

# General Education Act: Model Legislation

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## Introduction

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American universities always have recognized citizens' authority to shape the educational mission of public universities, particularly with respect to "general education"—courses prerequisite to graduation. Appointed or elected university trustees usually represent the citizenry. Trustees set the strategic direction of public universities and create or ratify general education requirements. From time to time, state legislatures do the same. Academic freedom grants professors a large degree of authority over the content of their own individually designed courses. Yet academic freedom does not entitle a professor's individually designed course to be counted toward the fulfillment of a general-education requirement. The public's representatives rightly decide that matter.

In the last generation, the American public justly has lost confidence in the higher education establishment's judgment about general education. They no longer wish to defer to faculty and education administrators who advance their personal politics under the guise of academic expertise. Several state

legislatures already have begun to exercise their legitimate authority over the content of general education; the rest should join suit. The failure of public universities to nurture a robust marketplace of ideas, the entrenched conflict between the specialized research interests of faculty and the educational needs of students, and inaction by too many boards of trustees, mean that reform is now impossible without action by legislators in the public interest.

In the past 60 years, American universities abandoned traditional general education requirements that gave students shared knowledge of the history, civilization, and ideals and institutions of America and the West, as well as a proper introduction to science, mathematics, and composition. They substituted distribution requirements, which students could choose to satisfy from a cafeteria menu of courses, with gravely deleterious effects for the students, for the universities, and for America.

The model General Education Act (GEA) proposes a thorough reform of the failed system of cafeteria-style distribution requirements geared to faculty research specialties, rather than to the true requisites of liberal education. GEA first creates a new, independent School of General Education at a selected state university, which will assume responsibility

for all general education courses, and provides a three-year transition from the old system of general education to the new. GEA then specifies that the general education requirements at a selected state university will consist of a core curriculum of thirteen courses, including Western History, Western Humanities, World Civilizations, United States History, United States Government, and United States Literature, and comprising 42 semester hours. GEA finally states that the university may add no further general education requirements.

GEA restores a common civic education to the center of American public university education—a common civic education that includes examination of fundamental moral and philosophical questions via a study of the history and the greatest books of Western civilization, and the world. America’s public universities enthusiastically supported such common civic education for one hundred fifty years and more, and the creation of a new School and a new core curriculum revives America’s proudest educational tradition. Distribution requirements, at best, have replaced preparation to be a free citizen with pre-professional preparation in the social sciences or the sciences. Public universities’ first duty to the citizens who fund them is to educate their children to assume their role as citizens. So too is public universities’ duty to their students. Universities can provide no greater gift to their students than to teach them about their country and its ideals.

Americans now disagree profoundly about how best to understand the intellectual and historical traditions of America, the West, and the world. Universities must remain free to expose their students to contrasting points of view on these issues. Yet universities only can assign a limited number of general education requirements. They must choose which courses to designate as fundamental components of liberal education and their choice inevitably will register decisions about importance and values. Public universities, which depend upon and serve the citizenries of their states, must and should articulate the state citizenries’ fundamental values. The public, through its representatives, rightly can and should determine

general education requirements. A public university’s choice whether to require courses in critical theory or in Western civilization proceeds from underlying value commitments rather than from academic expertise. The public’s representatives therefore have both a right and obligation to make these decisions, as they have done in the past, and as they do now with increasing frequency.

Contemporary administrators’ and professors’ philosophical preference for courses shaped by the faculty’s highly specialized research interests alienates them from the philosophy behind traditional general education. Faculty and administrative resistance therefore frequently has undermined legislators and trustees who direct universities to strengthen traditional liberal education. This unfortunate history makes it necessary to specify the content of required general education courses in a way that clearly states and enforces legislative intent. The model GEA does this by offering clear descriptions of topics to be covered, and by establishing a new School of General Education at a selected public university and by recruiting to that School a faculty with both expertise and interest in the classic general education tradition. The new School of General Education also will have graduate students, and will be able to grant them advanced degrees. This will generate a body of scholars able to staff similar programs in a state university system and in other states.

The creation of a School of General Education designed to revive the tradition of classical liberal education will constitute, for almost any public university that adopts this program, a fundamental shift in educational mission. This broad strategic reorientation will necessitate the discontinuance of some existing academic programs, including some currently existing tenure lines. It is economically unworkable to reconfigure general education substantially, by hiring new faculty with the expertise required to carry out that shift, without shrinking a comparable number of existing programs and faculty. The model GEA provides for this shift. The model also provides for some existing faculty to be granted appointments that would allow them to

teach courses under the auspices of the new School of General Education. The key consideration in staffing will be expertise and interest in traditional liberal education.

