

Considerations for CLAS Skill Area Course Reviews

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Background: We served as a special subcommittee of the CLAS C&C during the Spring of 2025 tasked with aligning courses to the college's three new Skill Areas: Communication and Dialogue; Information, Digital, and Media Literacy; and Leadership and Ethics. We aligned 91 courses to the Skill Areas through this process, and chose to take no action on an additional 34 courses where we could not reach a consensus on the course's suitability to the desired Skill Area. To assist those courses in potentially re-applying in the future, and to assist the entire CLAS C&C in evaluating Skill Area alignments during regular business, we have drafted this list of considerations for Skill Area course reviews. We strongly encourage the CLAS C&C to utilize these review considerations alongside the existing Guiding Principles for CLAS Skill Area Courses, which we append to the end of this document.

1. **The Skill Areas were created to help students develop *their* skills in these given domains. Coursework should not just feature related *content*, but also empower students to apply what they learn from engaging with this content to other content and contexts.** The original document explains that "The oversight of courses being reviewed for inclusion in the skill areas should prioritize clarity and efficiency *while upholding the spirit of the requirements.*" We must underscore that the spirit of the requirements was to ensure that CLAS students emerge as (1) strong communicators, (2) competent consumers, evaluators, and creators of information and media, and (3) capable leaders and problem-solvers who can engage their work and communities ethically. Skill Area Courses, then, should be able to clearly articulate – whether on theoretical or applied grounds – how successfully completing this course prepares students to achieve one of those three goals.
 - a. Within the *Communication and Dialogue* category, we note that every university course possesses some degree of communication between instructors and students, but this doesn't inherently position every course to focus on improving students' capacity for effective communication, nor for engaging in meaningful and productive dialogue. In a similar vein, the acts of analyzing a text written by another, or reviewing the dialogue between two characters within a narrative, do not inherently meet the spirit and intent of the category. Courses of this nature should go beyond reviewing singular texts or acts of interaction to think about the complexities of discourse in one or more given contexts, how those discourses manifest in students' lives, and what they can do to improve their skillful navigation of – and participation in - such discourses.
 - b. In our initial review cycle, we noted that some justifications for courses seeking alignment to *IDML* could apply to *any* course where some form of media content is reviewed or used to deliver information – in these cases, we found it hard to reach agreement if we could simply replace "Media Content X" with any other content from *any* other mediated domain in the justification. We sought courses that were *about the processes and/or effects of media* (broadly construed) rather than courses taught *with media*, because the former helped prepare students to deal with the near-infinite

iterations of content and information they will encounter and need to address in their lives.

- c. Within *Leadership and Ethics*, we expected to see a clear dimension of the course dealing with ethical behavior and ethical action within the navigation of social, civic, or professional challenges. Going back to the creation of the Skill Areas, many have noted that the word leadership can be a slippery slope, but our interpretation, in the spirit of a CLAS education, was that the courses included prepare students to make decisions collaboratively, productively, and ethically. As such, courses that merely (1) contained a group project or (2) reviewed historical or literary themes of others making decisions did not suffice our standard for the category. Likewise, a single unit adjacent to leadership or ethics did not instill confidence in us that a course embodied the skill area.
2. **The Skill Area in alignment should be central to the course.** We reviewed some courses where one of the key phrases in the title of the Skill Area was addressed in a single lesson or module; we did not feel comfortable aligning these courses. We have a vast array of courses in CLAS, and many across several disciplines that meet these Skill Areas – we think it should be clear in reviewing the syllabus for a course that the Skill Area in question is **central** to the content, methods, and instruction of the course. Played out over many years, we fear that failing to uphold this standard would lead to the dilution of the Skill Areas. We encourage units to align courses where the fit is clear and the course embodies the Skill Area, as opposed to tangentially touching upon it.
3. **The match between the Course and the Skill Area should be evident in the course catalog.** Going forward, all course alignments to the Skill Areas will be processed by revising courses; we see this as an opportunity to ensure that students can clearly see *how* a course meets the Skill Area with which it is aligned. Whether through the catalog copy or, in the future, the published course learning outcomes, clear documentation of the fit between the course and the category will help the C&C vet the course alignment and help ensure that all iterations of the course meet the criteria for the Skill Area.
 - a. Relatedly, we reviewed some courses where it was clear that a specific instructor was teaching the course in a manner that would meet the Skill Area, but nothing about the title or catalog copy would explain this to be case, and it was quite conceivable that another instructor's section may not merit alignment with the Skill Area. We see this consideration as a way to minimize the possibility that this occurs.

