

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**Item Name:**            **Approval of Revisions to Northern Arizona University's  
General Education Program Framework**

Action Item

**Requested Action:** Northern Arizona University asks the board to approve the revised general education program framework effective Fall 2025.

### **Background/History of Previous Board Action**

Arizona Board of Regents revised ABOR Policy 2-210, "General Education" in June 2019 and subsequently in February 2021.

Northern Arizona University proposed General Studies Program framework was approved by ABOR in September 2021.

Per ABOR direction at the September 2022 AAEA Committee meeting, NAU has revised the NAU General Studies Program framework.

### **Discussion**

NAU has considered feedback from ABOR and in response, pursued changes to the program design. These changes make the program less proscriptive for the students, increase discretion for faculty in how to structure and teach courses, change vocabulary where different meanings are intended, clarify our commitment to American Institutions and specifically define what we mean by critical thinking.

The major specific changes from the last plan submitted include:

1. Changing "Diversity Perspectives" to "Inclusive Perspectives" to better capture our intent, including consideration of religion and religious groups.
2. Reducing the embedded Inclusive Perspective areas of study from four to three and eliminating the "Intersectional Identities" requirement, but leaving U.S. Ethnic, Global and Indigenous Peoples perspectives as essential for global understanding.
3. Clarifying the expectations for courses fulfilling the Inclusive Perspectives requirement such that there is no percentage content requirement and increasing faculty discretion in the incorporation of Inclusive Perspectives content.

### **Contact Information:**

Karen Pugliesi, NAU  
Chad Sampson, ABOR

[karen.pugliesi@nau.edu](mailto:karen.pugliesi@nau.edu)  
[chad.sampson@azregents.edu](mailto:chad.sampson@azregents.edu)

928-523-1593  
602-229-2512

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4. Defining critical thinking to better reflect our intention for students to be able to engage in free inquiry, interpret multiple points of view, assess evidence, and advance reasoned points of view.
5. Conveying our clear expectation that General Education will include courses advancing civic knowledge, that emphasize the basic principles of American constitutional democracy, an understanding of the Constitution and America's founding documents, of major Supreme Court cases and of American economics.

The new program design has been adopted in accordance with NAU's curricular shared governance process. Pending ABOR approval, NAU will prepare for full implementation of the new General Studies Program in Fall 2025, effective for newly admitted students.

The proposed General Studies Program fulfills all aspects of ABOR's policy 2-210.

### **Committee Review and Recommendation**

The Academic Affairs and Educational Attainment Committee reviewed this item at its November 3, 2022 meeting and recommended forwarding the item to the full board for approval.

### **Statutory/Policy Requirements**

ABOR Policy 2-210, "General Education"

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**Request to Establish New Academic Program in Arizona**

**University:** Northern Arizona University

<b>Name of Proposed Academic Program:</b> Northern Arizona University's General Studies Program
<b>Academic Department:</b> The Office of the Provost
<b>Geographic Site:</b> All available sites of Northern Arizona University
<b>Instructional Modality:</b> All available modalities at Northern Arizona University
<b>Total Credit Hours:</b> 34
<b>Proposed Inception Term:</b> Fall 2025
<b>Brief Program Description:</b> <p>NAU's General Studies Program is designed to create well-rounded graduates who possess knowledge from a variety of disciplines and implement a range of crucial transferable skills.</p> <p>Students begin their journey with foundations in English and Mathematics. Students develop a firm understanding of traditional branches of knowledge by taking courses in each of the following areas: (a) Arts &amp; Humanities, (b) Social &amp; Political Worlds, (c) American Institutions, and (d) Scientific Literacy &amp; Methods. The American Institutions requirement engages students in advanced civics education centered on the constitutional democratic government and institutions of the United States. For each Knowledge Area, students will develop and apply fundamental capacities of critical thinking and methods of evaluation toward robust information literacy.</p> <p>Recognizing that students "must understand how the traditional branches of knowledge can be situated within a broad perspective that enables them to comprehend change, cultures and diverse experiences, and local and global regions," students will develop a range of intercultural competencies to foster success in the modern workforce and equip them as active and engaged citizens of their local, national, and global communities. Embedded within some of the Knowledge Area courses, knowledge and perspectives related to Indigenous Peoples, U.S. Ethnic, and Global diversity are meaningfully included.</p> <p>Understanding commonalities, differences, and changes experienced by groups and those they encounter in their careers and personal lives provides a strong foundation for civil dialogue and civic participation. Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples perspectives</p>

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aligns with NAU’s longstanding commitment to Indigenous students and communities, a priority reinforced in *NAU 2025 – Elevating Excellence*, and reflects NAU’s differentiated location and mission within Arizona’s public higher education enterprise.

**Alignment Map - Program Requirements to  
 General Studies Program Learning Outcomes**

<b>Program Requirements (11 courses)</b>	<b>General Studies Program Learning Outcomes</b>
<p><u>Knowledge Areas (9 courses)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts and Humanities (3 courses)</li> <li>• Scientific Literacy &amp; Methods (3 courses)</li> <li>• American Institutions (1 course)</li> <li>• Social and Political Worlds (2 courses)</li> </ul>	<p>Utilize a depth and breadth of Utilize a depth and breadth of knowledge to enrich focused disciplinary capabilities, foster civic engagement, and respond and adapt to real-world experiences.</p>
<p>Of the 9 required Knowledge Area courses, students will take 3 courses that embed <u>Inclusive Perspectives</u> (Indigenous Peoples, U.S. Ethnic, Global).</p>	<p>Understand lived experiences and perspectives that differ from their own, in order to engage in an inclusive workforce and contribute to equitable local, national and global communities.</p>
<p><u>Mathematics Foundations (1 course)</u></p> <p><u>Essential Skills</u> (Information Literacy, Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning, and Applications) are embedded in Knowledge Area courses.</p>	<p>Apply analytical thinking skills to:</p> <p>Interpret and analyze from multiple perspectives; withhold judgment until they have assessed the evidence; advance an argument; or problem-solve to suggest solutions.</p> <p>Use numerical, visual or symbolic reasoning for the purposes of drawing inferences, understanding phenomena or making predictions.</p> <p>Effectively find, evaluate, and use information.</p>
<p><u>English Foundations (1 course)</u></p> <p><u>Essential Skills</u> (Civil Discourse through Writing, Speaking and</p>	<p>Employ strategies of civil discourse to engage in constructive dialogue through speaking, writing and teamwork.</p>

