

FAQs for the Revised General Education Program

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Preface:

On January 20, 2010, the SUNY Board of Trustees passed a resolution amending the December 15, 1998 Resolution 98-241 that established a General Education Requirement for every SUNY baccalaureate recipient. It is important to understand what this new amendment to the original requirement does and what it does not do. In short, the ONLY change in the general education of the past decade is that colleges can now create general education programs of at least 30 credits (no change) distributed among at least seven of the original ten content areas, which now must include both mathematics and basic communication. (The “seven of ten” is *the* change.)

There is no change in the courses that have been approved for general education in each of the ten categories, nor is there any current change in any other mandates relating to the SUNY general education requirement.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Q: When is the amended general education policy effective?

A: Fall 2010.

2. Q: Is there flexibility as to the effective date to say Fall 2011? Campuses may have difficulty fully implementing changes by Fall 2010.

A: The implementation date for the policy remains Fall 2010, but campuses need not change their general education requirements by that date.

This question reveals an issue that needs to be understood. In almost all cases, SUNY students are facing several different sets of general education requirements: the SUNY requirement, which has now been amended to give campuses greater flexibility, and campus specific requirements, which are different campus to campus. And, there is even a difference between community and baccalaureate colleges with only the latter being held to creating a general education program that, at a minimum, incorporates the SUNY requirements.

3. Q: How does this policy work in combination with the recently passed policy on Student Mobility?

A: One possible outcome of the new policy would be to facilitate student mobility by allowing baccalaureate granting schools more flexibility in designing their general education programs. They could take advantage of the fact that many community college students transfer with more than one course in a designated SUNY general education

4. Q: The policy has a statement on providing resources from SUNY for Gen Ed implementation and faculty recognition on our campus. How does this work, and what is the process for receiving the funds?

A: This section was part of the original General Education resolution, which did have a special resource pool set aside to assist campuses with implementing the new program. We know of no such resources set aside in 2010.

5. Do we have a clear understanding of how many Gen Ed “silos” the community colleges will deliver, or agree to have completed by students prior to graduation from the community college?

A: This has not changed from the original informal agreement that was concluded by an exchange of

letters in which the community college presidents indicated that students who earned AA and AS degrees would graduate with at least seven of the general education requirements completed

6. Is the answer to #5 above different depending upon the type of degree a student earns at the community college?

A: The agreement remains seven for students graduating with AA and AS degrees and five for students who earn AAS degrees.

7. Do community colleges have any obligation, or absolute requirement for their students to have completed a certain number of Gen. Ed courses prior to graduation from the community college?

A: No, only those required by their specific degree programs. Many, however, are advised to complete more, especially if they have decided to complete a baccalaureate degree at a SUNY school. In addition, many community college students far exceed the number of credits needed (30) in general education courses; they are simply not all in the right silos. Students in the sciences, for example, complete many more than a single course in the Natural Sciences, and so on across the curriculum.

8. Is it still true that any four year college can decide to require all 10 of the SUNY general education content areas if the college decides to do so?

A: In a word, yes. In fact, a college could, as many have, add either new fields or additional requirements, such as a second Natural Science or a second foreign language. Nothing in this revised policy prohibits the continuation of these requirements. But those “additional” requirements exceed the minima established by SUNY policy.

9. Is it true that four year colleges will now be free to allow students to “double up” on some silos to allow for more specialization, providing the students complete 30 hours of approved general education credits in at least seven of the SUNY content areas?

A: Yes, it’s true, as long as basic communication and mathematics, which are still required, remain among the competencies. In fact, the flexibility of the amended program would allow for different general education requirements by different Schools on a single campus (such as Sciences, Arts and Letters, Business), each tailored to students in that group of academic majors, as long as each includes at least 30 credits in at least seven of the ten content areas.

10. Are 4-year SUNY schools required to accept transfer credit for up to 60 credits earned at a 2-year school, and will those transfer credits substitute for the first two-year major requirements of the four-year school?

A: In terms of total credits, the answer is yes. Students who receive an AA or AS degree at a SUNY community college are to be given “junior” status, with every general education course transferring to meet the SUNY general education requirement.

Beyond that, there are courses taken in academic majors. The general education courses have been approved by a SUNY-wide faculty committee that has been working for a decade, and hence, the courses transfer seamlessly, carrying with them general education credit. As mandated in the November, 2009 Board of Trustees Resolution on Student Mobility, a similar process is being developed for those courses in academic majors that are *normally offered in the first two years*. Where questions about the transferability of such courses arise, from either sending or receiving institutions or from a student, there are now system-wide appeals processes that empower

university-wide faculty committees to advise the University Provost, who is authorized to make a final decision.

The goal of the recent resolutions and processes is clear: to make the long-standing SUNY promise of seamless transfer among its colleges and university centers a reality, especially for the thousands of students who begin their college studies at one of SUNY's community colleges.

11. Will SUNY continue to determine whether courses fulfill General Education requirements, or will those decisions be made at the individual campuses?

A: With very few exceptions, the work of the last decade has been to ensure that there are recognized standards that carry across all of SUNY, and this aspect of the SUNY general education program will not change.

12. Now that there's no centralized General Education assessment, isn't the *de facto* outcome that the campuses can do anything they want?

A: No, absolutely not. First, the resolution does not decrease the general education requirement to seven areas. Credit requirements remains 30 credits, but that can now be met in at least seven of the designated content areas, instead of a mandated ten. These constraints remain in force. Second, campuses will be held to strict assessment measures by their accreditation bodies. The assessment criteria of these agencies have increased measurably in the past decade, which is what provides one rationale for the proposed revision of the SUNY Assessment System, which has been a model in the past.

13. How does the amended policy affect waivers?

A. As we understand the issue, campuses have the authority to waive local requirements, but cannot waive state-mandated or SUNY Board policies. However, the original implementation of the general education policy allowed for specific waivers for some specialized programs, such as in Nursing, certain science and technologies and several performing arts. In this regard, nothing has changed. Yet, since faculty have more flexibility in designing the general education requirements for their college or program, the need for waivers may have decreased.