Making the GURs More Coherent

After more than a decade of dissatisfaction among students and faculty alike, and after many surveys and task force reports, ACC formally charged CUE with constructing a clear purpose for the GURs with an accompanying visual representation that could explain how the GURs fit into a liberal arts and sciences education and help faculty teaching the GURs explain their importance to students. In addition, ACC recommended a reduction in the current eleven competencies that appear on course proposal and revision forms. CUE has acted on this request and this document provides information for faculty.

Purpose of the GURs

The GURs, the core of a liberal arts and sciences education, provide students with foundational knowledge and opportunities to develop, integrate, and extend their core capacities in a range of literacies.

## The Reduction of 11 Competencies into 6 Literacies Clusters

The current eleven GUR competencies focus exclusively on skills and practices. However, the GURS are also intended to provide a broad knowledge base. The term, *literacy* by definition, includes both knowledge and ways of knowing and practice and ways of doing which makes *literacies* an ideal choice for describing the purpose of Western's GUR program.

The six knowledge and practice literacies clusters described below are not distinct or rigid categories with firm boundaries. They are interconnected parts of a whole. By grouping broad disciplinary areas or interests into one of three multi-dimensional knowledge literacies clusters, we work against the common misconception that the GURs are simply a distribution list of separate items that students need to complete and check off.

We would like to communicate the message that students can use the literacy practices that they are acquiring to forge their own connections and linkages within and between these domains. We would hope that students come to see the GURs as clusters of ideas, methodologies, and practices that can help them continue to build understandings of themselves and their worlds throughout their lives.

An individual GUR course does not have to address all the literacies in the cluster title. For example, a course in the Social, Cultural, & Historical Literacies cluster might focus more on cultural literacies or social literacies. Some courses might have a historical component, and others might not. A course in the Quantitative, Scientific, & Technological Literacies cluster, may focus on quantitative literacies, scientific literacies, or some combination of these literacies. An Environmental Studies GIS course might focus on science and technology, for instance. The accompanying set of slides depicts how Western's current 6 GUR categories fit with these literacies clusters.
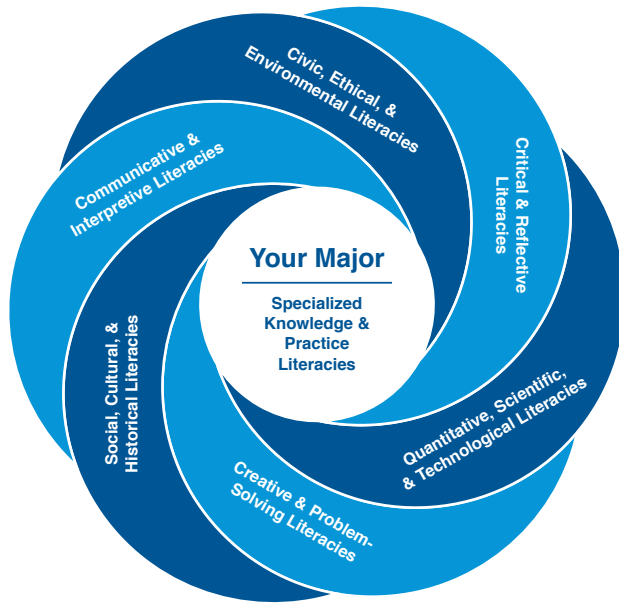
Core Knowledge Literacies Clusters

Courses in the 3 knowledge clusters include courses from multiple disciplines that develop and extend content knowledge in three broad areas:

• Social, Cultural & Historical Literacies

Typically, courses from the HUM and SSC GURs. This cluster also includes many ACGM and BCGM courses (or soon to be DEJ courses).

Courses in this cluster focus on the foundational knowledge and aesthetic, theoretical, and methodological approaches for studying the diversity of human experience.

• Civic, Ethical, & Environmental Literacies

Typically, courses from SSC, SCI, as well as some HUM GURs. This cluster also includes many ACGM and BCGM courses (or soon to be DEJ courses).

Courses in this cluster focus on knowledge of humans, their value systems, their organizations and contexts, and/or their place in the natural environment.

• Quantitative, Scientific, & Technological Literacies

Typically, courses from the QSR, SCI, and SSC GURs.

Courses in this cluster focus on quantitative and symbolic reasoning and theoretical, methodological, experimental, and technological approaches for studying the physical and biological world.

Core Practices Literacies Clusters

Together, all GUR courses work to develop and extend students' core capacities in a range of practices. The amount of time different courses spend on helping students acquire different literacy practices will vary, and some GUR courses will focus more deliberately on specific literacy practices than others. For example, many COM courses focus explicitly on helping students learn and acquire different kinds of communicative and interpretive practices. Com courses are also likely to focus on one or more of the other practices clusters.

• Communicative & Interpretive Literacies

These literacy practices focus on reading, interpreting, and communicating information through oral, print, & digital media and genres for audiences, both specialized and general.

• Creative & Problem-Solving Literacies

These literacy practices focus on methods for solving complex problems, generating and designing innovative ideas, and creating aesthetically engaging works.

• Critical & Reflective Literacies

These literacy practices include evaluating and contextualizing sources and information, applying various theoretical frameworks to examine and/or evaluate texts, knowledge, and truth claims, and identifying and examining one's own (and other's) assumptions, values, and beliefs.

How will this impact you?

