EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Item Name: General Education Quality Review Series

☐ Action Item
☐ Committee Recommendation to Full Board
☐ First Read of Proposed Policy Change
☒ Information or Discussion Item

Issue: The board office asks that the committee engage in a strategic discussion with University Administrators in the first of a five-part review series on General Education Quality Assurance at the three Arizona state universities. Following the discussion, the board office asks that the committee determine next steps/course of action.

Enterprise or University Strategic Plan

☒ Empower Student Success and Learning
☒ Advance Educational Attainment within Arizona
☒ Create New Knowledge
☒ Impact Arizona
☐ Compliance
☐ Real property purchase/sale/lease
☐ Other:

Background/History of Previous Board Action
The board and university administrators have engaged in past discussions about general education quality at the three public Arizona state universities with the resulting review series beginning September of 2017.

Discussion
The board will discuss Part 1 of the General Education Quality Review series, which will highlight the purpose of general education programs, the structure, and the connections between general education and student development, the institutions’ mission and values, and the expected outcomes that general education curriculum contributes to producing the type of graduate that institutions seek to produce.

Requested Action
The board office asks that the committee engage in a strategic discussion with University Administrators in the first of a five-part review series on General Education Quality Assurance at the three Arizona state universities. Following the discussion, the board office asks that the committee determine next steps/course of action.

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GENERAL EDUCATION QUALITY REVIEW SERIES
ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS
UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION

The information provided in this document is derived from a broad quality project charged by the Arizona Board of Regents to ABOR staff and university presidents to accomplish the following:

PURSUIT OF QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

The EEC will design a Quality Framework for the public university enterprise and identify the key quality markers called for in the Enterprise Strategic Plan. The plan will consider:

1. Key Elements of Quality – How do we define quality in academics and other key aspects of our university enterprise? What quantitative and qualitative measures should we use to demonstrate quality?

2. Key Processes Used to Assure Quality – What are the major processes we use to assure quality in academics and other key operations of our university enterprise? How do we ensure consistent quality no matter which path of study a student chooses? What changes in policy or practice can be made to better assure quality?

3. Key External Measures of Quality – What outside sources and measurements do we look to that reflect quality in academics, research, scholarship and other key aspects of universities?

Part of the quality initiative is to identify general education program definitions, criteria, outcomes, and assessment of said programs. The charge is as follows:

The EEC will develop a review series for the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs committee that analyzes the essential elements of the General Education curriculum and how the General Education curriculum contributes to the essential knowledge and skills of undergraduates. The EEC will present changes in the delivery of General Education over time, the role of community colleges in the delivery of general education, and how quality is assured.

Ensuring quality in general education is a large scale process that includes faculty, department heads, deans, administrators, and provosts who all engage in the evaluation of courses and programs in the general education curriculum. These efforts are more necessary than ever as universities face remarkable challenges in the 21st century including: reduced state funding, growing enrollment, market demand, employer and stakeholder expectations, and the
preparation levels of incoming students in what is largely an open access environment. All of these factors highlight the need to demonstrate how universities ensure that general education meets quality goals and how those goals are assessed. 

*General education* for the purposes of this document refers to the common course requirements for all undergraduate students at the public universities in Arizona. This curriculum typically encompasses about one-fourth of undergraduate courses required to earn a bachelor’s degree, and although the universities assign unique labels to their general education programs, the goals and curriculum are similar and encompass courses in a variety of subject areas regardless of the student’s major (henceforth referred to as the General Education Program).

General education as a function of undergraduate liberal arts education falls within the purview of faculty. The rich history of general education curriculum has its roots in developments at Harvard University and other American private schools and has been a curricular tradition at both public and private universities across the nation for well over a century. As new knowledge has grown over time through faculty research, the curriculum has evolved to offer greater breadth, depth, and choice to university students.

