

**Reimagining OHIO's General Education Program**  
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**  
**Updated: October 22, 2019**

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**About the COMMON GOALS**

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**How were the common goals created?**

In January 2013, the Provost appointed a task to recommend revisions to OHIO's General Education program. The task force comprised a representative from each college offering undergraduate degrees plus an RHE representative, the dean of Arts & Sciences, and the dean of University College. That committee started with the objectives provided by the previous Gen Ed task force in 2012 and the [American Association of Colleges & University LEAP objectives](#). Launched in 2005, Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a national public advocacy and campus action initiative. LEAP champions the importance of a liberal education—for individual students and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality.

The task force members each devised a process to solicit feedback from their college's faculty about these objectives and about possible curricular components. In some colleges, this took place in a college meeting, while others used systematic surveys. Based on the data collected from those processes, which overwhelmingly supported some version of the LEAP objectives, the task force slightly revised the LEAP objectives to tailor them to OHIO. Those objectives were presented to UCC and to Faculty Senate, and officially by the Senate in May 2014.

The LEAP objectives are still endorsed by the AAC&U, and they form the basis for the specific skill and competency outcomes found in the well-validated VALUE rubrics (see below).

**How were the learning outcomes for the common goals created?**

In 2017-18, a committee composed of the UCC's General Education Committee, UCC committee leadership, representatives from the 2014 General Education Task Force, the Office of Institutional Research, and representatives from the 2018 AQIP Higher Learning Commission Strategy Forum developed learning outcomes using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) LEAP Initiative and VALUE Rubrics.

AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics reflect the LEAP essential learning outcomes. Between 2007-09, the original VALUE initiative involved teams of faculty and other educational professionals from over 100 higher education institutions engaged over many months to develop 16 VALUE rubrics for the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. Each rubric was developed from the most frequently identified characteristics or criteria of learning for each of the 16 learning outcomes. Drafts of each rubric were then tested by faculty with their own students' work on over 100 college campuses.

Today, AAC&U's VALUE rubrics are available for free use by all institutions. More than 2800 colleges and universities use the original or adapted VALUE rubric learning outcomes as a critical component of its assessment processes.

Learning outcomes for the common goals were presented to both UCC and Faculty Senate in 2018.

**The common goals require “knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world.” How are these incorporated into general education reform?**

Learning outcomes for specific knowledge areas are included in general education reform through the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) learning outcomes for the five areas of distribution: (1) English Composition, (2) Mathematics, Statistics, and Logic, (3) Arts and Humanities, (4) Social and Behavioral Sciences, and (5) Natural Sciences. Each ODHE area of distribution has a set of broad learning outcomes.

Each of the proposed models achieves ODHE’s requirements for the minimum number of credit hours in the ODHE areas of distribution.

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## About STUDENTS

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**Are students involved in general education reform?**

YES. Students have been involved in the process in several ways. First, the General Education Advisory Council includes two representatives from the Ohio University Student Senate. Second, students are welcome to attend the open Question and Answer sessions, as well as submit individual comments and suggestions to the task force. Third, the General Education Task Force has been invited to present to the Student Senate on November 6, 2019.

**I know the Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force proposed three models. Is there a model that is more attractive to students?**

Informally, some students have shared that they think the blended model (Model 1) and the integrated model (Model 2) are appealing. Both models offer components and experiences that are more appealing than OHIO’s existing general education program.

**How will launching a revised model affect current students?**

OHIO policy assures that students within five years of initial enrollment may complete the requirements listed in their catalog of entry. They may, however, choose to follow requirements in a newer catalog. In all likelihood, the two general education programs will overlap for four to five years. This does not necessarily mean offering a wider range of courses. Depending on how the revised program is implemented, classes that already fulfill Tier requirements may continue to fulfill a requirement in the new curriculum. Courses developed for the new curriculum could also be approved for Tier credit, reducing the need to offer older general education courses that departments wished to phase out.

**How will general education reform impact transfer students?**

Current general education policies at OHIO tend to discourage students from transferring in, with the result that total enrollment is lower than we could otherwise expect. In addition, the Ohio Department of Higher Education expects that the Ohio Transfer Module will transfer between public colleges and universities.

For these reasons, we must make the transfer of general education credit easier for students who have earned an associate degree or completed a substantial number of credits at another institution. Ease of transfer can be created either through program design or by transfer credit policy. Which route OHIO takes to accommodating transfer students will depend on which general education model we adopt and how we choose to implement it.

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## About ODHE and HLC

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### What are the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) requirements for general education?

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) requires that all public institutions of higher education require all students to complete a set of liberal education courses within associate and baccalaureate degrees. These courses are commonly known as the general education requirements, but may be called "General Requirements," "University Requirements," "Core Requirements," or "Liberal Education Requirements."

