

# R470, General Education<sup>1</sup>

**R470-1 Purpose:** This policy creates guidelines to assure consistency in the structure and essential learning outcomes of general education requirements for undergraduate degree programs and reciprocity in recognition of general education requirements between Utah System of Higher Education (“USHE”) degree-granting institutions.<sup>2</sup>

## R470-2 References

- 2.1 Utah Code § 53H-1-101, Definitions
- 2.2 Utah Code § 53H-3-303, Duties of Degree-granting Presidents
- 2.3 Utah Code § 53H-3-603, Changes in Curriculum
- 2.4 Utah Code § 53H-3-604, Common Course Numbering
- 2.5 Utah Code § 53H-3-605, Granting of Degrees, Diplomas, or Certificates
- 2.6 Board Policy R401, Approval of New Programs, Program Changes, Discontinued Programs, and Program Reports
- 2.7 Board Policy R471, Lower division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits
- 2.8 R470 Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes
- 2.9 Importance of General Education Issue Brief

## R470-3 Definitions

- 3.1 **“Basic Instruction”** means instruction offered by technical colleges in areas such as reading, language arts, and mathematics that is necessary for student success in a chosen technical education or job-related program. Basic instruction does not include college-level general education courses or introductory college-level disciplinary courses but may parallel developmental education offered by degree-granting institutions.
- 3.2 **“Competencies”** mean the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that demonstrate accomplishment of learning objectives within a specific course or program.
- 3.3 **“Essential Learning Outcomes”** means the requisite competencies of a course or program, including intellectual ideas, bodies of knowledge, and academic skillsets and mindsets.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved August 19, 2005. Replaces R463, Credit by Examination; R465, General Education; R467, Lower Division Major Requirements; R471, Transfer of Credit and R472, Course Numbering. Amended March 25, 2011, September 16, 2016, and March 31, 2017. Repealed and replaced December 1, 2023; amended June 6, 2024; and November 21, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Technical edits December 1, 2025.

**3.4 “General Education”** means a required set of shared essential learning outcomes, the foundational subject areas required within the general education program, and the individual courses and disciplines that comprise those subject areas. These include written communications, quantitative literacy or mathematics, American Institutions, humanities, fine arts, social sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences.

#### **R470-4 General Education Guidelines**

**4.1** Undergraduate degrees within USHE should be structured to prepare students for both professional competence in a particular discipline and cross-disciplinary general education to develop critical thinking, analytical and ethical skills, and the broad-based academic knowledge necessary for an adaptable 21st century workforce and an educated citizenry. *See Reference 2.8.* All undergraduate degrees must meet the shared USHE General Education requirements. An institution must seek approval from the Board for an exemption as outlined in *Board Policy R401, Approval of New Programs, Program Changes, Discontinued Programs, and Program Reports.*

**4.2** USHE degree-granting institutions shall construct their general education programs in alignment with their institutional roles as outlined in *Board Policy R312, Institutional Roles and Missions*, and their unique institutional missions and faculty specialties, but institutional general education programs shall have consistent core and breadth requirements, essential learning outcomes, minimum grade requirements, and credit structures and shall be fully transferable across the system. Technical education programs may not provide general education but may offer basic instruction.

**4.3** General education essential learning outcomes are informed by USHE faculty through area work groups and faculty major committees outlined in section 8, disciplinary standards, and nationally recognized expectations as reflected in professional organizations such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and accrediting bodies.

**4.4** General Education courses shall be designed to actively engage students in the disciplinary subject, support the learning and success of all students, and make interdisciplinary connections to help students understand the value of the program.

**R470-5 General Education Credit Requirements:** To assure consistency and transferability across USHE and timely completion for students, each institutional general education program shall require 27-30 semester credits to build student competence in the core and breadth general education areas. These include:

**5.1** 12 credits in the core requirements of written communications (six credits of which three credits are at the 2000-level or higher), three credits Quantitative Literacy, and three credits American Institutions.

**5.2** Three credits from each of the five breadth area requirements of arts, humanities, life sciences, physical sciences, and social and behavioral sciences.

**5.3** Up to three credits of unique institutional coursework to address gaps in meeting shared general education program-level essential learning outcomes, not to exceed an institutional requirement for 30 general education credits. Because each USHE degree-granting institution structures its general education program around its unique faculty specialties and academic departments and serves students of differing backgrounds and levels of academic preparation, some institutions may need to specify this unique institutional coursework to ensure students achieve the expected system-level general education program outcomes.

