



Overview of State Policies on Lower-division General Education Core in the WICHE States

The WICHE **Interstate Passport Initiative**, launched in October 2011, is a pilot project that addresses interstate student transfer. When students transfer from one postsecondary institution to another – both within and out of state – they may be required to repeat courses, which can add to the time and cost of completing their education. Although most states have implemented intrastate policies aimed at streamlining pathways to graduation, these policies do not affect interstate transfer students. Working with five Western states – California, Hawai’i, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah – the Passport initiative attacks this issue toward the goal of improving graduation rates, shortening time to degree, and saving students money.

The Interstate Passport Initiative seeks to forge general education core transfer agreements between 28 institutions in the five partner states based on the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes, a quartet of targets that a college curriculum should aim to foster in students in order to prepare them for work, life, and strong citizenship. Already being adopted at a variety of colleges and universities, the LEAP outcomes were developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in concert with hundreds of institutions. On a regional level, the Passport initiative will introduce a new framework for transfer based on this outcomes work. The project will focus on the lower-division general education core, the common denominator among institutions – concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses – and will allow for a cross-border “match” of outcomes-integrated general education cores for block transfer. For this pilot phase of the Passport project, the general education core is defined as oral communication, written communication, and quantitative reasoning.

One of the Passport initiative’s main goals is to provide data and information for understanding the status of the general education core and its relationship to state transfer policies and patterns in the 15 WICHE states, the numbers of students who transfer among the WICHE states, the role of outcomes in defining the core, and the process by which change in policy occurs in each pilot state.* This document provides an overview on the current policies around the lower-division general education core in the WICHE states and presents the general education credits required in each state. By examining the existing policies and conducting our pilot project, we hope to highlight particular policies or practices that may be effective models for exploration and replication by other states; identify where some strategies might need to change in order to support the new transfer framework; and pinpoint likely places where the Passport Initiative may be expanded. (A companion piece to this document is *General Education Policies in the WICHE States*.)

* The 15 WICHE member states include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Specifically, data and information have been compiled on the following research objectives:

1. Identify existing policies in the WICHE states related to the general education core.
2. Identify the courses, criteria, or outcomes that compose the general education core in the WICHE states, as well as the similarities and gaps among states.
3. Identify the means by which higher education policy change is effected in the five pilot states.

Overview of General Education Policies

Of the 15 WICHE states, 11 have a statewide general education (gen ed) core: Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Washington. Four states – Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming – do not have a statewide gen ed core. Two of those states (Alaska, Idaho), however, have a systemwide gen ed core for their higher education institutions. Nevada has a statewide set of minimum credit requirements within certain disciplinary areas. Wyoming's one higher education institution (University of Wyoming, or UW) does have gen ed requirements, as well as articulation agreements with all Wyoming community colleges, ensuring that students transferring to UW have met the gen ed requirements.

Only three of the 15 WICHE states – California, Montana, and Utah – have identified and aligned student outcomes from the gen ed core to the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. The LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes cover four overarching areas:

1. Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world: through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.
2. Intellectual and practical skills.
3. Personal and social responsibility.
4. Integrative and applied learning.

Although not aligned with the LEAP outcomes, South Dakota's general education requirements are notable because they are not based on course requirements or credits but rather are designed to achieve seven specific student-learning goals approved by the board of regents. Briefly, these goals include the ability to write and communicate effectively; to understand human diversity and complexity through the arts and humanities and social sciences; to think and evaluate critically; and to understand the fundamental principles of the natural sciences.

General Education Core Curriculum: Credits and Courses

Among the WICHE states' gen ed core requirements, the terms used to describe the official unit of measurement vary, including *course credits*, *semester credits*, *quarter credits*, *semester hours*, *quarter hours*, *semester units*, *quarter units*, *hours*, *credit hours*, and *credits*. (See the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Glossary at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/?chartindex=C> for definitions of these terms.)

Typically, a gen ed course is equivalent to three semester credit hours. The required “units” for the core – whichever one is used in a particular state – range from 12 credits in Utah and Washington to 48 semester units in California. Table 1 below presents the gen ed core requirements in each WICHE state that has them, including three of the four states that do not have a statewide gen ed core. The requirements in Alaska, Idaho, and Wyoming apply to intrastate transfers between two- and four-year institutions.

| Table 1. General Education Core Requirements in WICHE States | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| State | Gen Ed Core Requirement | State | Gen Ed Core Requirement |
| Alaska* | 34 credits | New Mexico | 32-38 hours |
| Arizona | 35-37 course credits | North Dakota | 36 semester hours |
| California | 39 semester credits plus 9 upper-division semester credits | Oregon | 31 quarter credits |
| Colorado | 31 semester hours | South Dakota | 30 credit hours |
| Hawai'i | 31 credits | Utah | 12 credits |
| Idaho* | 36 credit hours | Washington | 12 credits |
| Montana | 30 semester credits | Wyoming* | 30-36 hours |
| Nevada* | Statewide set of minimum credit requirements | | |

*No statewide gen ed core.

Note: Passport pilot states are shaded.