According to ODHE, the general education component at Ohio's public institutions must fulfill the institution's Ohio Transfer Module (OTM). The Ohio Transfer Module contains 36-40 semester hours of coursework in general education. It is a subset or a complete set of general education requirements at each college or university. In order for general education courses to be a part of an institution's transfer module, all coursework is subject to review by the statewide transfer module panels against the Ohio Transfer Module Guidelines and learning outcomes.

Each transfer module must include a minimum of 24 semester hours of approved OTM courses as outlined below:

1. At least three semester credit hours in **English Composition and Oral Communication** (e.g., First Writing, Second Writing, Public Speaking);
2. At least three semester credit hours in **Mathematics, Statistics, and Logic** (e.g., College Algebra, Pre-Calculus, Trigonometry, Calculus, Statistics, Formal/Symbolic Logic);
3. At least six semester credit hours in **Arts and Humanities** (e.g., Art History, Ethics, American History, Literature, Philosophy, Religion, Ethnic or Gender Studies);
4. At least six semester credit hours in **Social and Behavioral Sciences** (e.g., Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology); and
5. At least six semester credit hours in **Natural Sciences** (e.g., Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Geology, Physical Geography, Physics).

The additional 12-16 semester credit hours needed to complete the OTM are distributed among the same five categories.

In addition, according to the ODHE:

- Courses in oral communication and interdisciplinary areas may also be included as elective credit hours by individual institutions to satisfy OTM requirements.
- Courses for the OTM should be at the lower-division level general education courses commonly completed during the first two years of a full-time student's residency.
- Institutions often have general education requirements that go beyond the OTM or have individual degree programs with specific requirements in the liberal education area which go beyond those required to meet the institution's general education requirements.
- The distributive model required is not meant to discourage institutions from experimenting with thematically clustered or multidisciplinary general education courses, particularly when those courses are approved as OTM or TAG courses.

**Does Ohio University's current general education program for baccalaureate degrees achieve all of the ODHE general education requirements?**

NO. Ohio University's current general education requirements do not achieve ODHE's requirements. A primary problem is an insufficient number of credit hours. Ohio's general education requirements include 33 credit hours; 27 of those credit hours fit within ODHE's requirements. (Note: Junior Composition courses and Tier III courses do not fit with ODHE requirements.)

**I have heard Ohio University's current general education program does not adequately achieve expectations of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). What does that mean?**

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region of the United States. It has several criteria for accreditation broadly related to the mission, integrity, teaching and learning, and resources. Criterion Category 1 ("Helping Students Learn") involves:

- Determining common outcomes,
- Incorporating curriculum opportunities for all students to achieve the outcomes,
- Selecting the tools, methods, and instruments used to assess the attainment of common learning outcomes, and
- Assessing common learning outcomes.

OHIO received feedback from HLC through its 2014 Systems Appraisal and 2016 Comprehensive Quality Review Report. Combined, feedback from both underscore the necessity of assessment of OHIO's general education program. Specifically, reviewers stated, "The University now has the opportunity to develop systematic, comprehensive assessment processes to assess student achievement across the institution as a means to further define and iterate the institutional vision and strategic priorities to support student success."

By the next review, HLC expects Ohio University to have completed a full assessment cycle for its general education program, including the Common Goals (passed by UCC and Faculty Senate in 2014). A full assessment cycle includes an initial assessment of each learning outcome, continuous improvement based on the results of assessment, and the second assessment of each learning outcome. Furthermore, HLC expects Ohio University to mechanisms for a system-wide process (explicit, documented, repeatable) for general education assessment.

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## About GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM

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### It seems like general education reform is urgent. Why now?

Updating our general education is urgent for several reasons.

1. Student recruitment and retention: Our peer institutions in Ohio and regionally simply look more attractive because their general education programs have a rationale – supported by the curriculum – that offers students skills they find valuable with also provides more opportunity to study areas that they find interesting. And every year that we cede this advantage to other universities means up to four years of lost enrollment. Further, our current program and policies discourage transfer into OHIO.
2. One OHIO: The work of integrating all OHIO campuses so that we can more efficiently work together for all our students should consider the kinds of courses that we will expect to find in different locations. Changing our general education requirements after that structure has already been fully built will make the task even more difficult and disruptive.
3. External expectations: Our accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, will review our accreditation in 2024. At that point, they expect to find that we have completed a full cycle of assessment and improvement based on the Learning Outcomes that we have approved as an institution. Our current program does not fully align with those outcomes and offers significant barriers to effective assessment that can clearly guide us to specific program improvement. In addition, the Ohio Department of Higher Education requires.
4. Student learning: OHIO has always prided itself on providing an excellent education centered around the student. Our general education requirements should better reflect and further that commitment. The current tiers are built around what classes a student will take, rather than what the student is learning in those classes and how that learning combines to produce essential skills. Organizing the curriculum around what the student should gain makes our academic values more explicit.

