Pathways Model

Pathways
General Education (11 courses, 33-35 hours)

Knowledge Domains
11 courses, 33-35 hours

- **Aesthetics**
  - Inquiry/Reasoning, 6 hrs
  - Communication, 3 hrs

- **Nature & Technology**
  - Inquiry/Reasoning, 6-8 hrs
  - Communication, 3 hrs

- **Society & Culture**
  - Inquiry/Reasoning, 6 hrs
  - Communication, 3 hrs

- **Electives**
  - Any 2 qualifying Domains courses, 6 hrs

Sample Pathways
Students may take courses from one or more Pathways

- **Diversity**
- **Ethics & Justice**
- **Great Thinkers & Ideas**
- **Health & Wellness**
- **Local & Global Development**
- **Privacy & Security**
- **Sustainability**

Optional PLUS Gen Ed Minor

NEW: A General Education Pathway Minor is earned if 6 courses (18 hours) are taken in a single pathway

Students must take one course (3 hours) designated as Quantitative Literacy.

1. Knowledge Domains are broad topical areas that guarantee content exposure. Three courses are taken in each Domain: (1) an intensive Communication course that emphasizes the Writing/Oral Communication skills particular to that domain; and (2) two Inquiry/Reasoning courses that emphasize Analytical & Empirical Inquiry or Qualitative and Quantitative Reasoning.

Two of the six required Inquiry/Reasoning courses must be selected from new signature **PLUS COURSES** that focus upon the process of research and investigation.

Together, the Knowledge Domains address six Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): **Global** (SLO #1); **Cultural** (SLO #2); **Human/Natural** (SLO #3); **Crit. &Creat. Thinking** (SLO #4); **Communication** (SLO #5); and **Quan. & Qual. Reasoning** (SLO #7).

2. Pathways are thematic subject areas that integrate the curriculum by including courses from all three Knowledge Domains. The Pathways listed here are intended only as suggestions. Pathway categories be periodically reviewed with student input.
**STRENGTHS** | **CHALLENGES**
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S1. Added flexibility by reducing Gen Ed credit hours | C1. Credit reduction may weaken core learning
S2. Explicitly emphasizes 6 SLOs | C2. A student may complete studies without taking a course in all the traditional distributional areas
S3. Offers a general education minor | C3. A Minor may decrease content exposure
S4. Creates signature courses on research | |
S5. Encourages writing within specific domains of knowledge | |

The Pathways model is an integrated general education and major studies program that offers students a holistic educational experience by connecting courses to: (1) general domains of knowledge that provide content exposure in cross-disciplinary interrelationships; (2) six of the eight Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs); and (3) pathways (subjects) that integrate the curriculum.

This model requires incoming first-year students to complete eleven general education courses totaling 33-35 semester hours.

1. **General Education Mission Statement**

The General Education program at Northern Illinois University provides a set of core skills and intellectual foundations that transcend and complements learning in particular academic emphases. Disciplined study in diverse fields of knowledge promotes life-long learning and empowers students to make intellectually informed, ethical decisions as responsible citizens.

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

The Student Learning Outcomes for the Pathways model flow from the recognition that certain essential intellectual and practical skills rest at the foundation of a high-quality General Education program and subsequent Baccalaureate studies. Student will experience six of eight SLOs in the context of three different Domains of Knowledge. The SLOs covered are:

2.1. Communicating clearly and effectively (SLO #5);
2.2. Demonstrating critical, creative, and independent thought (SLO #4);
2.3. Using and combining appropriate quantitative and qualitative reasoning skills to address questions and solve problems (SLO #7);
2.4. Integrating knowledge of global interconnections and interdependencies (SLO #1);
2.5. Exhibiting intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives (SLO #2);
2.6. Analyzing issues that interconnect human life and the natural world (SLO #3);

3. **Enhanced Writing**

This program emphasizes enhanced writing by requiring three intensive communication courses that explicitly focus upon SLO #5; communicating clearly and effectively. A communication course is taken in
each of the three domains of knowledge encouraging students to enhance their communication skills in that particular domain.

4. General Education Content Exposure

The Pathways model employs three domains of knowledge and a set of Pathways to guarantee content exposure.