Traditional liberal education belongs to no single ideology or political party. While too many contemporary academics reject this educational tradition, both liberals and conservatives take inspiration from the tradition of classic liberal education. Traditional general education, after all, dedicates itself to exposing students to the intellectual and historical sources of our pluralist moral, philosophical, and political beliefs, thereby allowing them to develop their own views by learning the best evidence and arguments for all these varying convictions. The charter of the newly established School of General Education highlights the value of intellectual pluralism and welcomes the free, fearless, and civil differences of opinion that naturally exist in any university community.

- GEA achieves its goals in harmony with universities' vital role to prepare students for careers and to ensure American prosperity.
- GEA's specified core curriculum only includes 42 semester hours, which is very practicable for a bachelor's degree. Indeed, public universities that use distribution requirements frequently impose far more onerous general education requirements on students. GEA's core curriculum will reduce the burden of time and tuition on many students.
- GEA, moreover, recognizes that students pursuing a Bachelor of Science, as opposed to a Bachelor of Arts degree, frequently need an intensive professional preparation, and often have fewer free classes. We have reduced from 13 to 10 the number of required courses for students seeking a BS.
- GEA also allows universities to add up to two courses in a foreign language requirement. Universities should be free to add foreign language preparation to general education requirements—and free to decide that it is not necessary.

We have drafted GEA to be the first step of what should be a broader program of educational reform. It will take some years to establish the School at a selected state university. As that is accomplished, we suggest the following complementary reforms:

- Ensure that all core curriculum courses can be transferred throughout the state public university system.
- Foster dual credit courses in these core curriculum courses by supporting K-12 teacher professional development and other incentives to ensure that high school students can take as many general education courses as possible before going to college.
- Select an accreditor for the selected state university whose mission and experience suits it to accredit a traditional liberal arts core curriculum.

We also have drafted GEA so that it can be modified to suit different states. We use phrases such as **{govern- ing board}** to allow policymakers to select between university boards, state boards, or other bodies. The entire governance structure of the School of General Studies should be modified to fit local conditions.

Yet we urge policymakers to focus on two aspects of the School.

- The School's success depends on having both a university president and a Dean of the School of General Education who are truly committed to the traditional ideal of general education, since the president is solely responsible for the appointment of the dean and the dean is solely responsible for establishing the School. Policymakers must ensure that the Board of Trustees (or other responsible authority) rapidly installs a president fully committed to traditional general education, if such a president is not already in place.
- Given the record of administrative and faculty resistance to traditional general education requirements, we have specified

that the Board of Trustees shall report regularly to state policymakers about the progress of the School. State policymakers, especially those in specifically tasked committees, also must continue to exercise oversight, to ensure that universities faithfully carry out the legislature’s

intention in passing a bill along the lines of this model.

A properly supported School of General Education can remake our public universities into what they once were—the keystones of the American republic.

## General Education Act: Model Legislative Text

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WHEREAS, undergraduate students should acquire the knowledge that will help them to comprehend the foundational ideals and the workings of the American republic and of {State} to enable them to contribute to their country as informed, self-reliant, and public-spirited citizens; now therefore,

BE IT ENACTED:

### SECTION A [School of General Education]

1. The {**Board of Trustees**} shall establish the School of General Education as an independent academic unit within the {**Selected State University**}. The School of General Education shall conduct teaching and research on the theory and practice of general education education in the classic Western liberal arts tradition, and shall be responsible for designing and teaching all general education courses at the university, except for those in the sciences, mathematics, economics, or foreign languages.
2. The school shall establish bylaws requiring the school to do all of the following:
  - A. Educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth;
  - B. Affirm its duty to equip students with the civic and intellectual virtues they need to reach their own informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance;
  - C. Affirm the value of intellectual diversity in higher education and aspire to enhance the intellectual diversity of the university; and
  - D. Affirm a commitment to create a community dedicated to an ethic of civil and free inquiry, which respects the intellectual freedom of each member, supports individual capacities for growth, and welcomes the differences of opinion that shall naturally exist in a public university community.

The requirement prescribed under divisions (A)(2)(a) to (d) of this section shall take priority over any other bylaws, mission statement, value, or other goal adopted by the school.