**5.4** Institutions may develop integrative courses or programs rather than structuring general education around one course per general education area requirement, not to exceed 30 credits except as allowed in subsection 5.5.

**5.5** Courses with embedded co-requisite developmental education, instructional supports, or lab or other high impact pedagogical strategies may have more than three credits and may bring individual students' general education credit count above the 30-credit range.

**5.6** In some cases, students majoring in a particular discipline may be required to take a two course sequence in the major rather than a traditional single introductory course to meet a general education requirement served by that discipline. Two-course sequences may be given the appropriate general education requirement attribute for students in the major without affecting the institution's base general education credit count.

**R470-6 Essential Learning Outcomes:** USHE's shared general education essential learning outcomes should inform institutions' design of their general education programs at the program, area (core and breadth), and course level to offer an appropriate breadth, depth, and sequencing of learning.

**6.1 Program-Level Essential Learning Outcomes:** Program-level design shall ensure student demonstration of specific understanding and application of the following general education competencies:

**6.1.1 Intellectual and Practical Skills:** These skills include inquiry and analysis,

critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, information literacy, teamwork and problem-solving, and practical skills such as visual, kinesthetic, design, and aural forms of artistic communication.

**6.1.2 Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural Worlds:**

Engagement with “big questions”—both contemporary and enduring—in the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.

**6.1.3 Personal and Social Responsibility:** Development of personal and social responsibilities, including ethical reasoning and actions, foundations and skills for lifelong learning, community and civic knowledge and engagement, involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges, and local and global intercultural knowledge and competence.

**6.1.4 Integrative Learning:** Demonstration of synthesis of learning and advanced accomplishment across coherent general and specialized studies and the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

**6.2 General Education Core Requirements:** General education core essential learning outcomes address foundational competencies to promote student success across the curriculum and prepare students for subsequent coursework. The essential learning outcomes for the core areas are not exhaustive, and other outcomes may also be addressed at each institution’s discretion.

**6.2.1 Written Communication (Six Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating foundational ability in academic composition, communication, and other related skills, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.2.2 Quantitative Literacy (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating familiarity with fundamental quantitative methods, concepts, and skills, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.2.3 American Institutions (Three Credits):** Consistent with Utah Code section 53H-3-605(1)(b), to satisfy this requirement students must “demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the history, principles, form of government, and economic system of

the United States” as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3 General Education Breadth Areas:** Students are required to complete requirements within five different breadth areas to cultivate the exposure to a range of subjects, analytical skills, and to develop the intellectual agility required to navigate a variety of perspectives and participate effectively in professional life and a diverse democracy. Courses that meet general education requirements may also fulfill lower division major requirements.

**6.3.1 Arts (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating a foundational understanding of the creative arts, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in R470 Appendix, *Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3.2 Humanities (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating a foundational understanding of the humanities, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3.3 Life Sciences (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating a foundational understanding of the life sciences, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3.4 Physical Sciences (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating a foundational understanding of the physical sciences, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3.5 Social and Behavioral Sciences (Three Credits):** Students satisfy this requirement by demonstrating a foundational understanding of the social sciences, as defined by the essential learning outcomes for the designation in Board Policy R470, *Appendix, Essential Learning Outcomes*.

**6.3.6** Faculty from disciplines that offer general education courses within the breadth areas shall actively engage in reaching out to similar disciplines at other USHE institutions to further establish and articulate specific course learning outcomes and objectives for commonly numbered courses.

**6.3.7** Institutions shall develop rules to assure that student course selection in the breadth area reflects exposure to a broad range of disciplines.

**6.3.8** Breadth course learning outcomes may also support students acquiring relevant career information and professional, civic, and personal skills.

**R470-7 General Education Sequencing and Completion:** Institutions shall implement strategies to facilitate student completion of general education requirements.

**7.1 Lower Division Sequential Numbering:** Some lower division courses with general education attributes are intended to prepare students for advanced work across the curriculum or within an intended major. Expectations that these requirements should be completed early in a student's academic career shall be reflected through the appropriate use of the common course numbering sequences outlined in *Board Policy R475, Common Course Numbering*.