These changes should not affect the way that faculty teach their courses. Most faculty already include statements about the purpose of the GURs and indicate the competencies their course addresses. The shift to knowledge and practice literacies simply asks faculty to include the GUR visual with the appropriate clusters highlighted and a brief explanation of how the course speaks to these clusters.

When proposing new or revised GUE courses, faculty will now designate knowledge and practice literacies rather than competencies beginning in 2020–2021.

Proposing new and revised GUR courses in Curriculog (starting in 2020–2021).

• Faculty indicate one of the three knowledge literacy clusters the proposed course fulfills.

• Faculty indicate one to three practice literacy clusters the proposed course addresses and explain how these practice literacies will be evaluated.

• Some Com courses such as English 101, for example, may only focus on practice literacies.

Communicating the purpose of the GURs to students

• Include a reminder of the purpose of the GURs and a statement about how your course contributes to this purpose on your syllabus.

• Include the visual PPT image of the GUR literacies clusters with the appropriate knowledge and practice literacy sections shaded on your syllabus. By including the rosette of literacies, we remind students that GUR courses are part of an integrated cluster of knowledge and practices, not isolated disciplinary silos. We also show their relationship to the major.

**Here are some examples of ways that the image might be color-coded:**
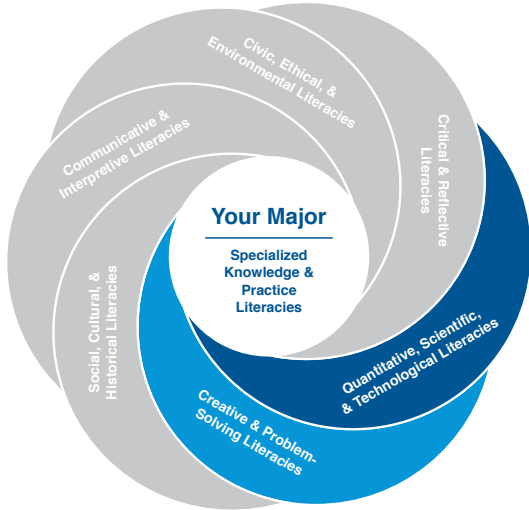
A GUR course in the quantitative, scientific, & technological knowledge literacies cluster with a focus on one practices cluster: Creative and Problem-Solving Literacies.
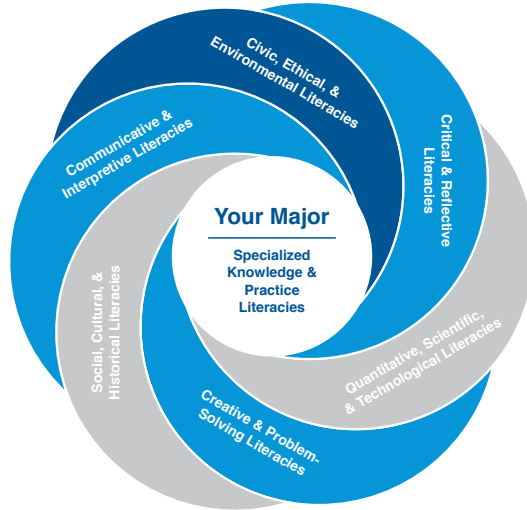
A GUR course in the Civic, Ethical and Environmental knowledge literacies cluster with a focus on three practices clusters: Critical & Reflective, Communicative & Interpretive Literacies, and Creative & Problem-Solving.
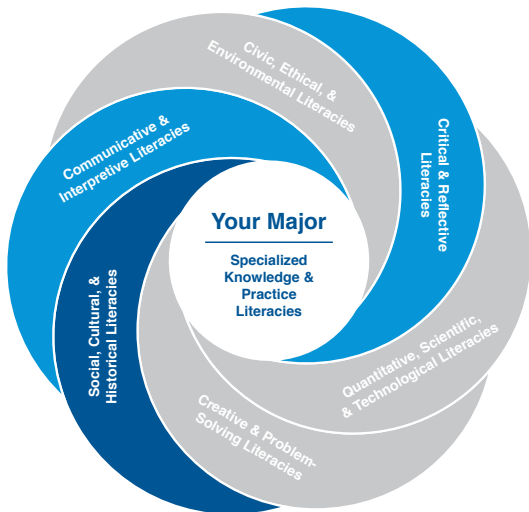
A GUR course in the Social, Cultural, & Historical knowledge literacies cluster with a focus on two practices clusters: Critical & Reflective and Communicative & Interpretive Literacies.
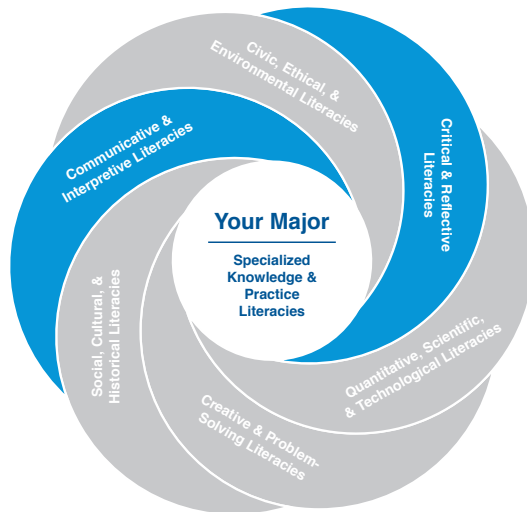
A GUR COM course with a focus on two practices clusters: Communicative & Interpretive and Critical & Reflective Literacies.