3. The school shall offer instruction in all of the following:
  - A. All undergraduate general education courses placed under the authority of the school by this act;
  - B. The books and major debates which form the intellectual foundations of free countries, especially that of the United States;
  - C. The principles, ideals, and institutions of law, liberty, and civic virtue that underpin the American constitutional order;
  - D. The foundations of public-spirited leadership and informed citizenship;
  - E. The books, major debates, history, and culture that have shaped ways of life and belief in the West, especially the West's enduring culture of liberty, with attention to culturally formative phenomena outside the West;
  - F. The Western tradition of liberal education, from its roots in ancient Greece through the theory and practice of liberal education in nineteenth-century America and Europe, to the present; and
  - G. The question of how best to extend and apply the tradition of classic liberal education to the present, at the undergraduate level, and in secondary and continuing education as well.
4. The School of General Education shall be an independent academic unit with the authority to house tenure-track faculty who hold their appointments within the school. Faculty appointed to the school shall not be required, but may, hold joint appointments within any other division of the university. Each academic year the dean of the School of General Education shall propose the number of tenure-track faculty positions, lecturer positions, adjunct faculty positions, and graduate assistant positions that shall be allotted to teach under the school, subject to approval by the **{governing board}**. The dean of the school may approve the voluntary joint appointment of a faculty member housed within any other division of the university to the School of General Education for a term of up to three years, renewable at the discretion of the dean. No faculty outside of the school shall have the authority to block faculty hires or appointments into the school, the granting of tenure or promotion, or any other condition of faculty employment.
5. Only faculty appointments within the School of General Education may teach general education courses outside the areas of science, mathematics, economics, or foreign languages.
6. Not later than one full academic year after the passage of this act, a dean of the School of General Education shall be appointed.
7. Not later than two full academic years after passage of this act, entering freshmen at the university will be responsible for completing, prior to graduation, the following eight general education requirements as described in this act in Section B: Mathematics Required Course, Laboratory Science Required Course, Western History I, Western History II, United States History I, Introduction to Economics, Western Humanities I, and Western Humanities II. No later than two full academic years after passage of this act, the faculty of the School of General Education shall begin to teach the afore listed eight general education courses, except for those in mathematics, science, and economics.
8. Not later than three full academic years after passage of this act, entering freshmen at the university shall be responsible for completing, prior to graduation, all general education requirements imposed by this act in Section B. Not later than three full academic years after passage of this act, the School

of General Education faculty shall begin to teach all those general education courses for which it is responsible, as specified in this act.

9. The School of General Education shall be administered by a dean, for whose hiring the president of the university has direct and sole responsibility, subject to approval by the **{governing board}**. The dean shall have the protection of tenure or tenure eligibility and shall report directly to the president of the university.
10. The Dean of the School of General Education shall have the authority to manage the recruitment and hiring process and to extend offers of employment, or joint appointment within the school, for all faculty and staff of the school, subject to approval by the university president and **{governing board}**. The dean may offer teaching and research positions, stipends, fellowships, awards, and any other form of remuneration to graduate students in any academic unit within the **{Selected State University}**, for a term of one year, renewable at the dean's discretion. The dean shall oversee and approve the development of the school's curriculum by the school's faculty, and ensure that the general education courses the school is responsible for are consistent with the terms of this act. The school shall be granted authority to offer courses and develop certificate, minor, and major programs as well as graduate programs, and offer degrees.
11. The Dean of the School of General Education shall submit an annual report to the **{university governing board}**, the **{governing board of the State Public University System}**, and to the general assembly. The report shall provide a full account of the school's budget, achievements, opportunities, challenges, and obstacles in the development of this academic unit.
12. The adoption of a specific set of graduation requirements organized around the history, great works, and civic culture of the West as a whole, and the United States in particular, constitutes a long-term, fundamental shift in the educational mission and strategy of the **{Selected State University}**. As the faculty and teaching duties of the School of General Education increase in size, the university shall reduce faculty in divisions outside the School of General Education to a corresponding degree, through program discontinuance or substantial curtailment, as deemed necessary by the **{governing board}**.
13. The **{governing board}** may, with appropriate notice, discharge any faculty member and eliminate the position when such an action is deemed necessary due to a budget or program decision regarding program discontinuance or substantial curtailment consequent to this act. Such decisions are the responsibility of the **{governing board}** alone and are not subject to faculty review.
14. Each chamber of the state legislature shall assign to an existing or to a new committee or subcommittee the responsibility to conduct oversight on the School of General Education, and on all further Schools of General Education that are established within the **{State Public University System}**.
15. No later than **{Month Day, Year}**, the **{Board of Trustees}**, and every two years thereafter, the **{governing board}** shall report to the **{new committee or subcommittee}** on progress made toward establishing the School of General Education consistent with the intent of this Act and factors affecting the long-term sustainability of the School.

