



General education: Ensuring Utah’s citizens have the essential skills needed to succeed

Employers in a [2018 study](#) conducted by the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](#) endorsed broad learning and cross-cutting skills—including oral communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, working effectively in teams, written communication, and real-world application of skills and knowledge—as the best preparation for long-term career success.

Utah needs an educated citizenry that possesses these and other “soft skills” gained through general education courses at colleges and universities in the Utah System of Higher Education. Accordingly, the essential learning outcomes for undergraduate general education at USHE institutions emphasize skills and competencies identified by business and industry leaders, and higher education faculty as those needed to prepare graduates for academic, professional, and societal success.

General education in Utah

USHE Board of Regents [Policy R470](#) shapes general education for Utah’s public colleges and universities. The policy includes a foundation of four broad essential learning outcomes for students:

- Acquire intellectual and practical skills
- Gain knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural worlds
- Develop personal and social responsibility
- Demonstrate integrative learning

General education courses in core areas of written communication, quantitative literacy, and [American institutions](#), as well as breadth areas of the arts, humanities, life sciences, physical sciences, and social and behavioral sciences, introduce students to different fields of study and foster lifelong learning. These general education courses produce strong graduates for the workforce and give students the necessary skills for success in other aspects of life.

The USHE Board of Regents’ General Education Task Force has played a key role in shaping general education in Utah for more than 20 years. The task force is comprised of general education chairs and directors from all USHE institutions, as well others with expertise in relevant areas to ongoing work. This task force advises USHE institutions’ chief academic officers and provides leadership in defining and

evaluating what students should know, understand, and be able to do through general education. Over the years, the task force has also advanced Utah’s involvement in national initiatives such as [AAC&U LEAP States](#) and [Interstate Passport](#), among others.

USHE and the GETF host an annual conference on general education focused on an enduring question—What is an Educated Person? Faculty, staff, and students from across the state and beyond come together annually to hear from national and state leaders and to examine important and timely topics such as student learning outcomes, learning outcomes assessment, diversity and equity, student success, high-impact practices, student demographics, gateway courses, and many others.

Transferability and earlier access

General education courses across USHE are aligned and transferable, thanks to decades of work by the General Education Task Force and the USHE major committees which are comprised of USHE faculty and staff from more than 30 academic disciplines. Because of their work, Utah students can more seamlessly transfer between colleges and universities in the state without unnecessary repetition of similar courses, saving them both time and money on their way to graduation.

“Block transfer” of general education is another important provision in USHE Policy R470, impacting how students transfer between institutions. If a student fully completes general education at one USHE institution, it transfers as a “block” and will meet the general education requirements of all other USHE institutions. Even students that only partially complete their general education credits at one institution can transfer to another public college or university in the state, with those individual credits accepted at full value at the receiving institution.

General education courses are also available to Utah public high school students through the state’s Concurrent Enrollment program. Through Concurrent Enrollment, students can earn college credit that also counts toward high school graduation. Taking general education courses while still in high school introduces students to the rigor of college, helps them gain confidence in their academic ability, and reduces college costs—Utah students who participated in Concurrent Enrollment in 2017-18 saved [\\$48.7 million in future tuition expenses](#).

Next steps

USHE continues to refine lower-division general education courses so that current and future students develop the essential “soft skills” needed for individual prosperity and the progress of our state.

Looking ahead, students will have more options to receive general education credit through [prior learning](#) assessment and competency-based courses. A new [Regents Transfer Council](#) will examine policies,

strategies, principles, expectations, and alignment of courses and programs of study. Additionally, A new state-of-the-art online transfer guide will be available early in 2020 to help students with course and degree planning.

Above all, USHE will continue its long practice of systemwide collaboration, examination, and improvement to ensure general education is accessible, relevant, and transferable.