

THE REFORM OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM AT ARIZONA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

September, 2022

In 2018, the Arizona Board of Regents began the intense research, review and work to update and reform general education for Arizona's public universities. While all three ABOR universities had long-established general education programs, the board did not have a system-wide general education policy.

Why did the board decide to reform general education? The board strongly believes it is a solemn responsibility of Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona to graduate students who are not only prepared for the workplace, but also equipped to participate as contributing members in our constitutional republic with a knowledge of our nation's founding and key historical moments as well as aptitude for and understanding of civil discourse and free speech.

The board recognized the general education reform would be a significant project, requiring close collaboration with the universities and taking place in iterative phases over a number of years. The development, design, implementation and reporting are structured in four distinct phases. As is often the case with complicated policy development, as the project progresses from phase to phase, the board has paused and may continue to pause to clarify prior decisions.

The first phase of the reform was implemented in 2019, with the establishment of the board policy directing our public universities to revise their general education requirements to ensure ASU, NAU and UArizona students – no matter their focus of study – receive instruction on our nation's founding and history, the Constitution, American institutions of self-governance and more. Among other key provisions, the policy also called for the universities to cultivate students capable of engaging in 'civil discourse founded in fundamental civic knowledge.'

The policy was updated in 2021 to clarify board expectations.

The second phase was the adoption of each university's general education framework. Following months of development and review, the board approved the frameworks in meetings held in between September 2021 and April 2022. The frameworks serve as a structural outline that will guide the development of each university's general education studies program.

The board is now in the midst of the third phase, which is the development and review of a crosswalk between the frameworks and the actual courses the universities will offer to meet the general education requirements. Throughout this phase, the board may need to refine the frameworks to ensure that the course designs for general education align with the expected outcomes.

The final phase will be the assessment of academic outcomes of general education across the three universities. The board has already implemented a writing assessment and will develop the additional assessments in the coming years. Once again, what is learned from these assessments will guide adjustments or clarifications to the original policy, the frameworks or the courses themselves.

The regents are developing a system to ensure ASU, NAU, and UA's required general education classes align with our intended goals of educating students who are not only prepared for the workplace but are also equipped to meaningfully participate in American society and the world.

The board believes that reforming and implementing general education is important and recognize it is complex. The board is most appreciative of the Presidents, Provosts and faculty for their commitment and dedication to this work.