



PA State System of Higher Education Board of Governors

Effective: January 21, 1993

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POLICY 1993-01: GENERAL EDUCATION AT STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION UNIVERSITIES

See Also:

Adopted: January 21, 1993

Amended:

A. Purposes

1. To address the Board of Governors' statutory duties to establish broad educational policies, and to prescribe minimum standards for graduation.
2. To implement recommendation #7 of *Priorities for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education during the 1990s* (adopted by the Board of Governors in October 1990), calling for a greater emphasis on liberal education at State System universities.

B. Definitions and Rationale

The focus of this policy is on procedures for assuring that a designated segment of the undergraduate curriculum, which is required of all students and is generally referred to as **general education**, addresses appropriate goals and serves to prepare State System students as effectively as possible for life and work in the 1990s and beyond. The rationale for the policy, however, as for the *Priorities* recommendation that prompted it, relates to the broader concept of **liberal education**.

Traditionally, educators have distinguished between **professional education**, which prepares students for their life work, and **liberal education**, which prepares students for life. In today's world, where both careers and lives are subject to greater complexity and more frequent change than ever before, this distinction may be outdated.

Liberal education is essential today—regardless of the profession for which students may be preparing—to prepare them to think and communicate as professionals, to understand the societal and global context of their work, to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting and career to another, to recognize the ethical implications of

professional practice, and to balance the various dimensions of their personal and professional lives

At the same time, liberal education is ever more essential in preparing students for the challenges and choices they face in their roles as partners, parents, friends, consumers, and lifelong learners—roles that have become more complicated and demanding than they were even a generation ago. Perhaps, above all, liberal education in the 1990s is critical for preparing students to be responsible citizens of pluralistic communities, a democratic country, and the global society of the 21st century.

Thus, while study within and across the arts and sciences disciplines forms the basis for the general education curriculum, the most important outcomes—the liberal education outcomes—will consist not so much in the mastery of particular bodies of knowledge as in the acquisition of the skills, values, awareness, understanding, perspective, and appreciation needed for continuing professional and personal growth in a rapidly changing world. To achieve the outcomes of a liberal education, imaginative, deliberate, and rigorous approaches to the design of general education and to its integration with other parts of the curriculum and the college experience are called for.

C. Procedures

To insure the quality, currency, and effectiveness of the general education portion of the undergraduate curriculum, State System universities shall:

1. Develop an institutional statement of general education goals and rationale to guide the design of the general education curriculum.
2. Develop written criteria, which may include pedagogical considerations, for inclusion of courses or other experiences in the general education program, and a process for reviewing and approving courses that meet the criteria and address the university's goals for general education.
3. Develop effective means for communicating the goals and explaining the rationale and significance, as well as the specific requirements, of the general education program to students, parents, and other constituencies.
4. Develop processes for assessing outcomes of the general education program and for including the general education program in the university's program review cycle to assure the continued improvement, currency, and vitality of general education; summaries of general education reviews should be submitted to the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in the same manner as reports on other program reviews.
5. Include in the university's faculty professional development program opportunities for faculty to gain assistance, as might be needed, in developing

and teaching courses that address the goals of the university's general education program and in assessing student outcomes with relation to those goals.

D. Recommended Liberal Education Goals

A State System task force of faculty and administrators knowledgeable about general education programs developed the following list of goals or outcomes, based on the sample list included in Priorities recommendation #7(a). The list reflects recommendations and models commonly set forth in the national literature on general education.

None of these goals should be understood as equating to one or more specific courses. They may be addressed in countless curricular (and co-curricular) configurations. Moreover, the goals may be interpreted as outcomes to be realized through students' entire undergraduate experience, as some should certainly be addressed through work in the academic major and through co-curricular experiences, as well as within the general education portion of the curriculum.

In developing or reviewing their own goal statements, designing general education curricula, and considering the integration of general education with the rest of the undergraduate curricula, State System university faculty and administrators should use these goals as guidelines or benchmarks.

1. Skill in various forms of inquiry, abstract logical thinking, inductive reasoning, critical analysis, and ability to find and use information.
2. Communication skills—including those required for effective reading, writing, speaking, and listening—and awareness of the challenges of cross-cultural communication.
3. Ability to understand numerical data and use mathematical methods for analysis and problem-solving.
4. Basic understanding of the natural and social sciences and their significance in contemporary society.
5. Historical consciousness, i.e., understanding of ideas, events, persons, and creative expressions from the past.
6. Awareness of the social, economic, political, and environmental interdependence of countries and regions of the world.
7. Understanding of how people's experiences and perspectives are shaped by gender, ethnicity, culture, and other factors that distinguish groups of people, coupled with recognition of common elements within human experience that transcend time, space, race, and circumstances.

8. Appreciation of and experience with literature and the arts.
9. Understanding of the role of values in personal, professional, and civic life; experience in recognizing and analyzing ethical issues.

E. Implementation

Several State System universities are already in a position to certify compliance with this policy and may submit statements explaining the university's status with regard to items C (1-5) in this policy to the Office of Academic and Student Affairs soon after Board adoption of the policy. All State System universities should submit such statements when they believe they are in a position to certify compliance with Section C, but not later than December 1994. The Board will receive a report on policy implementation in January 1995.