## SECTION B [General Education Requirements]

Students at the {**Selected State University**} may only receive a bachelor's degree if they complete a core curriculum of 42 semester credit hours, subject to the exceptions noted in Section (B)(6)(B) and Section (B)(8) of this act.

1. This core curriculum shall include the following 13 introductory survey courses:
  - A. A 3 semester credit hour course of Rhetoric and English Composition, which shall include grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and substantial readings from works devoted to rhetoric and composition by figures such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Hugh Blair, and aim to instruct students to produce correct and lucid academic writing.
  - B. A 3 semester credit hour Mathematics Required Course, which may only be Precalculus, Mathematical Logic, Probability, Introduction to Statistics, or Calculus I.
  - C. A 4 semester credit hour Laboratory Science Required Course, which may only be Introduction to Biology, Introduction to Chemistry, or Introduction to Physics.
  - D. A 3 semester credit hour course of Western History I 3000 B.C.–1450, which shall be a broad survey course with concentration on Athens and the Greek polis to 404 B.C., the Roman Republic and Empire, the rise of Christianity, Medieval Western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and medieval English legal and constitutional history, including Magna Carta, common law, and Parliament.
  - E. A 3 semester credit hour course of Western History II 1450 to 2000, which shall be a broad survey course with concentration on the Renaissance, the Reformation, the development of parliamentary democracy in Britain, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution in Britain, Western science, and the rise and fall of the Soviet state and Nazi Germany in the twentieth century.
  - F. A 3 semester credit hour course of United States History I 1607–1877, which shall be a broad survey course exploring the development of America's republican form of government from the colonial period through 1877, with particular attention to the Founding, as well as issues of politics, economics, technological progress, war, and foreign policy, and to include a comparison between the progress of democratic representation in the United States and the rest of the world.
  - G. A 3 semester credit hour course of United States Government, which shall explore the founding principles of natural rights, liberty, equality, representative democracy, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, and constitutional self-government as they have played out over America's history, chiefly through the study of original source material, to include primarily substantial selections from documents published by Ohio's Ashbrook Center, including the contemporary documents that established and explained America's independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, and later documents that illustrate America's constitutional history and structure.
  - H. A 3 semester credit hour course of United States Literature I 1607–1914, which shall explore substantial selections from works of first-rank literary quality and enduring literary influence, often called Great Books, with readings that include religious literature, novels, short stories, poems, essays, and memoirs.
  - I. A 3 semester credit hour course of Introduction to Economics, which shall include supply and demand, market competition, economic growth, trade, taxation, externalities, and public goods.

- J. A 3 semester credit hour course of one of the following courses:
- a. Founding Ideas of Western Liberty, which shall explore influential conceptions of liberty written in the 17th through 19th centuries, with readings to include at least substantial selections from works by figures such as John Locke, Adam Smith, Montesquieu, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville on political liberty, religious liberty, economic liberty, common law, the nature of republican government, and the American fusion of liberty, republican government, civic virtue, and democracy; or
  - b. Founding Traditions of Western Art, which shall explore the history of Western fine arts from ancient Greece to the twentieth century, with readings to include at least substantial selections from figures such as Aristotle, Alberti, Vasari, Winckelmann, and Ruskin, on music, painting, sculpture, and architecture; and shall expose students to the study of exemplary masterpieces of Western fine arts in genres including music, painting, sculpture, and architecture.
  - c. Founding Ideas of Western Economics, which shall explore influential works of economic theory written in the 18th through 20th centuries, with readings to include at least substantial selections from works by figures such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Carl Menger, John Maynard Keynes, and Milton Friedman, on economy-wide phenomena such as markets, international trade, economic growth, inflation, the role of state fiscal and monetary policies, labor, and changes in unemployment.
- K. A 4 semester credit hour course of Western Humanities I 1000 B.C.–1450, which shall explore substantial selections from works of first-rank literary quality and enduring literary and philosophical influence, often called Great Books, with readings by figures such as Plato, Augustine, Dante, and the troubadours that include the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, Homeric epic, Greek philosophy, Greek tragedy, and medieval literature, and which includes a 1 semester credit hour component of English composition, which shall aim to instruct students to produce correct and lucid academic writing on the works taught in this course.
- L. A 4 semester credit hour course of Western Humanities II 1450–1950, which shall explore substantial selections from works of first-rank literary quality and enduring literary and philosophical influence, often called Great Books, with readings by figures such as Martin Luther, Teresa of Avila, William Shakespeare, Michel de Montaigne, Miguel de Cervantes, John Donne, and Jane Austen that include Catholic and Protestant religious literature, drama, essays, poetry, and novels, and approximately equal coverage of each of the five centuries between 1450 and 1950, and which includes a 1 semester credit hour component of English composition, which shall aim to instruct students to produce correct and lucid academic writing on the works taught in this course.
- M. A 3 semester credit hour course of World Civilizations, which shall be a broad survey course covering the distinctive history, culture, literature, and social structure of at least four nations or culture areas to be selected from among China, India, the Islamic Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Russia, Japan, and Southeast Asia, with concentration on a representative country or countries permitted when a given culture area is under consideration.
2. General education courses in the humanities and social sciences, where appropriate, shall explore and highlight the theme of Western liberty and republican self-government, its historical sources, strengths and weaknesses, 20th century challenges from communism and fascism, contrasts with non-Western systems of government, its distinctive features in the United States, and its spread beyond the West.



