



**MINNESOTA STATE**  
Board of Trustees

**AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

**NAME:** Academic and Student Affairs Committee

**DATE:** March 19, 2024

**TITLE:** Lower General Education Redesign

Action

Review and Discussion

*This item is required by policy*

**PRESENTERS**

Satasha Green-Stephen, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Students Affairs

Matt Dempsey, Faculty, Normandale Community College, and Vice President, Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF)

Aureliano DeSoto, Associate Professor, Metropolitan State University, and Academic Coordinator, Inter Faculty Organization (IFO)

**PURPOSE**

This review and discussion item will provide an update on the current progress of re-envisioning lower general education, present the draft philosophy statement, proposed changes to the current model (parameters), and next steps.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The history of general education in America has been dynamic, at best. There are several moments in history that have contributed to this history and different forms it has taken in higher education (Mintz 2024). For many years systems, colleges, and universities across the country have been engaged in reforming general education to improve student outcomes and align workforce needs. Minnesota State has embarked on re-envisioning lower-division general education since Fall 2022 through the representative General Education Steering Committee (GESC). The committee has engaged in research of general education models, examining transfer data, and acquiring feedback about the current curriculum. With the intention of revising and updating our approach to general education approach across our colleges and universities of Minnesota State to reflect the challenges and needs of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the committee has completed a draft of a philosophy statement that defines the purpose and intent of the lower general education curriculum. The draft philosophy statement is as follows:

The General Education program for Minnesota State, “Minnesota Foundational Studies,”

equitably serves learners throughout Minnesota State institutions in their pursuit of academic, professional and personal success. This essential core curriculum has a transparent structure that is readily transferable between Minnesota State institutions. Through an intentional and foundational design, this program engages learners with varied ways of knowing, thinking, and creating by teaching the core competencies that encompass the vast array of human experiences, thus elevating the power of diverse perspectives and individuals. These studies aim to inspire ethical, curious, compassionate and engaged globally informed citizens who are prepared to contribute to the diverse communities in which they live in Minnesota and beyond.

In addition, the committee has created draft parameters that endorses proposed changes to the current general education model:

- Continue to utilize the existing MnTC Goal Area model as a basis for review and revision, with a focus on how it is implemented consistently across campuses and further exploration of possible changes, modifications, and additions within and beyond the existing goal areas.
- Continue to support transfer of lower division general education as a “package” while ensuring that goal areas and courses are transferable as well.
- Standardize the way in which goal areas are satisfied for the gen ed across the system but allow local institutions to place their own courses within those areas.
- Standardize breadth requirements within goal areas 1, 5 and 6. Standardize the way breadth requirements within these goal areas are met (use the same or no sub-groups).
- Require only certain courses to have the same goals across the system while allowing each institution to designate its own goals for each course outside of those identified as requiring the same goals.
- Continue to allow double-dipping but there needs to be better definition about how this is done consistently across the system.
- Remove Goal Area 2 as it is currently defined. Charge a faculty group in Phase II with determining how Critical Thinking and/or Information Literacy is fulfilled within the general education model.

Looking at higher education broadly, there are as many models of general education as there are institutions (Handstedt, 2024). General education across the United States and Europe has been a continuing cycle of re-design since the progressive reform from classics at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jerry Gaff (1980) in the article, “Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Reforming Education,” noted, “a program for reforming general education should be designed around each institution’s character, the strength and interest of faculty, and the needs of its students.” According to Handstedt’s (2024) *General Education Essentials*, models of general education run on a continuum of models from Distribution (Minnesota State current MNTC) to a more integrative model. Whereas distribution models outline the number of courses taken from pre-defined domains (Communication, Science, Arts, etc.), Integrative models that “refers to a model that makes deliberate attempts to create explicit connections among courses, fields, majors, disciplines, and traditional academic and nonacademic areas.” Handstedt (2024) points out that there are several essential components we should employ in re-envisioning general

education:

- The Complexity of Students' Lives
- The Changing Nature of the Workplace
- The Challenges of Citizenship in Today's World

Steven Mintz in his article, "Gen Ed: Its Past, Present, and Possible Future: Moving beyond today's smorgasbord of disconnected courses," shares that innovation in lower general education that results in more coherent and meaningful curriculum are the product of teams of engaged faculty members whose shared vision centers on a more coherent and meaningful lower general education curriculum (2023).

Re-envisioning Minnesota State's lower general education curriculum is essential to meeting the needs of our students and the state workplace needs and environment. The current Minnesota Transfer Curriculum has been in place since 1994. This inclusive and dynamic committee of faculty, staff, administrators, and students have engaged in deep rooted, informed, and agile work to meet this initial milestone. The completed work of phase 1, by this committee will propel the redesign of general education to our second phase, 2024-2025, of determining and defining the domains to be addressed in this redesign; develop a framework for student learning assessment and develop detailed parameters and characters of the new framework.

### **Resources**

Jerry Gaff, "Avoiding the Potholes: Strategies for Reforming Education," *Educational Record*, v61 n4, Fall 1980.

Paul Handstedt, *General Education Essentials: A Guide for College Faculty*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Routledge, 2024.

Steven Mintz, "Gen Ed: Its Past, Present, and Possible Future," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 2, 2023 (<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/gen-ed-its-past-present-and-possible-future>).