General Education Requirements
For students who began at USC or elsewhere before Fall 2015

Part One: Foundations: 3 courses

Courses in these categories help students locate themselves culturally, historically, and intellectually in an increasingly complex world. The foundation categories are intended to give students a broad conceptual base for their further studies and their roles as informed citizens in the world of the future, training them to think critically and analytically about ideas and events, sharpening their ability to assess arguments and information, and engaging them with the principles of scientific inquiry and primary works of culture and civilization.

Category I. Western Cultures and Traditions

Courses in this category introduce students to an area of academic inquiry traditionally perceived to be central to general education. They stress concepts, values, and events in Western history that have shaped contemporary American and European civilization. Courses are distinguished by their historical sweep, which allows students to become aware of the continuing legacies of the past in contemporary culture. Students learn to situate contemporary society in a broad historical context and to think critically about the past and its relationship to the present, while becoming acquainted with the most significant analytic methods by which we attempt to understand the meaning of history. Comparative insights may also be offered with the non-Western cultural traditions studied in Category II.

Category II. Global Cultures and Traditions

Courses in this category introduce students to cultures and civilizations associated with Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Native America, and Russia. Each course examines the distinctive qualities of the cultures studied and seeks to engage and explain those characteristics on their own terms. Students learn to understand the impact of historical development on cultures that interact in the contemporary geopolitical scene and to articulate the role that cultural differences play in those interactions. As a result, they are better prepared to participate actively in an increasingly global cultural and political landscape. Courses in this category are distinguished by their breadth of perspective over a substantial period of time. Comparative insights may also be offered between these cultures and those studied in Category I.

Category III. Scientific Inquiry

In this category, students learn about the process and methods of scientific inquiry, examining the fundamental principles underlying a body of scientific knowledge and how those principles were developed. Students learn to evaluate the soundness of scientific arguments and appreciate how current ideas might change in response to new data. Students engage in scientific inquiry through field experiences or a practical component. A section of laboratory or field experience is required. As a result, all students should acquire substantive knowledge in science and technology; understand the processes by which scientists investigate and answer scientific questions; and be able to articulate the basic principles used to explain natural phenomena.
Part Two: Case Studies: 3 courses

In these categories students learn to think critically through a focused inquiry into a particular area of knowledge. Analytical techniques and methodologies are demonstrated to illuminate specific topics in the natural and social sciences, the arts and humanities.

Category IV. Science and Its Significance

In this category, students learn why science is important in people's lives. Through a concentrated study of a single area of research or small set of related areas, students learn to articulate the relationships among observed phenomena, the scientific principles those observations inform, their technological applications, and their societal implications. Scientific inquiry is understood in the context of its historical setting, philosophical assumptions, as well as its material consequences. A section of laboratory, field experience, and/or discussion and writing is required.

As a result, all students should be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems and issues, including personal and societal needs; to discriminate unsound from well-supported scientific claims about those issues; and to talk about science cogently in articulating scientific concepts and their significance for other areas of their lives.

Category V. Arts and Letters

In this category students develop their skills for critical analysis through intense engagement with works of literature, philosophy, visual arts, music, and film. The works studied may be associated with a particular country, time period, genre, or theme. Students will learn to use techniques of literary and artistic analysis. At the same time they will become familiar with disciplinary and interdisciplinary methods of argument and persuasion. Because intensive reading and writing is demanded in these courses, they will generally be capped at 30 students.

Category VI. Social Issues

Courses in this category prepare students for informed citizenship by teaching them to analyze compelling local, national and/or international issues or problems. Analytical tools are examined systematically so that students may fruitfully apply them to understand a broad range of social and political phenomena. Students learn to assess the validity of arguments and discern the connections between data cited and conclusions drawn.

Students completing this category develop the basic critical skills needed to evaluate and use the vast amount of information concerning social issues now available via the internet, media, and traditional scholarship. They acquire the concepts and confidence necessary to discuss contemporary social issues in an informed manner and develop a passion for learning that will allow them to engage complex questions about human beings and society.

For more information visit www.usc.edu/ge and www.usc.edu/gecg for the GE Course Guide.