### Is general education reform a faculty-driven process?

YES. As stated in the Faculty Handbook (2019, pg. 1), the faculty (through Faculty Senate) “maintains primary jurisdiction over curriculum and academic policies.” Furthermore, the Faculty Handbook states (2019, pg. 107-108) “The University Curriculum Council, a statutory body established by the Faculty Senate in order to discharge the Faculty Senate's responsibilities with respect to curricular matters, is the final organization in a system of committees composed of departmental curriculum committees, college curriculum committees, and the University Curriculum Council itself. The function of the University Curriculum Council is to make recommendations in curricular matters that include ... implementation and maintenance of the General Education program. The Curriculum Council is the final recommending voice in curricular matters. Its recommendations go through the Provost to the President for final approval.”

Five of the seven members of the Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force are faculty members and include representatives from Faculty Senate and UCC. In addition, 18 of

the 32 members of the Reimagining General Education Advisory Group are full-time, Ohio University faculty, and include wide representation from Faculty, UCC, academic colleges, and Regional Higher Education.

### **Have other public universities in the state of Ohio revised their general education programs?**

YES. Several other state institutions have revised their general education programs in recent years. These include

- Miami of Ohio's [Miami Plan](#)
- Cincinnati's [General Education Core](#)
- Akron's [General Education Program](#)
- Ohio State's [General Education Curriculum](#)

Many of the revisions have moved from a distribution model (i.e., where students are required to take courses in certain disciplinary areas) to a blended model (i.e., where students are required to take courses in certain disciplinary areas as well take integrated courses that achieve certain learning outcomes or have specific experiences). For example, Cincinnati's general education program includes the development of four "core competencies: critical thinking, knowledge integration, effective communication, and social responsibility." For example, Ohio State's proposed general education program includes a thematic component that examines broad areas of contemporary importance through a liberal arts approach.

### **I know the Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force proposed three models. What are the basic differences between the models?**

Broadly, general education models can take a variety of forms including (but not limited to):

- A core model where students take a specific set of required courses;
- An individualized model where students create their own general education requirements;
- A distribution model where students select from a list of courses organized into separate groups of general education requirements; and
- An integrative model where general education courses are integrated into a meaningful, cohesive program.

The Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force proposed three models that represent different levels of integration. Arguably, Model 1 (Integrated) includes the most integrated components, Model 2 (Blended) combines distribution requirements and integrated requirements, and Model 3 (Distributed) includes the most distributed components.

According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2016)<sup>1</sup>, the majority of institutions surveyed use a distribution model with additional integrative features (68%). In 2016, common integrative design elements in general education included thematic required courses (42%), a common intellectual experience (41%), a capstone or culminating

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<sup>1</sup> Association of American Colleges & Universities (2016). *Recent Trends in General Education Design, Learning Outcomes, and Teaching Approaches: Key Findings from a Survey among Administrators at AAC&U Member Institutions*.

study within general education (26%), and a learning community (22%). In addition, institutions reported that their general education programs include global courses (70%), first-year seminars (63%), diversity courses (60%), interdisciplinary courses (55%), service-learning opportunities (46%), civic-learning opportunities (42%), and required experiential learning opportunities (36%).

Consistent with the recommendations of the 1804 Task Force convened to consider general education reform at Ohio University (2012), the Reimagining General Education Leadership Team recommends a **blended model** where elements of a distribution model and integrative model are combined to create a meaningful, cohesive general education program.

**I know the Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force proposed three models. Is there a preferred model?**

The Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force has identified several advantages of the integrated model (Model 1) and the blended model (Model 2). These include:

- Addresses ODHE general education requirements
- Maps to the OHIO Common Goals
- Integrates multiple high-impact educational practices
- Includes some learning outcome-driven coursework
- Combines learning outcomes with distribution requirements
- Includes some stand-alone, disciplinary coursework
- Allows for exploration of a topic through a multi-disciplinary perspective
- Allows for transferability of some courses into and from OHIO
- Limits general education requirements to no more than 40 credit hours
- Allows for the possibility of double-counting courses as both major and general education

By comparison, the distribution model (Model 3) is not supported by the task force for the following reasons:

- Significantly adds to general education requirements
- Will likely require significant changes to major programs
- Treats common goal learning outcomes as distinct from the breadth of knowledge learning outcomes
- Is not competitive or innovative as compared to other universities in the state of Ohio
- Does not reflect best practices for evidence-based learning
- May limit transferability of some courses into and from OHIO
- Will likely require significant resources to assess and manage general education
- Will likely require modifications to the registration system to tag courses

**Will a revised general education increase the number of total credit hours required in the general education program?**

YES. The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) expects public institutions' general education program to include a minimum of 36 credit hours across five areas of distribution. Ohio University's general education program only requires 27 credit hours that fit ODHE's requirement.