Finally, as we return oversight of the Skill Areas to the full C&C for AY 25-26 and beyond, we stress that our considerations emerge from our experiences in aligning courses at a rapid pace. Other considerations may undoubtedly emerge during the committee-wide process, and we encourage discussion and deliberation as this occurs. Most of all, we think it important to build out the Skill Areas carefully, to ensure that the courses within match the intent of the proposal that the full committee passed in September of 2024.

Guiding Principles for CLAS Skill Areas

This document was prepared by the 2023-24 CLAS C&C General Education Subcommittee: Ariana Codr, Elena Comay del Junco, Frank Griggs, Michael Hren, Matthew McKenzie, Mansour Ndiaye (CLAS, non-voting), Anne Oeldorf Hirsch, Fatma Selampinar, Stephen Stifano (Chair), and Evelyn Tribble (CLAS, non-voting). Small elements of the document were edited on 10/7/24 by the Chair to ensure consistency with the “Simplified Proposal” for college requirements as approved by CLAS C&C on 9/17/24. Further refining of language was conducted at the 10/15/24 meeting of the CLAS C&C and over email.

Communication and Dialogue

Courses that satisfy the requirement in *Communication and Dialogue* explore the processes of human interaction to enhance students’ understanding and ability. Through these courses, students will accomplish two or more of the following objectives:

- Utilize theories, principles, and concepts rooted in human interaction to analyze the ways in which individuals communicate through verbal and nonverbal behaviors.
- Create messages appropriate to audience, purpose, context, and modality.
- Interpret the messages of others across dimensions of audience, purpose, context, and modality.
- Develop strategies for positively influencing discourse in interpersonal, civic, and/or professional contexts.

Note: These guidelines differ from the University’s Writing Competency Guidelines. A writing-intensive course does not inherently meet the objectives or spirit of the CLAS Communication and Dialogue requirement.

Information, Digital, and Media Literacy (IDML)

Courses in *Information, Digital, and Media Literacy* educate students in the rhetorical and intercultural dimensions of media, both as consumers and creators. Through these courses, students will develop the skills to accomplish two or more of the following objectives:

- Identify relevant information across various digital or analog platforms and media channels to inform one’s understanding of a given topic, event, or issue.
- Analyze information and/or media for purpose, message, accuracy, bias, and intended audience and goal.
- Evaluate design elements of various kinds of digital or analog products and media productions to observe how messages are constructed for a specific purpose.
- Articulate how the information ecosystems function in the course’s discipline and how these patterns influence scholarship and/or practice in the discipline.

Leadership and Ethics

Courses in *Leadership and Ethics* examine the intricacies of ethics, decision-making, and leadership from philosophical, institutional, and organizational perspectives. Through these courses, students enhance their problem-solving skills, practice ethical thinking, and enhance their ability to entertain different perspectives. Through these courses, students will develop the skills to accomplish two or more of the following objectives:

- Utilize sound, inclusive reasoning and judgment to evaluate issues and make actionable decisions.
- Address practical ethical issues that impact individuals, communities, and organizations.
- Work alongside others to propose solutions to complex problems.
- Approach problems and challenges in a manner that promotes collaboration and inspires others.

Management of the Skill Areas: *The oversight of courses being reviewed for inclusion in the skill areas should prioritize clarity and efficiency while upholding the spirit of the requirements. All CLAS units are welcome to put forth courses for alignment with all areas, provided the courses can genuinely meet the criteria outlined for each skill area. The CLAS C&C should invite collaboration between units in the development of coursework meeting these requirements and promote dialogue about how existing courses can meet the criteria of the skill areas.*