**7.2 Upper Division Coursework in General Education:** General education courses should be numbered at the 1000- and 2000-level, allowing students to fulfill all general education requirements through lower division coursework. However, in rare cases, courses that receive general education designations may have upper division numbering in alignment with the standards of *Board Policy R475, Common Course Numbering* and justified as being in the students' best interests.

**7.3 Institutional Upper Division Non-major, Non-general Education**

**Requirements:** Institutions that implement specific requirements for upper division courses outside of a major and outside of the USHE standardized general education program shall not refer to those requirements as general education and should carefully consider the possible negative effects of those requirements on transfer students and completion in general.

**7.4 Early engagement with General Education:** Institutions shall structure general education programs so that students begin general education work during their first year of enrollment, particularly in core requirements that are foundational to subsequent coursework.

**7.5 Clear Communication of General Education Sequencing and Requirements:**

Degree plans and advising materials should encourage students to complete general education requirements early and through the most effective curricular and pedagogical means possible, i.e., co-requisite rather than developmental course entry points where possible.

**7.6 Completion within First Two Years:** Depending on a student's intended major and transfer plans, general education may be completed within the first 60 credit hours or spread across multiple semesters to accommodate major requirements and facilitate completion.

**7.7 Certificate of General Education Completion:** Institutions shall mark completion of the general education program with a certificate to ensure transferability of the entire program within USHE or to non-USHE institutions.

**7.8 Credit for Prior Learning:** In support of timely completion, institutions shall allow students to obtain general education credit by other means, such as prior learning assessments as outlined in *Board Policy R472, Credit for Prior Learning*.

**7.8.1 Allowable Credit:** Institutions shall not impose limits on the amount of general education credit that a student may earn by means other than taking courses directly from the institution only in alignment with accreditation requirements and *Board Policy R472, Credit for Prior Learning*.

**7.9 Substitution of Courses in General Education to Accommodate Major**

**Requirements:** Institutions may allow students with declared majors in breadth areas listed in subsection 6.3 to substitute study and achievement in lower division major courses for the general education requirement and to achieve the required number of total general education credits by completing additional coursework in other general education areas. The receiving institution shall allow a USHE transfer student who retains the major to maintain the substitution at the receiving institution and shall not require the student to complete additional general education coursework.

**R470-8 Designated Responsibilities for General Education Procedures:** To implement this policy, the following committees are established:

**8.1 Board's General Education Council ("GEC"):** The GEC will be comprised of one representative from each USHE degree-granting institution who: oversees General Education at their institution and/or is nominated by the institution's Chief Academic Officer, and is appointed by the President. Non-voting or ex officio members may also attend as needed to provide expertise on particular issues. The GEC will select a chair and vice chair, who must be approved by the Commissioner of Higher Education. These officers' terms of office are three years, and they are eligible for reelection. Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education ("OCHE") staff will provide administrative support to the GEC and may serve as ex officio participants. The GEC shall:

**8.1.1** Establish general education program-level essential learning outcomes and goals and essential learning outcomes in the core and breadth areas of general education, based on the most current recommendations of the general education area work groups and with input from general education faculty, faculty major committees, and accrediting bodies, national associations, and academic societies that are considered leaders in general education;

**8.1.2** Propose methods to assess student learning outcomes in general education and submit those recommendations to the Chief Academic Officers and USHE institutions;

**8.1.3** Coordinate with groups working on related tasks by appointing members of the GEC to assist other USHE committees, such as the USHE Transfer Council, as requested and appropriate;

**8.1.4** Address disagreements about general education attributes for courses across USHE as they arise; and

**8.1.5** Recommend policy updates to OCHE, which must be vetted and endorsed by the Council of Chief Academic Officers before being forwarded to the Council of Presidents and then to the Board.

**8.2 General Education Area Work Groups:** The general education area work groups (“work groups”) include Arts, Humanities, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Written Communication, Quantitative Literacy, and American Institutions. These work groups are comprised of two faculty representatives from each USHE degree-granting institution nominated by the institution’s general education committee and approved by the Chief Academic Officer. Non-voting or ex officio members may also attend as needed to provide expertise on particular issues. Each work group shall be chaired by a member of the GEC or a faculty member appointed by the GEC. The work groups shall:

**8.2.1** Meet annually during the annual professional development conference organized by the GEC each fall, and at least once during the spring semester, to review the general education competencies and learning goals in each area and discuss and compare programs; and

**8.2.2** Provide recommendations on changes to the competencies and essential learning outcomes underlying each general education area and suggestions on methods used to assess student learning outcomes in relation to the learning outcomes to the General Education GEC.