However, the minimum number of credit hours required by Ohio University for general education is somewhat misleading for three reasons:

1. *Junior Composition*. Currently, Ohio University's junior composition requirement does not technically meet the ODHE requirements because all junior composition requirements are at the upperclassman level (3000 or 4000). If Ohio University allows some courses to be at the underclassmen levels (1000 or 2000), then we will be able to offer options that meet ODHE requirements. This is possible even if some options remain at the upperclassman level.
2. *Tier III*. Currently, many of Ohio University's Tier III courses also count as major coursework. "Double-dipping" courses to count for both general education and major requirements will still be possible after we revise general education.
3. *Tier II*. For many majors, Ohio University's Tier II courses also count as major coursework. "Double-dipping" courses to count for both general education and major requirements will still be possible after we revise general education.

**The major program in my department requires students to take many credit hours. I am concerned that increasing the number of required general education credit hours will be a problem. Has this been considered?**

We have discussed this issue and are continuing to seek feedback. Arguably, one of the benefits of focusing on student learning outcomes is the possibility that requirements for a major may count also count for general education.

For example, each of the proposed models adds at least one credit hour of experiential learning as a general education requirement. As defined by UCC in Spring 2018, context for experiential learning "may include (but are not limited to) internships, apprenticeships, clinical experience, fellowships, cooperatives, fieldwork, practicums, community engagement (service-learning, community-based research, volunteering), interactive simulations, role-playing, performance, professional internship / student teaching, study abroad / cultural immersion, research (basic, applied, lab, industry, community), live case studies, job training, place-based education, and student organization leadership." Given the range and number of possibilities, it is highly likely that a major requirement may also count for the experiential learning requirement.

In addition, your department at a peer institution has likely also gone through a general education reform recently. Any faculty, department chair, or program coordinator should contact one of the leaders of the Reimagining General Education Task Force to discuss concerns and to identify possibilities for addressing those concerns.

**Will a revised general education increase enrollment in general education courses?**

Demand for general education courses is a function of several factors: undergraduate enrollment in baccalaureate programs, general education course credit completed prior to entry (through College Credit Plus, transfer, etc.), and student interest. As such, we cannot accurately predict the extent to which enrollment will increase or decrease.



On the one hand, we believe that our current general education program will likely see continued declines in enrollment in general education courses. According to data from Ohio University's Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, enrollments in courses designated as general education have decreased since 2015-16. Specifically, total enrollment in courses designated as general education (fall and spring semesters only) decreased from 109,796 in 2015-16 to 95,747 in 2018-19; this a percentage decrease of approximately 13%. Arguably, these declines are a result of declines in undergraduate student enrollment as well as an increase in the total credit hours students have earned through College Credit Plus.

On the other hand, we believe it is possible for a revised general education program to have the potential to increase enrollment in general education courses through an increase in student interest in courses. In other words, students may choose to enhance their educational experience by taking general education requirements even if they are not required to do so.

### **Will courses be able to double-count for both general education and major requirements?**

It depends on the approved model. Currently, all of the proposed models include mechanisms for double-counting courses or experiences for both general education and major requirements. However, the extent to which counting courses for both general education and major requirements will be a function of the model (and its specifications) approved by the Faculty Senate and the University Curriculum Council.

### **Who gets to vote to approve a revised general education program?**

Faculty Senate and the University Curriculum Council have the authority to approve a revised general education program. Any revisions will also need to be approved by the Executive Vice President & Provost (EVPP).

### **After we approve a revised general education program, what are the next steps?**

The goal is to have a revised general education program ready to launch by Fall 2021. Assuming approval early Spring 2020, the next steps after:

- Spring 2020. The goal is to begin to work on the structures necessary for implementation. For example, this could be providing support to faculty to modify existing courses or create new courses.
- Fall 2020. The goal is to modify policies and processes necessary for implementation. For example, depending on the model, we will likely need to create new guidelines for course approval processes, develop processes for assessing learning outcomes, and determine policies for transfer.
- Spring 2021. The final task will be to address any system changes such as student degree audits (DARS) and Ohio University's course database management program (OCEAN).

Regardless of the model chosen, the Reimagining General Education Task Force is committed to ensuring that any implementation of a revised general education is faculty-driven and achieved with minimal frustration.

### **Who do I contact to share my feedback?**

Faculty, staff, and students are welcome to contact any member of the Reimagining General Education Leadership Task Force or the Reimagining General Education Advisory Group. Your feedback is welcome.