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<p>Collaboration/Teamwork) are embedded in Knowledge Areas courses.</p>	
<p><u>Habits of Mind</u> (Curiosity, Intellectual Integrity, Persistence, Self-awareness) are embedded in all General Studies courses.</p> <p>Each major will demonstrate how they infuse, or incorporate, Ethics in a disciplinary-appropriate manner into their courses and degree requirements.</p>	<p>Integrate the habits of mind of curiosity, intellectual integrity, persistence, and self-awareness in their personal and professional lives.</p>

**Learning Outcomes and Assessment Plan**

NAU faculty practice outcomes assessment to understand what our students learned from our programs, and how to continue to adjust our methods and design to meet the learning needs of our students. The highest quality assessment that delivers the most useful results is a resource-heavy endeavor. NAU is grateful for the assessment funds provided by the Arizona Board of Regents, as these funds allow us to continue to use the successful design principles from our previous university-wide assessments of Writing, Critical Thinking, Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Scientific Inquiry.

NAU will initially focus our assessment on the areas articulated in ABOR policy: Writing, Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning and Civic Knowledge. Following the pilot assessment for Written Communication in AY 2021-2022, the Tri-University Assessment Working Group is planning a Quantitative Reasoning assessment and will subsequently conduct assessments of Civic Knowledge and Critical Thinking. NAU will adapt the common strategies for assessment of the skill areas to assess student learning through General Studies after implementation. We will also consider potential opportunities to expand university-wide assessment to encompass additional content and skill areas of the program.

**Four Assessment Areas**

**Writing**

**Learning Outcome:**

Write toward a context, purpose and audience; Develop content; Apply conventions of organization; and Apply conventions of syntax and mechanics.

**Assessment Endeavor:** Samples of writing artifacts were collected from courses across all disciplinary branches of the university at entry and exit points of the

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students' academic career (English Foundations and Capstone). Sampled artifacts were reviewed by faculty trained in using the Tri-U Writing Rubric.

### ***Critical Thinking***

#### Learning Outcome:

Critical thinking as applied in all courses will have students interpret and analyze from multiple perspectives, withhold judgment pending assessment of evidence, and advance an argument or problem solve to suggest solutions.

Assessment Endeavor: To be developed by Tri-University Assessment Working Group

### ***Quantitative Reasoning***

#### Learning Outcome:

Quantitative Reasoning is the application of numerical, visual or symbolic reasoning for the purposes of drawing inferences, understanding phenomena or making predictions.

Assessment Endeavor: To be developed by Tri-University Assessment Working Group

### ***Civic Knowledge***

#### Learning Outcomes:

- **An understanding of how the history of the United States continues to shape the present,**
- **The basic principles of American constitutional democracy and how they are applied under a republican form of government,**
- **An understanding of the United States Constitution and major American constitutional debates and developments,**
- **Knowledge of the essential founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of American institutions of self-governance,**
- **An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases and their effects on law and society, and**
- **The basic economic knowledge necessary to critically assess public policy options and to succeed professionally and personally.**

Assessment Endeavor: To be developed by Tri-University Assessment Working Group

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**Projected Enrollment for the First Three Years:**

NAU is planning for implementation of the revised program starting in AY25-26, thus first year students will enter under the new requirements; transfer students may elect to be in the new program.

As such, the following estimates reflect approximately 5,000 first year students, as well as ~500 lower division transfer students and ~500 upper division transfer students who would have the opportunity to begin taking the program in AY25-26. In subsequent years, we size up the enrollments using the same estimates.

- Year 1: AY 2025-2026: ~6,500
- Year 2: AY 2026-2027: ~13,000
- Year 3: AY 2027-2028: ~19,500

**Evidence of Market Demand:**

Throughout the examination of NAU's general education program, the task force and committees evaluated numerous studies of high-impact practices and what employers value in order to provide a solid design of the breadth of knowledge and skill development rooted in general education curricula. Detailed information may be found here:

- <https://www.aacu.org/2021-report-employer-views-higher-education>
- <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2018EmployerResearchReport.pdf>
- <https://www.aacu.org/aacu-news/newsletter/how-college-contributes-workforce-success>

Further, we note that our program requirements include the following high-impact practices recommended by the AAC&U. These high-impact practices foster student achievement and have been typically unavailable to underserved students:

- <https://www.aacu.org/node/4084>

**Similar Programs Offered at Arizona Public Universities:**

University of Arizona and Arizona State University will also provide general education programs that are aligned with ABOR's policy 2-210.

**Objection(s) Raised by Another Arizona Public University?** NA YES NO

**If Yes, Response to Objections:**

**New Resources Required? (i.e. faculty and administrative positions; infrastructure, etc.):**

Our capacity and implementation modeling suggest that we will need to consider how to redistribute existing resources, as well as identify specific areas to invest faculty lines, as we transition to the new program to meet student capacity.

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<b>Program Fee/Differentiated Tuition Required?</b>	YES	<u>NO</u>
<b>Specialized Accreditation?</b>	YES	<u>NO</u>