Baylor University’s General Education Outcomes:

What They are and Why They Matter
By Wes Null

Every university is responsible for providing students with a common body of knowledge. This core knowledge—which is rooted in essential texts, skills, and ideals—builds community, opens students’ minds to new possibilities, and provides young people with access to political and cultural influence. This core knowledge also unifies institutions and serves as the basis for communication, common understanding, and shared experiences. Educational institutions have the responsibility to hand down this core knowledge from one generation to the next. This common knowledge has been preserved within the traditional disciplines that comprise the social sciences, the physical sciences, and the humanities.

Every student at Baylor takes coursework in these three areas. Students who complete this type of curriculum should be different—in noticeable and tangible ways—from those who do not. Our job at Baylor is to provide you, our students, with the framework necessary to acquire the essential knowledge, skills, and capacities that will help you to become a liberally educated person. Toward this end, Baylor has identified four learning outcomes that are common for every student regardless of degree, major, or program. Sometimes referred to as the “Four Cs,” these outcomes are: 1) communication, 2) critical reasoning, 3) civic leadership, and 4) Christian perspective. All undergraduate majors and degrees are tied together with these four outcomes. They grow directly out of Baylor’s mission “to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.” The first three outcomes are quite common within any college or university, but the fourth—Christian perspective—is what sets Baylor apart and enables us to achieve our mission. I want to touch briefly on each of these outcomes before concluding with a few thoughts on why they matter and what makes Baylor unique.

Communication:

Communication is essential regardless of your future profession. When we list communication as our first general education outcome, we mean not only speaking and listening, but also writing, persuading, and knowing how to adapt communication to a specific audience. Your success in life is greatly influenced by your ability speak and write persuasively. All students at Baylor are required to complete courses in writing and speaking, and we expect you to use these courses to strengthen your ability to communicate with elegance and power.
Critical Reasoning:

Critical reasoning, the second general education outcome, is every bit as significant as communication. By “critical reasoning,” we mean the ability to calculate accurately, evaluate evidence for truth and validity, justify conclusions with data, and reason through problems to arrive at solutions that are rooted in fact and truth. Baylor’s science and mathematics requirements are of course designed to strengthen your ability to calculate, reason, and think critically. Many other courses, however, also nurture your ability to reason in both theoretic and practical ways. As significant as it is, the ability to reason must also be viewed within the context of community. At Baylor, we want students to learn to reason not just for themselves, but for the communities they serve. This point demonstrates the significance of the third general education outcome, civic leadership.

Civic Leadership:

Baylor graduates should become civic leaders in whatever field they enter. Civic leaders are the kind of people who can build consensus among diverse populations and then lead communities toward the ideals they uphold. Whether the profession is medicine, engineering, business, law, or teaching, communities need professionals who can provide civic leadership by placing the needs of communities above their own. The ideal of civic leadership is woven throughout Baylor’s curriculum, but it is particularly evident within social science and humanities courses. For example, every Baylor student completes a course on American Constitutional Development. This course will introduce you to the history and philosophy of America’s unique form of government. Baylor students are taught that they are acquiring knowledge not just for themselves, but also for the broader goal of building communities that flourish.

Christian Perspective:

Last but certainly not least, the fourth general education outcome at Baylor is Christian perspective. All Baylor students complete two religion courses and chapel. These requirements make Baylor unique. Chapel and required religion courses have been part of Baylor’s curriculum since the University’s founding more than one hundred sixty-five years ago. Baylor’s mission extends beyond civic leadership to shape students toward Christian discipleship. Courses in Christian heritage and scripture provide students with the knowledge necessary to understand the Christian narrative, reflect on how this narrative has shaped human history, and consider how Christ’s message relates to each of us personally. These core requirements offer students the opportunity to grow in their faith and reflect on God’s calling for their lives.

These four general education outcomes—communication, critical reasoning, civic leadership, and Christian perspective—connect you with the core knowledge that ultimately translates into moral, intellectual, and social power. All of the courses you take aim collectively at this end—even the ones that you take in your first year. So, remember you are not just checking off degree requirements in order to “get the general requirements
out of the way.” They cannot be achieved without good teachers, nor can they be realized without sustained effort on the part of students. You are entering into a partnership, and each of us has a role to play within the educational process. Your teachers are the ones passing down this knowledge to you now, but your turn will come soon enough. Do not miss this opportunity to realize the ideals embedded within Baylor’s general education outcomes. You should do so not just for yourself, but for the next generation as well.

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