and solve problems, and effectively communicate these ideas to others in both academic and real-world projects.

2. Promotion of Baccalaureate Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

As an essential element in the Undergraduate Baccalaureate Experience at NIU, general education courses are expected to address the Baccalaureate goals (Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Communication). Each general education course will be expected to promote at least one Baccalaureate Goal and demonstrate how it does so. In addition, each general education course will be expected to promote at least one to three (1-3) of the eight Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and demonstrate how it does so.
The correlation of Baccalaureate Goals and SLOs to General Education coursework will be mapped, permitting students to determine which goals and SLOs are stressed in the courses they select and permitting student transcripts to indicate in what quantities and at what levels such goals and SLOs have been met.

3. Enhanced Writing

This program emphasizes enhanced writing by requiring: (1) a composition course; (2) a first-year one-hour year thematic and integrative course with a significant writing and presentation component; (3) a second-year writing course; and (4) the addition of enhanced writing hours later in the curriculum.

4. General Education Content Exposure

This model employs an “inner” and “outer” core grouping of general education courses combined with extra writing course requirements. The total “Inner Core” and “Outer Core” General Education Requirements for an incoming first-year student is 37-38 credit hours.

4.1. Inner Core – 13 hours.

4.1.1. First Year Requirements

- English Composition (3 hours)- Satisfied by ENGL 103, 104, or 105, or comparable credit.
- Oral Communication (3 hours)- Satisfied by COMS 100, or comparable credit.
- Quantitative Literacy (3 hours) - Satisfied by MATH or STAT courses currently offered.
- First Year Seminar (1 hour)-15 students per section (faculty teaching such a seminar could meet at the same hour with three separate groups per week, thus providing this experience to 45 students per semester, significantly increasing the cost-effectiveness of this coursework). Thematic and integrative course with a significant writing and presentation component. Seminar topic chosen by instructors and approved by GEC subcommittee.

4.1.2. Second Year Writing Requirement (3 hours)

- Courses fulfilling this requirement introduce students to writing across the curriculum. Students will write in different genres related to particular academic fields or domains of knowledge. In these courses students will read a variety of academic texts to examine issues and problems from different perspectives, while developing their ability to communicate their knowledge and understandings using appropriate rhetorical conventions in their writing. This course could be taught in ENGL or be opened to courses taught in other disciplines if they demonstrate that they satisfy defined writing requirements.

4.2. Outer Core – 24-25 hours.

4.2.1. PLUS Learning Electives (15 hours) – Students must take approved courses from five different departments or disciplines. It is anticipated that a wider range of course offerings than currently exist in the present general education program would be available, including more intermediate and some upper-level courses. This would provide greater diversity and flexibility for course selection for students.
4.2.2. **PLUS Integrative Learning Cluster** (9 hours) – Students must complete at least three courses that examine a particular theme from different disciplinary perspectives.

4.3. **PLUS Liberal Studies Distribution Requirement** – This requirement guarantees that breadth of learning and elements of a “liberal arts” education are incorporated in the program. Of the 18 PLUS Elective and Cluster hours, students must complete at least three hours of credit (i.e. one course) in the each of four areas.

4.3.1. **Fine Arts** – Courses as currently identified from CVPA, or otherwise approved courses;

4.3.2. **Historical Studies** – Courses as currently identified from CLAS, or otherwise approved courses;

4.3.3. **Literary and Cultural Studies** – Literary courses as currently identified from CLAS or otherwise approved courses. Cultural Studies courses from various colleges as approved;

4.3.4. **Social Sciences** – Social Sciences as currently identified from CLAS, or otherwise approved courses.

4.3.5. **Natural Sciences and Mathematics** – Natural science and mathematics as currently identified from CLAS, or otherwise approved courses.

No additional hours are added to this requirement if the five Comprehensive Liberal Studies Distribution courses are taken as part of the PLUS Learning Electives and/or Integrative Learning Cluster.

5. **Curricular Flexibility**

The Core program provides significant opportunity for the general education content to be tailored to the needs of a major studies program. Both lower-level and upper-level courses may be chosen for inclusion in the general education program, allowing more advanced study in a given domain. Upper-level programs may counsel students toward preferred Themed Learning Clusters that are aligned with the major. Students may also have the flexibility to choose Clusters that are more aligned with their major studies or their interests.

6. **Student Appeal**

The reduction of the general education requirements from 39-41 credit hours to 37-38 credit hours would make this program appealing to incoming first-year students and transfer students who have not completed their Illinois Articulation Initiative AIA General Education Compact.

The new PLUS Courses offer an added attractive feature to fulfill general education requirements by engaging students directly with themes that are examined from an interdisciplinary perspective.

7. **Infrastructural Costs**

7.1. **Enhanced support** for Writing Center/Writing across the Curriculum/First-Year Composition. The writing requirement will require considerable institutional support;
7.2. **Costs** associated with adding a required first-year seminar.
7.3. **Faculty incentives** for transforming or designing new themed learning course clusters;
7.4. **Buy-out time** for General Education Committee members to ensure adequate program review;
7.5. **Education and training** for faculty, students, and advisors, including the use of course transformation start-up funds, particularly related to the coordination of themed learning course clusters. (Potentially associated with a version of a summer transformation institute).

8. **References**

8.1. Appalachian State core program: [http://generaleducation.appstate.edu/](http://generaleducation.appstate.edu/)
8.2. Illinois State inner, middle, outer core program: [http://gened.illinoisstate.edu/](http://gened.illinoisstate.edu/)
8.3. Portland State core/cluster program: [http://www.pdx.edu/unst/home](http://www.pdx.edu/unst/home)