On April 2, 2014, the three state universities submitted a document highlighting the value of liberal arts—specifically a liberal arts degree—but which nonetheless provides important information with regard to general education programs. The text below is taken directly from the document:

Findings from a 2013 Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) report describes what college graduates need to succeed in a global economy and clearly underscores the importance of a liberal arts education. Employers are seeking both broad knowledge and specific skills:

- 80% of employers agree that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, regardless of major.
- 95% of employers give hiring preference to college graduates with skills that will enable them to contribute in the workplace.
- 92% agree that “innovation is essential” to their organization’s success
- 93% of employers agree that candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.
- 75% want colleges and universities to place more emphasis on critical thinking, complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings.
- More than 90% want those they hire to demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity; intercultural skills; and the capacity for continued new learning.
- 74% would recommend a liberal arts education to a young person they know as the best
way to prepare for success in today’s global economy.

(Hart Research Associates, pp. 1 - 3)

The Arizona University System ensures that graduates have not only specific skills from their major field of study, but also broad knowledge through the required general education curriculum. Whether it is a liberal arts major or the general education program, employers’ strong preferences for the skills developed within the liberal arts highlight that students gain from this curriculum the important competencies that employers seek.

The review series will address the following questions at ASAC meetings throughout FY 2017-2018:

1. What criteria categorize a course as a general education course? (September)
2. What are goals and learning outcomes of the general education program? (September)
3. What are the quality indicators? (November)
4. How is student learning assessed in general education courses and programs, and what to do universities do with the results? (November)
5. How does general education quality assurance translate to transfer coursework? (February)
6. What innovations are being employed to improve general education instruction? (April)

**QUESTION # 1: WHAT CRITERIA CATEGORIZE A COURSE AS A GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE?**

In order to answer the first question, it is important to provide an overview of the general education program and of its constituent parts (distribution categories, skills, requirements, foundations, etc.). The mission of the General Education Program is to cultivate informed, responsible, productive, engaged, and self-reflective citizens of the world, and to provide opportunities for students to gain a breadth of knowledge and skills that complement the depth of knowledge and expertise that they acquire in their major.

What students need to know and be able to do upon graduation is the responsibility of the faculty. Collectively, university faculty decide the desired learning outcomes, both the essential content knowledge and the essential competencies or skills. A committee of faculty, the general education committee, representing all undergraduate colleges construct the framework for the general education requirements. The requirements may follow the disciplines normally found in a college of arts and science (humanities, social science, natural science, and the arts)
or may reflect an interdisciplinary approach (UA requirements follow, to some degree, this latter example).

Courses categorized as general education courses must demonstrate alignment with one of several categories related to key knowledge areas to gain a breadth of knowledge. Additionally, general education courses must incorporate at least one essential skill deemed to be of critical importance for well-educated and productive graduates.

While universities often have slightly different course requirements in the general education program, there are common disciplinary areas that are usually included. These are:

- foundation courses in English composition and mathematics, and sometimes in foreign language,
- distribution blocks, which require courses from humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, and
- courses that convey appreciation of cultural diversity, and sometimes global awareness.

Despite similarities, each university has a unique mission and therefore some variation in the philosophy behind the general education curriculum.

**Northern Arizona University’s general education purpose is as follows:**

The mission of the Liberal Studies Program is to cultivate informed, responsible, productive, engaged, and self-reflective citizens of the world. The purpose of the Liberal Studies Program is to provide opportunities for students to gain a breadth of knowledge and skills that complements the depth of knowledge and expertise that they acquire in their major.

[https://nau.edu/liberal-studies/](https://nau.edu/liberal-studies/) 2017

**University of Arizona’s general education purpose is as follows:**

General education programs provide breadth of knowledge as a balance and complement to the depth provided by the major. General education is designed to accomplish several goals: first, to afford students the opportunity to learn how different disciplines define, acquire and organize knowledge; second, to provide a basis for an examination of values; third, to develop analytic, synthetic, linguistic and computational skills useful for lifelong learning; and finally, to provide a common foundation for wide-ranging dialogue with peers on issues of significance. Taken together, the experiences of general education encourage the student to develop a critical and inquiring attitude, an appreciation of complexity and ambiguity, a tolerance for and empathy with persons of different backgrounds or values and a deepened sense of self. In short, the goal of the general education program is to prepare students to respond more fully and effectively to an increasingly complex world.
Arizona State University’s general education purpose is as follows:

All students enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program must successfully complete a minimum of 35 credit hours of approved General Studies courses. The General Studies requirement complements the undergraduate major by helping students gain mastery of critical learning skills, investigate the traditional branches of knowledge, and develop the broad perspective that frees one to appreciate diversity and change across time, culture, and national boundaries.