4.1. Domains of Knowledge – 33-35 credit hours.
   4.1.1. Aesthetics – 9 hours. Critical study of art, literature, religion, and philosophy;
   4.1.3. Society & Culture – 9 hours. Critical study of individuals, groups, societies, and states.

These three domains assure proper content exposure across the traditional disciplinary boundaries.

4.1.4. Skill-Learning – A minimum of 9 credit hours are required in each of the three domains.
   Each set of three courses include: (1) an intensive Communication course that emphasizes oral and written communication skills particular to that domain; and (2) two inquiry/reasoning courses that emphasize analytical and empirical inquiry or qualitative and quantitative reasoning.

4.1.5. Domains Electives – Two additional qualifying domains courses (6 hours) area also required. These may be taken from any domain, and allow flexibility for students changing majors and students transferring in with various electives. Colleges or programs may recommend certain courses for their students.

4.1.6. PLUS Courses – The Inquiry requirement consists of a set of new signature PLUS Courses that focus upon the process of research and investigation. The PLUS courses take advantage of NIU’ strength as a research institution and help infuse investigation and discovery into the curriculum. In branding the general education curriculum in this way, the PLUS Courses will help to define what is unique about learning at NIU.

A PLUS Course will challenge students with the excitement of learning by applying diverse intellectual traditions to today’s big issues and inspire them to reflectively engage in discourse about contemporary problems and to consider innovative ideas. These courses will be designated as 200-300 level courses and make up approximately 20% of the general education curriculum, serving as “gateway” upper-division courses.

4.2. Pathways – Pathways are thematic subject areas that integrate the curriculum by including courses from all three Knowledge Domains. Students may take courses from one or more Pathways. The number of available Pathways should be between eight and twelve. The Pathway categories will be periodically reviewed with student input.
4.3. Optional PLUS General Education Minor – In order to enhance the relevancy of General Education program at NIU for both native students and those that transfer in with some course credits from either a two- or four-year institution, students are able to earn an integrated minor by completing 18 credit hours in any single Pathway. A Pathway minor degree represents an additional emphasis of study that consists of an integrated and interdisciplinary set of courses revolving around a single subject.

5. Curricular Flexibility

The Pathways program is flexible by way of:

5.1. A reduced credit hour requirement
5.2. Three broadly defined domains of knowledge
5.3. Two-course electives
5.4. Inter-domain Pathways

Groups disciplines into three domains of knowledge encourages greater course inclusion into the general education program. In addition, the two-course elective option gives students, particularly those who transfer in with some general education courses completed, greater flexibility to complete their general education requirements.

The Pathways 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 direct students toward preferred PLUS Courses that are aligned with the major. Students may also have the flexibility to choose PLUS Courses 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 33-35 credit hours would make this program particularly appealing to incoming first-year students and transfer students who have not completed their Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) General Education Compact.

The Pathways program offers a unique way for students to add relevancy to their studies. Those students who wish to complement their major studies with another emphasis, or those who have entered without deciding yet upon a major studies program, may follow a trajectory that is appealing to them from the get-go.

The new PLUS Courses offer an added attractive feature to fulfill general education requirements by engaging students directly with real-world problems from research faculty who are addressing these problems. A PLUS course will take students inside a new field of study, where they may glimpse the practicality and elegance of a discipline that may have been previously been viewed as unknown or not interesting.
The optional integrated minor offers an attractive “value-added” option to credentialize a component of student’s Baccalaureate and general education studies that might otherwise seem less relevant than a major degree program. This minor represents a “no-cost” enhancement for the institution.

7. Infrastructural Costs

7.1. Implementation costs for creation of the Pathway course curriculum;
7.2. Faculty incentives for transforming or designing new Signature PLUS courses;
7.3. Cost for the re-articulation process of IAI community college courses to an SLO-based articulation system from the existing system of content-based articulation;
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.

8. References

8.1. The Chico State pathways program: http://www.csuchico.edu/ge/pathways/
8.2. A review of the Chico State program:
8.3. The CUNY pathways program: http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/gened/pathways.cfm
8.5. Campaign to repeal CUNY pathways program: http://www.psc-cuny.org/pathways