

With regard to HB No. 1220:

The North Dakota General Education Council writes today to ask the North Dakota Legislature to seriously consider the implications of allowing institutions to offer reduced-credit degrees.

While we understand the intended benefits of awarding degrees in some fields without requiring the standard number of credits, the consequences of reducing the number of credits needed for a degree will be far-reaching. There is less time for personal growth in these proposed degrees: college is not just about academics, and the current timeline allows for students to mature emotionally, develop leadership skills, and navigate social dynamics that are valuable in the workplace. Group projects, extracurricular activities, and internships are crucial for building teamwork, leadership, and interpersonal skills. A shortened degree may limit opportunities for these experiences, which are vital for cultivating communication and collaboration abilities. The length of a traditional degree teaches students to manage long-term projects, juggle multiple responsibilities, and persevere through challenges. A reduced timeline potentially rushes this process, leaving students less prepared to handle complex workloads. Higher education provides the opportunity to build a professional network. A reduced-credit degree might limit the time available for networking with peers, professors, and industry professionals, which could diminish career opportunities post-graduation.

Our greatest concern stems from the potential to open the door for the reduction in credits to come from the general education curriculum. General education serves as the cornerstone of higher education, providing students with a comprehensive knowledge base that serves as the foundation for their chosen majors. It also plays a vital role in shaping well-rounded citizens and fostering a thriving society. Subjects like mathematics, literature, history, and the arts provide an understanding of human culture, society, and the natural world. Concepts learned in general education courses provide the foundational skills of higher education that bolster success. This academic and intellectual development helps individuals make informed decisions, engage in critical thinking, and adapt to a rapidly changing global landscape. As education is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about personal growth, general education courses can boost self-confidence, communication skills, and cultural awareness, making individuals more adaptable and better equipped to face life's many challenges. In short, it is the general education curriculum which teaches learners *how* to learn, to think, to solve problems, to work with others—all attributes that employers say they are looking for and qualities which make for better neighbors, colleagues, and citizens. It is significant to note that the Higher Learning Commission, which accredits higher-learning institutions in the central United States, has recognized that some institutions want the option to offer reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs and have them accredited. It is significant to note that the [guidelines](#) established by the HLC for such degrees require that institutions incorporate "general education, and the associated breadth and depth of student learning" into these programs.

North Dakota Career and Technical Education (NDCTE) offers a [rubric](#) for career-ready practices. The soft skills that are vital in the workplace are clearly a part of each of the twelve categories NDCTE offers for evaluation. The South Dakota Department of Education identifies similar standards for [soft skills](#). General education coursework plays a vital role in the development of all these categories of soft skills; removing it from degree programs will shortchange both the students earning these degrees and their future employers.

While it may be tempting to focus upon developing field-specific expertise for possible immediate benefits, it is vital to bear in mind the potential long-term costs to both the potential graduates and employers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average person will change careers five to seven times during their working life. A degree that focuses on preparation for one type of employment may not adequately prepare the individual to move into a different occupation. Even for those who remain within a particular career, the necessary skills will change over time. Students who have developed the ability to learn will be prepared to successfully meet these challenges.

Removing general education from degree requirements will undercut the quality of the degree programs offered in North Dakota. We strongly urge a vote against HB No. 1220.