To help students achieve these educational goals, the General Studies Program includes five core areas and three awareness areas. The five core areas help students acquire critical lifelong learning skills and guide their exploration of the traditional branches of knowledge. The three awareness areas promote appreciation of cultural diversity within the contemporary United States, develop an international perspective, and foster an understanding of current human events through study of the past.


Also, the table below highlights the specific general education curriculum at each university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Arizona: General Education</th>
<th>Arizona State University: General Studies</th>
<th>Northern Arizona University: Liberal Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Five Core Areas of general studies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Foundations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• First-year writing (2 courses)</td>
<td>L: Literacy and Critical Inquiry</td>
<td>• English Composition (4 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mathematics</td>
<td>• Students must complete 3 credit hours</td>
<td>• Mathematics (3 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Second Language</td>
<td>from courses designated as L.</td>
<td>• Distribution Block Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier One</strong></td>
<td>• Students must have completed ENG</td>
<td>• AHIL: Aesthetic and Humanistic Inquiry (6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individuals &amp; Societies (2 courses)</td>
<td>1201, ENG 105 or ENG 107 to take an L</td>
<td>units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traditions &amp; Cultures (2 courses)</td>
<td>course.</td>
<td>• CU: Cultural Understanding (6 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Natural Sciences (2 courses)</td>
<td><strong>MA and CS: Mathematical Studies</strong></td>
<td>• Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Note: students with a major in one of</td>
<td>• Mathematics (MA) is the acquisition of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the sciences can satisfy their Natural</td>
<td>essential skills in basic math (3 credits</td>
<td>• SAS: Science and Applied Science (3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences requirement with their core</td>
<td>expected to be completed by 30 hours of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laboratory sciences courses.</td>
<td>resident ASU credit)</td>
<td>units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Computer/statistics/quantitative</td>
<td>• LAB: Science and Applied Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applications (CS) applies mathematical</td>
<td>with embedded Lab Science course (3-4 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reasoning (3 credits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>HU: Humanities, Arts and Design</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A total of 12 credits must be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>completed in HU and SB areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SB: Social-Behavioral Sciences</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
elective. Tier One courses cannot apply toward the major or minor. Tier One requirement should be completed by the end of the midpoint of the student’s degree program.

**Tier Two**
- Humanities (1 course)
- Individuals & Societies (1 course)
- Arts (3 units)
- Natural Sciences (1 course)

One study area may be satisfied by courses taken for the major. Each major identifies which study area is exempt (completed with major course work). Students must complete Tier Two requirements by the conclusion of their undergraduate degree.

**Diversity**
- One course must focus on one of the following areas: Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, or Non-Western Studies.
- May be filled by a designated Tier one or Tier two course, or by designated courses taken in the major/minor.

**Honors exception**
- Students selecting Honors Option must complete three courses in each study area as follows: 1 Tier one and 1 Tier two course in each study area in accordance with their degree program. The third required course in each study area is to be selected either from Tier one or Tier two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

**C: Cultural Diversity in the United States**
- Promotes awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity within the contemporary U.S. through the study of the cultural, social or scientific contributions of women and minority groups, examination of their experiences in the U.S., or exploration of successful or unsuccessful interactions between and among cultural groups.

**G: Global Awareness**
- Help students recognize the need for an understanding of the values, elements and social processes of cultures other than those of the U.S.

**H: Historical Awareness**
- Helps students develop knowledge of the past, which can be useful in shaping the present and future.

