

North Dakota General Education Council

The North Dakota General Education Council urges a **NO vote on HB 1220**.

Our council appreciates the desire to promote programs that allow students to complete degrees related to high-demand fields in a shorter time frame. However, HB 1220, *even though it would be optional rather than mandated*, is not the best way to meet this need. The proposed legislation encourages the development of reduced-credit programs which eliminate general education requirements. This is problematic because:

- **Eliminating general education requirements endangers the accreditation of North Dakota's institutions of higher education by the Higher Learning Commission.** The HLC requires institutions to incorporate “general education and the associated breadth and depth of student learning” into academic programs. The HLC has established [guidelines](#) for reduced-credit programs; these programs similarly require general education coursework. Failure to meet these requirements would result in loss of accreditation, which is [required](#) for all North Dakota University System institutions.
- **The proposed legislation mandates that occupational or professional boards accept any resulting reduced-credit programs as meeting their standards, thus unilaterally changing requirements and removing the overview of professionals in the field.** For example, programs lacking general education coursework would not match the existing [rubric](#) for career-ready practices established by the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education, as general education plays a central role in development of the soft skills considered vital in the workplace, which play a vital part in the twelve categories NDCTE offers for evaluation.
- **These reduced-credit programs will disadvantage graduates who need to be licensed or certified in other states.** Online students from out-of-state need to meet the requirements of states other than North Dakota. Additionally, some students who currently reside in North Dakota know in advance that they will ultimately be working in other states (for example, members of the military temporarily stationed in North Dakota, as well as their family members). These individuals may be unpleasantly surprised to learn that their degree does not meet requirements in their anticipated location—or they may simply decide that enrollment in a North Dakota institution would be a mistake.
- **Programs that eliminate general education coursework will disadvantage both students and their future employers by failing to fully develop the capacity for continuous learning that is essential to successful long-term employment.** According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average worker can expect to change careers five to seven times during their lifetime. A degree that eliminates general education requirements and focuses solely on preparation for a specific type of employment and may not adequately prepare the individual to transition into a different occupation. Even those who continue to work within a particular career will find that the required skills change over time. The learning goals embedded in general education coursework are essential to preparing individuals for these transitions.

Article VIII, Section 6.6b of the North Dakota State Constitution states that the “state board of higher education shall have full authority over the institutions under its control with the right, among its other powers, to prescribe, limit, or modify the courses offered at the several institutions” in the North Dakota University System. The NDUS is currently working to establish reduced-credit degree programs that will meet the accreditation requirements of the HLC, including the presence of general education within these programs.

The NDGEC recommends that the North Dakota Legislature leave this issue in the hands of the SBHE and strongly urges a NO vote on HB 1220.

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