Overview of UM's General Education Requirements, 1979 to the Present

There has always been the Six Year Catalog Rule, a 2.0 CGPA required for graduation, and the Residency Requirement stating that of the last 45 credits, 30 must be “in residence” at UM. Students may meet General Education, Major and Minor requirements under different catalogs.

Prior to Autumn 1979: There were no General Education requirements! There were three academic quarters, Autumn, Winter and Spring. Major departments generally required English composition within their requirements; other cognate course requirements varied by departments.

Autumn 1979: The 12-12-12 General Education Requirement (GER) quarter system was instituted. Catalog 1979-80. There were 36 credits required across three areas: Humanities (h), Behavioral and Social Sciences (b), and Natural Sciences (s); transfer courses brought in for General Education were coded with capital letters: H, B and S. Courses in a student’s major were not allowed to satisfy Gen Eds. Courses taken for pass/no pass (P) and courses taken for traditional letter grades, including “D”, counted toward General Education (and the major). A total of 195 quarter credits was required for a degree.

Autumn 1984: A New Quarter General Education system with “competencies” and “distributonal” requirements. Catalog 1984-85. Competencies were in Writing (a composition course or exemption by exam, and three writing courses with one at the upper division), Mathematics and either one year of a foreign language (or completion of the third quarter) or completion of a Symbolic System (depending upon the major). Distribuational requirements included two or three courses across A, L, H, S, E and N and both a Western and a Non-Western course were required within the distributed courses. Students completed: Plan A included all requirements for students with 40 or fewer transfer credits; Plan B included students transferring in 41-90 credits having reduced requirements; Plan C included students transferring in over 90 credits having greatly reduced requirements; Plan D included no General Education requirements for students already having earned a degree.

Note: Students enrolled before Autumn 1984 could choose 12-12-12 or the New Quarter general education systems. Students transferring into UM for the first time between Autumn 1984 and Autumn 1985 were also allowed to choose general education systems, but students transferring in starting Autumn 1985 were required to complete the New Quarter system with the above reductions based upon total number of transfer credits.

Autumn 1990 through Spring/Summer 1992: Quarter-to-Semester Transition, with students’ general education requirements reduced based upon credit levels, sort of similar to the requirement breaks we offered transfer students with a certain number of earned credits.

- First rule: Do no harm to students. Catalog language stated “Students in attendance under both quarters and semesters will not lose credit for quarter courses in the conversion to semesters.”
- Quarter “sequence” courses, for the purposes of transition, allowed two of three courses to count toward the sequence, i.e., French 102 completed the Foreign Language sequence.
- Only the TOTAL quarter credits was converted to a semester credit equivalent; quarter credits X .667 = semester credits. Conversely, semester credits X 1.5 = quarter credits.
Toward every other purpose, quarter credits act as semester credits without conversion. For example, a 5 quarter credit Natural Science course count as 5 semester credits under conversion; quarter courses applied to the Upper Division Credit Requirement instituted in Catalog 1994-95 count equivalently as semester credits.

Autumn 1992: Semester General Education Requirements, similar to earlier quarter system, but with fewer courses required. Catalog 1992-93. The Mathematics and Foreign Language/Symbolic System requirements remained in place; for Writing Competency, composition still required but there was a reduction from three to two writing courses, one at the upper division. There were 32 credits required across the six perspectives. The Non-western course requirement remained but the Western course requirement was eliminated. There was still a break for transfer students bringing in over 27.1 – 60 and for over 60 transfer credits. An overall total of 130 semester credits was required for a degree.


Autumn 1997: Minimum number of TOTAL credits for the bachelor’s degree reduced from 130 to 120 semester credits and General Education “distributional” credits reduced from 32 across the six perspectives to 29. Catalog 1997-98.


Autumn 2000: General Education “distributional” credits reduced from 29 credits across the six perspectives to 27. For transfer students, no more reduced General Education requirements except for exemption from the Approved Writing Course if over 27 credits transfer in. Catalog 2000-2001.

Autumn 2004: General Education courses must be taken for a traditional letter grade, and D grades count. Catalog 2004-05.

Autumn 2005: Only UM and transfer courses graded C- and above* count for General Education and Major Requirements. Catalog 2005-06. *except English composition courses and courses meeting the Mathematics competency must be graded C, 2.00, or higher

Autumn 2009: Updated General Education, in which “Competencies” and “Distributional” requirements become “Groups.” Catalog 2009-10. Distinctive features include: all UM and transfer courses graded C- or above in all Groups count toward the Major and General Education, including English composition and mathematics; there are two writing course lists, one for the Approved Writing Course and the other for the Upper Division Writing Course; the mathematics course (M 115) is de-coupled from the symbolic statistics course; an American & European (AKA Western) course is added back into General Education requirements; three credits are required in each Group numbered IV – X and six credits required in XI but double dipping is allowed across the Groups.

Autumn 2013: The Writing Proficiency Assessment removed as part of the Writing Requirement in General Education. Catalog 2013-14.

Hoell, CHS: 2/2015