



PA State System of Higher Education Board of Governors

Effective: January 21, 1993

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Policy 1993-01-A: *General Education at State System of Higher Education Universities*

Adopted: January 21, 1993

Amended: October 6, 2016, October 14, 2021,
July 20, 2023, and July 11, 2024

A. Purpose

1. To affirm the significance and value of General Education and to strengthen its assessment through measurable outcomes;
2. To establish a common General Education framework that will support all students in acquiring breadth of essential knowledge and skills that reflect and prepare them to live and work in a diverse and interdependent world;
3. To align General Education in the State System with the Board Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement of Affirmation;
4. To align the Board of Governors policy with institutional accreditation standards related to General Education and assessment of General Education learning outcomes.

B. Definitions

1. **Directed General Education (Prescribed General Education):** General Education courses that are required for the major are considered "directed general education" or "prescribed general education." Therefore, directed (prescribed) General Education courses are counted in the General Education requirements/credits, not in the major or cognate requirements.
2. **General Education:** a coherent set of requirements in the liberal arts and sciences that is shared by all students at a university.
3. **Education in the Liberal Arts and Sciences:** a component of Liberal Education, "an approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity and change. This approach emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in depth achievement in a specific field of interest. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility; strong intellectual and

practical skills that span all major fields of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills; and the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real world settings” (AAC&U LEAP).

4. **Pa Public School Code, 24 Section 20-2002-C:** refers to legislation that directs Pennsylvania public institutions of higher education to accept for transfer foundation courses and accept with full junior standing the Associate of Arts or the Associate of Science degree into parallel baccalaureate programs.
5. **P2P:** refers to the legislative Pennsylvania statewide program to program articulation agreements that provide clear transfer pathways into a State System university for community college students who have selected a transferable major program. Universities may designate additional programs as precursor or parallel programs by reason of articulation agreement or similarity in disciplinary content or student outcomes, as indicated by 4-digit CIP code.
6. **Pa. Statewide Transfer Credit Framework:** refers to the 30 credit hours of foundational liberal arts and sciences in 6 categories of study which was developed to implement the legislation (Pa Public School Code, 24 Section 20-2002-C) related to transfer among public institutions of higher education.
7. **Prior Learning:** refers to student learning that occurred prior to enrollment at a State System university. Prior learning includes credits earned elsewhere as well as the assessment of skills, knowledge, and competencies acquired outside the classroom against a set of standards or learning outcomes. Prior learning may include documented learning such as (but not limited to) Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, DANTES, CLEP, military experience, and credit by exam.

C. Policy

1. Overview
General Education is aligned with a liberal arts and sciences foundation for learning and it is the part of a university undergraduate curriculum that is shared by all students. It ensures that students acquire breadth of knowledge and provides a basis for developing essential learning outcomes that allow students to pursue lifelong achievement. General Education student learning outcomes consist in the acquisition of foundational knowledge, transferable skills, habits of mind, capacity for creativity and innovation, and understanding of and empathy for self and others that are the foundation for informed participation in a democratic society and a lifetime of careers.
2. Compliance with Middle States Commission on Higher Education and University responsibilities

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) provides the common ground for General Education and its assessment for all State System universities. State System of Higher Education universities will meet the Middle States Requirements and Standards that relate to General Education, which include (from Standard III, 2023):
 - a. a General Education curriculum of sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global

awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgements outside as well as within their academic field;

- b. a General Education curriculum designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills including at least: oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy;
- c. General Education programs also include the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives.

State System universities may identify additional areas of General Education learning, consistent with their mission and in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

State System universities' General Education programs will have clearly stated General Education learning outcomes that are aligned with the provisions of this policy and assessed in accordance with Middle States standards, which stipulate implementing and documenting; organized and systematic assessments conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals that (from Standard V, 2023):

- d. define meaningful curricular goals with defensible standards for evaluating whether students are achieving those goals;
- e. articulate how they prepare students in a manner consistent with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives and where appropriate, further education. They should collect and provide data on the extent to which they are meeting these goals;
- f. support and sustain assessment of student achievement and communicate the results of this assessment to stakeholders and will use assessment results for improvement of educational effectiveness.

