

Dear Members of the North Dakota State Senate,

As faculty members educating the future workforce, it is our hope that this letter clearly conveys the impact HB-1220 would have on North Dakota constituents and future workforce. General education programs play a vital role in the development of individuals' critical thinking skills, creativity, and ability to communicate, which are essential to both individual success and contributing to the economic prosperity of our state and nation. Additionally, these programs provide exposure to the liberal arts, cultivating civically engaged individuals who actively contribute to the progress and well-being of the State of North Dakota.

General education is often rooted in liberal arts education, which fosters a breadth of knowledge across disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, and the arts, encouraging students to think analytically, engage in civil discourse, and understand diverse perspectives. These skills are essential in a world where adaptability and innovation are paramount. Employers consistently seek graduates who can reason effectively, articulate their ideas clearly, and navigate constantly changing work environments—competencies deeply rooted in a liberal arts education.

Eliminating coursework in these fields would have significant negative repercussions. Without exposure to humanities and social sciences, students may struggle with the critical soft skills that drive effective leadership, ethical decision-making, and collaborative teamwork. Businesses and industries—especially in the technology, healthcare, and public sectors—rely on employees who can synthesize information, craft compelling arguments, and understand the human experience. By narrowing educational opportunities, we risk producing a North Dakota workforce that is technically proficient but lacks the adaptability and interpersonal skills necessary to thrive in dynamic work environments.

Moreover, these programs contribute to civic engagement and a deeper understanding of democracy. Students who study history and political science, for example, are better equipped to participate in informed discussions about governance and policy. North Dakota will benefit from informed citizens who can analyze policies, engage in meaningful discourse, and advocate for social change. Additionally, the liberal arts encourage a commitment to the common good, empowering people to participate in civic life, vote responsibly, and contribute to the democratic process through public service and community leadership. Cutting these courses would hinder our ability to cultivate responsible, engaged citizens who appreciate the complexities of societal challenges and are prepared to address them with thoughtful, ethical solutions.

In a 2021 study conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), employers indicated that they placed a higher value on employees with values such as creative thinking, civic skills, leadership, and empathy. The report describes the need for a strong core curriculum that aligns with the program curriculum to enhance skills, mindsets, and aptitudes that employers deem necessary for success in the workplace. The AAC&U states that, in today's society, these skills are needed more now than before, in addition to employees' technical skills. Similarly, Burning Glass Technologies, a firm producing job market analytics, found that employers are willing to pay higher wages for employees with leadership, communication, and writing skills. In order for North Dakota to remain competitive in the workforce and retain employees in the state, it is vital that we equip graduates with the skills desired by employers at the state and national levels.

We urge you to protect and support the inclusion of general education and liberal arts within our higher education systems, so students are prepared not only for the jobs of today but also for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We hope you will stand in support of policies that uphold the value of a well-rounded education and ensure that future generations benefit from the intellectual and professional advantages that the liberal arts provide.

Sincerely,

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