

January 20, 2025

Chair Heinert and members of the committee, I am Dr. Katrina Eberhart. I am an Associate Professor of Mathematics at Bismarck State College, co-chair of BSC's General Education Committee, and a current member and past president of the North Dakota General Education Council. I submit personal testimony today to ask you to consider a **do not pass** on HB 1220.

In addition to questions about the potential for lobbying for occupations to be considered in-demand that could lead to abuse, my greatest opposition to this proposed bill comes from subsection 1d., "Not require a student to obtain general education credits for a North Dakota accelerated degree."

General education courses are a vital component of a college degree and eliminating them would undermine the broader purpose of higher education. These courses provide students with a well-rounded education, fostering critical thinking, effective communication, and cultural awareness—just to name a few skills essential for success in any field. Specialized knowledge in a major is undoubtedly important, but general education broadens perspectives, enabling students to connect their expertise to real-world issues and interdisciplinary challenges. We hear from different advisory boards, business, and industry about the absolute need for students to come out of their degree programs with soft skills in place—reading comprehension, communication, quantitative literacy, etc.—sounds exactly like general education. The general education curriculum at any institution directly correlates to the development of the above skills.

General education nurtures lifelong learning, adaptability, and civic responsibility. In a rapidly changing world, graduates must navigate complex social, technological, and environmental issues. General education courses prepare students not just for jobs but for informed and engaged citizenship, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to society. Consider general education mathematics. The point of mathematics isn't so nurses and elementary educators can do calculus problems, it's to learn *how* to solve problems in general so that when presented with a new situation, an analysis of the problem with learned strategies leads to a sound solution. Basically, by studying mathematics, people get smarter in places other than math.

The North Dakota Legislature is not the only party our state's colleges and universities answer to. Our accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), has recently published guidelines regarding reduced-credit bachelor's degrees. While HLC is allowing reducing the number of credits to obtain a degree, there is **no** allowance for eliminating general education credits for that degree. The proposition to remove these courses would not only narrow students' intellectual horizons and diminish the transformative potential of higher education but also impact our accreditation.

Regardless of the degree wanting to be earned, general education is imperative. These courses enrich the college experience and equip students with versatile skills, ensuring they are prepared to thrive in both their careers and their communities. I urge this committee to **do not pass** HB 1220.

Respectfully,
Katrina Eberhart, PhD