3. General Education Requirements

Every student who graduates from an undergraduate degree program will satisfy the General Education requirements through learning experiences at the university, course- based transfer, core to core transfer, prior learning, and/or demonstration of competency. General Education requirements at State System universities will be consistent with the requirements of the statewide Transfer Credit Framework.

Baccalaureate degrees: Policy 1990-06A: *Academic Degrees* requires a minimum of 40 General Education credits for a baccalaureate degree; the maximum shall not exceed 48 credits. The credit hours will be focused on competencies that are consistent with liberal arts and sciences learning outcomes.

Professional bachelor's degrees such as the BFA, BM, BSN, BSW, BSEd, and BS in Business Administration identified in policy 1990-06A are permitted to have General Education requirements specifically adapted to the profession but which must be consistent with the General Education competencies for all students.

Associate degrees: Policy 1990-06A: *Academic Degrees* requires a minimum of 30 General Education credits for an Associate of Arts degree, 24 credits of General Education for an Associate of Science, and 21 for an Associate of Applied Science. The General Education requirements should be consistent with requirements of the statewide Transfer Credit Framework. Associate degrees designed for transfer must be aligned with the requirements identified in the parallel P2P articulation agreements.

4. Transfer

Middle States Commission on Higher Education standards (Standard IV) indicates that prior learning applicable to General Education will be recognized either through transfer of course credits or other transcribed equivalents.

The Board of Governors Student Transfer policy requires that State System institutions recognize the integrity, design, and validity of general education at other institutions with the United States Department of Education (Department of Education) recognized accreditation and accept general education coursework when comparable. General Education credits aligned with the PA Statewide Transfer Credit Framework will transfer toward the general education requirements at the receiving institution.

The following apply to students who matriculate at a State System institution after attending another institution(s) of higher education:

- a. Students who transfer to a State System institution from a postsecondary institution with the Department of Education-recognized accreditation with an Associate of Science or an Associate of Arts degree, or having completed general education requirements for a bachelor's degree, or for an Associate of Science or an Associate of Arts degree, shall have satisfied the general education requirements at the receiving university. Exceptions may be made for the following, provided that these exceptions do not extend the student's time to the degree:
 - i. One signature general education course (up to 3 credits), if applicable;
 - ii. Any prescribed general education course required for the major, if not satisfactorily completed;
 - iii. General education overlays satisfied in advanced courses in the major.
- b. Undergraduate students who transfer into the State System of Higher Education from a postsecondary institution with Department of Education-recognized accreditation with an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science degree in a parallel academic program or as part of the P2P Statewide agreements will be awarded full junior standing and shall not be required to satisfactorily complete more than 60 credits to earn a 120credit baccalaureate degree in a P2P or other parallel program, regardless of the courses they took to earn the Associate degree; they will have the same requirements for admission to a particular academic program and for retention as students who began their education at a State System

university. Students transferring into a program with accreditation or licensing/certification standards may be required to take limited additional credits to meet those standards.

- c. Students who transfer into the State System of Higher Education with an Associate degree other than an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science will be expected to satisfy any remaining general education requirements.
- d. Students who matriculate at a State System institution without first earning an Associate of Science or Associate of Arts degree or completing general education requirements for an Associate of Science or Associate of Arts degree will be required to complete any remaining requirements of that institution's general education program. This does not apply to students who engage in "reverse transfer" by transferring their State System institution courses and credits back to a prior institution for the purpose of earning an Associate degree.

5. Prior learning

In addition to transfer credits, students' learning may occur outside the college classroom. Students entering a State System institution who have met General Education student learning outcomes and competencies through mechanisms such as (but not limited to) Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, DANTES, CLEP, military experience, college-level competencies documented in portfolios and assessed against learning outcomes or standards, and credit by exam will have that learning transcribed. All such learning will be indicated through transcription of academic credit or an alternative method to document learning.

C. Effective

This policy will become effective July 2024.