The areas or disciplines that compose the gen ed core in 14 of the 15 WICHE states are as follows:

- Communication – written or oral.
- Humanities/social or behavioral sciences.
- Quantitative skills/critical thinking (includes mathematics in some states).
- Physical and natural sciences (includes mathematics in some states).

As noted, Nevada has a statewide set of minimum credit requirements; they are within the areas listed above (i.e., English, math, science, etc.).

Although the subject areas are generally the same in all states, the number of units required in each area varies by state and cannot easily be compared across states. Similarly, the specific courses offered within each area – and credits earned per course – vary significantly across the region. In addition, some states have specific course requirements for the gen ed core that fall within one of the areas listed above or may be in a separate category. Examples include:

- Lifelong learning and self-development (CA).
- Symbolic reasoning (HI).
- Multicultural skills (HI).
- Global and multicultural perspective (HI).
- Health and wellness (OR).
- Cultural diversity (MT).

Policies and Authority

The policies related to and authority over transfer and the gen ed core are different in each state, and most states have policies that deal with transfer in both statute and agency policy. In 11 of the 15 WICHE states, policies and regulations on general education and transfer rest with the board or system office. In four states – California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah – gen ed and transfer policies are part of state education legislation, although in these states the higher education board or department is authorized to oversee, implement, and make decisions about gen education.

The specific policies and authority for gen ed in the five Passport pilot states are presented in Table 2 below.

| State | Authority and Oversight | Policy Reference |
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| California | The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, the Regents of the University of California, and the Trustees of the California State University, with appropriate consultation with the Academic Senates of the respective segments, shall jointly develop, maintain, and disseminate a common core curriculum in general education courses for the purposes of transfer. Any person who has successfully completes the transfer core curriculum shall be deemed to have thereby completed all lower-division general education requirements for the University of California and the California State University. | CAL. EDC. CODE § 66720: See also, CAL. EDC. CODE § 66721 and California Code – Section 66720: http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/cacode/EDC/3/d5/40/9.2/1/s66720 ; http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/cacode/EDC/3/d5/40/9.2/1/s66721 . |
| Colorado | The Colorado Commission on Higher Education’s General Education Council (GE 25 Council) is responsible for recommending the criteria and framework for "statewide guaranteed general education courses," identifying general education assessments, and communicating the state criteria to the members’ respective institutions. | Colorado Department of Education Policies and Procedures, Section I, Part L, Statewide Transfer Policy: http://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Policies/Current/i-partl.pdf . Statutory authority: The transfer policy is based on statutory authority of Colorado Revised Statute 23-1-108 (7) (a); C.R.S. 23-1-108.5; C.R.S. 23-1-125; and C.R.S. 23-60-802. |
| Hawai’i | University of Hawai’i System: Campuses’ overall plans for general education are adopted by the UH Board of Regents. The intent is to ensure overall coordination of general education across UH campuses. All general education and core requirements are approved by the board, and any changes in concept or principle must receive prior board approval. | Executive policy: University of Hawai’i System, Student Transfer and Inter-Campus Articulation, Board of Regents Policy, Chapter 5, Section 5-12b: www.hawaii.edu/offices/bor/policy/ . See also: www.hawaii.edu/apis/ep/e5/e5209.pdf and www.hawaii.edu/offices/app/aa/articulation/JI_MOA.pdf . |

| State | Authority and Oversight | Policy Reference |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| North Dakota | The State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) is the policymaking body for the North Dakota University System and the state's 11 public colleges and universities. North Dakota University System procedures are used to implement SBHE policies. | <p>North Dakota State Board of Higher Education Policy Manual, Academic Affairs, Section 403.7 (Common General Education Requirement and Transfer of General Education Credits): www.ndus.edu/makers/procedures/sbhe/.</p> <p>See also: "Guide to Transfer Within the North Dakota University System": www.ndus.edu/uploads/resources/2712/gerta-2011-manual.pdf.</p> |
| Utah | The State Board of Regents establishes guidelines relating to the roles and relationships between institutional presidents and boards of trustees, including those matters which must be approved by a board of trustees before implementation by the president. | <p>Utah Code §53B-2-106(2)(c) (Direction of Instruction, Examination, Admission and Classification of Students); Utah Code §53B-16-102 (Changes in Curriculum): http://le.utah.gov/~code/TITLE53B/htm/53B02_010600.htm; http://le.utah.gov/~code/TITLE53B/htm/53B16_010200.htm.</p> <p>Utah System of Higher Education, State Board of Regents, Current Policies and Procedures, R470 (General Education, Common Course Numbering, Lower-Division Pre-Major Requirements, Transfer of Credits, and Credit by Examination): http://higheredutah.org/sbr/policy/pdf/R470.pdf.</p> |

After collecting this information from across the 15 WICHE states, it is clear that arriving at a common solution with regard to interstate transfer of a gen ed core will be complicated and require cooperation between the states. Even so, the common gen ed core subject areas in 14 of the 15 WICHE states can serve as starting point in the interstate agreement process. Also, the existing agreements within each state to facilitate student transfer between institutions demonstrate each state's commitment to student transfer and to smoothing the process toward degree completion.