All students enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program must successfully complete a minimum of 29 credits of approved General Studies courses. Many General Studies courses are approved to satisfy more than one requirement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 6 credits must be taken in one of these two core areas.</td>
<td>The 12 credits required to meet the General Studies HU/SB requirement are in addition to the university level upper-division HU/SB requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ and SG: Natural Sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Quantitative (SQ)
- General (SG)
- 8 credits of courses designated SQ or SG must be selected. 
- At least 4 credits must be taken from the SQ category. |

**Three Awareness Areas of general studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SQ</td>
<td>Quantitative (SQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>General (SG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Diversity in the United States</td>
<td>8 credits of courses designated SQ or SG must be selected. At least 4 credits must be taken from the SQ category.</td>
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<td>Global Awareness</td>
<td>Help students recognize the need for an understanding of the values, elements and social processes of cultures other than those of the U.S.</td>
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**Junior Writing and Senior Capstone**

**Junior Level Writing Course**: courses designated with a W at the end of the course number. Junior level writing courses engage students in the writing process in the context of a discipline or profession.

**Senior Capstone**: designated with a C at the end of the course number. Capstone courses are culminating experiences in the major that involve students in application, synthesis, practice, or inquiry.
Each of the Arizona universities have a slightly different set of learning outcomes, but the learning outcomes expected from general education include competencies in:

- critical thinking and problem solving,
- communication: written and oral, and may include
- quantitative reasoning,
- value for cultural and individual differences, and
- use of information effectively, ethically and responsibly.

General education courses are developed and taught by faculty to meet one of the requirements within the general education framework. Depending on university policies, some general education courses also may be applied for major credit. Courses typically retain the course prefix of the academic program delivering the course. In this respect, the framework for delivering general education courses is integrated throughout the university’s curriculum and not housed within a separate unit responsible only for general education.

The competencies that students begin to develop in general education are expanded and strengthened in students’ majors. General education sometimes, but not always, serves as the foundation skills needed to prepare for a major. However, it is more often the case that the skills are developed simultaneously as students move through the baccalaureate curriculum. In other words, a student does not always complete general education coursework and then follow that with major course work; often these courses are taken during the same semester. Also, to further develop written communication skills, writing emphasis courses are embedded in the major curriculum. Once the university faculty develops the framework for the general education program, a standing general education committee manages the general education program by reviewing and approving new courses and reviewing existing courses on a regular basis.

The general education committee ensures that the courses consistently impart broad knowledge and skills to students that universities believe every college-educated person should possess. Part of the review includes specific elements that departments, colleges, the general education committee, and provost identify including a syllabus with detailed course descriptions/content, learning outcomes, textbook/readings, grading structure; writing component; assignments; and learning outcomes. The general education committee may also be involved in producing a plan for assessment of course, program, and institution-wide learning outcomes. The same committee or other faculty participate in the assessment, reporting the findings, and making suggestions for improvement.

**The process is outlined below**:  

1 If the evaluation is approved, the request moves forward. If it is denied at any point in the workflow, the request goes back to the originator (with reasons and feedback), and the faculty member may make adjustments and resubmit.
1. Department/College
   a. Faculty initiates new course request
      i. Online request form filled out and submitted
         1. Includes draft syllabus:
            a. Detailed course description/content
            b. learning outcomes
            c. writing component description
            d. textbook/readings
            e. grading structure
            f. assignments
   b. Departmental committee evaluates
   c. Department head evaluates
   d. College dean evaluates
2. University General Education Committee
   a. Committee evaluates each request
      i. Writing Component
      ii. Assignments
      iii. Learning outcomes accounted for
      iv. Written/Oral communication
      v. Critical thinking
      vi. Quantitative reasoning
      vii. Understanding of ethics
      viii. Inquiry
      ix. Creative thinking
3. Provost’s Office
   a. Provost conducts final evaluation for approval

QUESTION #2: WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES OF GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES AND PROGRAMS?