**8.3 Institutional General Education Committees:** Institutions shall establish policies, practices, and appropriate faculty curriculum committees to assess identified learning outcomes at program, area, and course-levels and shall ensure that courses receiving general education designations adequately assess shared essential learning outcomes. This assessment may be augmented with cumulative and integrative learning



experiences in which students can demonstrate intellectual skills and specialized knowledge, as designed by faculty subject-matter experts, for the institution's general education program.

**8.4 USHE Faculty Major Committees:** As outlined in Board Policy *Board Policy R475, Common Course Numbering*, institutional faculty representatives serving on USHE faculty major committees shall review commonly numbered and lower division major courses to assure they fulfill general education requirements and essential learning outcomes and the proper sequencing of general education requirements within the major. Faculty should design course content and pedagogical strategies that strive to include students all cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and viewpoints. Major committees shall identify assessment of general education program and area-level essential learning outcomes in their expectations for commonly numbered courses.

## **8.5 Individual Faculty**

**8.5.1 Faculty Design of General Education Courses:** Faculty teaching general education courses shall address and assess competencies and learning outcomes identified by designated faculty major committees and work groups within USHE. Faculty shall design course content and pedagogical strategies that strive to include students from all cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and viewpoints, and structure pedagogy and assessments to actively address gaps in course success rates. Courses should include assessment of general education program and area-level essential learning outcomes.

**8.5.2 Communication and Assessment of Essential Learning Outcomes:** Faculty teaching courses in each general education area shall include relevant course expectations and assignments based on the shared essential learning outcomes and reflect those expected outcomes in the class syllabus.

## **R470-9 Transfer of Credit in Fulfillment of General Education Requirements 9.1**

**Within USHE:** USHE degree-granting institutions shall facilitate transfer of general education credits, partially completed requirements, and full program completion from institution to institution within the system, as outlined in *Board Policy R471, Lower Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits*.

**9.1.1 Similar Names, Common Numbers, and Equal Credits for General Education Courses:** Institutions shall assure that all courses satisfying general education requirements at any USHE institution are articulated to the fullest extent

possible to satisfy comparable general education requirements at receiving USHE institutions as outlined in [Board Policy R471, \*Lower Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits\*](#). General education courses at USHE institutions having similar learning goals, content, rigor, and standards shall have similar names, common numbers, and credits in compliance with [Board Policy R475, \*Common Course Numbering\*](#).

**9.1.2 Transfer of Partially Completed General Education Credits:** For USHE students who have not fully satisfied all general education requirements at the sending institution prior to transfer, the receiving institution shall accept the credit hours and area designation of all general education coursework earned with a passing grade approved by the sending institution. A minimum grade for general education may not satisfy a major or prerequisite requirement in a particular discipline. The receiving institution may change a transfer course's general education area designation, with the student's consent, if it aids the student in fulfilling the receiving institution's remaining requirements. The receiving institution shall only require transfer students to complete any additional coursework needed to satisfy the unmet requirements of the receiving institution.

**9.2 Students Entering with Associate Degrees from Accredited Non-USHE Institutions:** The receiving institution shall review the transcripts of a student who enters a USHE institution with an associate degree from an appropriately-accredited non-USHE institution to assure the student has successfully completed relevant courses in the three core areas required of USHE students: written communication, quantitative literacy, and American Institutions. While USHE will honor associate degrees, institutions must address deficiencies found in one or more of the three core areas.

**9.2.1** Where possible, articulation agreements to accept transfer of a sending institution's entire general education program in fulfillment of the USHE general education program should be vetted by the GEC and the USHE Transfer Council and conducted at the system level rather than between individual institutions. Where the GEC and Transfer Council agree on a program-to-program general education articulation, the receiving institution shall accept a transfer student's entire lower division general education program without the student having to repeat or add courses, except American Institutions as required by [Utah Code section 53B-16103\(1\)\(b\)](#).

**9.3 Students Entering without Associate Degrees from Accredited Non-USHE Institutions:** The receiving institution shall evaluate the transcript of a student who enters USHE from an appropriately-accredited institution without an associate degree to determine if

additional general education coursework will be required for the student to meet USHE institutional requirements.