3. General education history survey courses, where appropriate, shall incorporate substantial selections from works of first-rank literary quality and enduring literary and philosophical influence, often called Great Books.
4. No core curriculum course shall require, include, or award course grading or credit to, student work for, affiliation with, or service learning in association with, any organization engaged in lobbying for legislation at the local, state, or federal level, or in social or public policy advocacy.
5. No core curriculum course shall require, include, or award course grading or credit to, lobbying for legislation at the local, state, or federal level, or any practicum, action project, or like activity involving social or public policy advocacy.
6. The university shall offer both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees.
  - A. More rigorous introductions to biology, chemistry, and physics may be devised to satisfy the Laboratory Science Required Courses requirement for students aiming for a Bachelor of Science.
  - B. Bachelor of Science degree holders may choose not to take these core curriculum courses: United States Literature I 1607–1914, Western Humanities II 1450–1950, Founding Ideas of Western Liberty, Founding Traditions of Western Art, and Founding Ideas of Western Economics.
7. The core curriculum courses detailed in Section A, Subsection 7 shall be the only general education requirement for students at the **{Selected State University}** who wish to receive an associate degree.
8. The core curriculum courses detailed in Section B shall be the only general education requirement for students at the **{Selected State University}** who wish to receive a bachelor’s degree, except that **{the governing board}** may also require 3 to 6 semester credit hours of foreign language courses.
9. The dean of the School of General Education, with the approval of the **{governing board}**, may allow students to satisfy core curriculum requirements with early college courses, including advanced placement courses, dual credit courses, and dual enrollment courses.
10. Under the supervision, and with the approval of, its dean, the School of General Education shall develop a set of learning outcomes consistent with the school’s purpose and bylaws as defined by this act. The core curriculum courses detailed in Section B will be exempt from all administrative policies that affect course content, including learning outcomes, curricular themes, and areas of knowledge, except those developed by the School of General Education in conformity with the terms of this act.

### SECTION C [Transfer Students]

The **{Board of Trustees}** shall direct the president of the **{Selected State University}**, and the other presidents of the colleges and universities of **{Public University System}** to enable transfer of students to the **{Selected State University}**, by:

1. offering regularly and sufficiently every core curriculum course described in Section B, Subsection 1;
2. identifying and encouraging the offering of courses at other **{Public University System}** or **{Community College System}** campuses that can be counted for transfer credit.
3. establishing all administrative means necessary to integrate student transfer to the **{Selected State University}** with the requirements of this act; and

4. providing that any student who transfers from any school to the **{Selected State University}** within seven academic years from the effective date of this act may fulfill their general education requirements in one of the three following ways:
  - A. by taking the program of general education specified in this act;
  - B. by taking the courses that satisfied general education requirements at the **{Selected State University}** immediately prior to passage of this act:
  - C. by any combination of the requirements referenced in Section C(4)(a) and C(4)(b) above that is approved by the Dean of the School of General Education.

#### **SECTION D [Separability]**

If any provision of this chapter, or the application of any provision to any person or circumstance, is held to be invalid, the remainder of this chapter and the application of its provisions to any other person or circumstance shall not be affected thereby.