As designed, the general education program has a set of student learning outcomes. The general education courses follow the framework originally designed for the program. The courses fit within the framework to help the student gain knowledge and skills that the

2 Not all general education learning outcomes are included in each course; these learning outcomes are accomplished across multiple courses at the program level and are dependent on discipline.
institution expects of its graduates. In addition, each block or discipline represented within the general education program has additional learning outcomes specific to that discipline. For example, quantitative reasoning would be an expected learning outcome from the mathematics foundation requirement and likely also from a natural science general education course. The requirement for multiple courses in each distribution block ensures breadth, engagement over time, and exposure to the full range of skills.

The section below gives examples of general education learning outcomes, content, and competencies. These descriptions are system-wide and may not capture exactly the outcomes of each individual university, as there as some variation.

**EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES: CONTENT AND COMPETENCIES**

**GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES**

The general education outcomes at the Universities are as follows and these outcomes are the elements of quality of general education programs:

**Critical and Scientific Thinking**

Critical thinking includes the skills--particularly as applied to one's own work--of articulating the meaning of a statement, judging the truth of a statement while keeping in mind possible biases, and determining whether a conclusion is warranted by the evidence provided.

**Effective Writing**

Effective writing conveys information or argues a point of view using organizational structures, supporting materials, and language appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience.

**Effective Oral Communication**

Effective oral communication influences, informs, and/or connects with others by using organizational structures, supporting materials and delivery skills suitable to the topic, occasion and audience.

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

**Creative or Aesthetic Thinking**

Creative or Aesthetic Thinking includes the skills of (1) artistic expression characteristic of the works of the fine, performing and literary arts, (2) analyzing and interpreting works of the artistic expression in systematic detail, or (3) processes of generating and evaluating innovative approaches to problem solving regardless of discipline.

**PROGRAM DESIGN**

General education programs at the universities may offer different courses and even label categories differently, but they all share these common curricular categories and descriptions overall:

**ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

Arts and Humanities: Study the human condition through philosophical inquiry and the analysis of creative expression. Courses in this category involve students in the study of the human condition through philosophical inquiry and analysis of the various forms of creative expression. These courses help students develop an understanding of the relationship between context and human creative expression, major conceptual frameworks utilized to make sense of the creative arts, and how human experience and values are expressed through creative endeavors. Students also develop their capacities for analysis and ethical reasoning along with an understanding of the multiple facets of the human condition.

**CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**

Cultural Understanding: Courses in this category enhance students’ understanding of different cultures of the world through the study of language, literature, religion and artistic creations or other disciplines. These courses provide students with an experience of diverse cultures (different from their own), and an analytic framework that facilitates awareness of how cultures vary and shape human experience. Students become more familiar with cultures of the world and develop an appreciation for the unique features and perspectives of varied cultural traditions.
SCIENCE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

Science and Applied Science: Courses in this category increase students’ understanding of the natural world and the impact of technology on the human condition and the natural world. In addition, these courses increase students’ knowledge of important theories, concepts, and taxonomies that are central to scientific disciplines and the application of scientific knowledge and technologies to problem solving. Students will also learn to employ the logic and techniques of scientific inquiry and thereby develop an understanding of the basis and limits of contemporary scientific knowledge as well as the impact of technology on the human condition and the natural world.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Social Science: Courses in this category engage students in the study of the patterns that characterize the history of human communities, the relationships between the psychological, social, cultural and political components of human communities and dynamics of human behavior in varied contexts. Students learn how different empirical and theoretical strategies are employed to study human behavior and social, political, and cultural systems. These courses enhance student understanding of the dynamic relationships between human communities and their ecological context, the systematic components and dynamics of contemporary human societies, relationships between human societies in the global community, and the major dimensions of variation in contemporary human experience.

QUESTIONS FROM REGENTS FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS:

- How do the general education courses contribute to the larger purpose of education in your institutions?
- How does your general education program reflect the mission and values of your university?
- How does the general education program help shape your students into the type of graduate you want to produce?
- How does the general education program connect with the learning outcomes of your majors?
- How does the presence of so many course options contribute to the goals of general education?
What’s Next in November?

In November, the committee materials will include information the identified quality indicators of their general education programs as well as the program assessment methodologies used including the measures, instruments, and tools used to assess program outcomes.

NOTES