State University of New York General Education Policy and Guidance: Discussion Draft for Feedback
September 3, 2024

The current State University of New York General Education Policy was adopted by the SUNY Board of Trustees in November 2021, with the original Memorandum to Presidents issued in December 2021 and an updated Memorandum to Presidents issued in February 2023. Initial implementation of the new SUNY General Education Framework occurred in fall 2023 for new first-time students in A.A., A.S., and all baccalaureate programs and will be implemented fall 2024 for new first-time students in A.A.S. and A.O.S. programs.

The SUNY General Education Framework is intended to be both stable and dynamic. Its stability is grounded in the foundational knowledge and skills students need for a balanced education. Its dynamism reflects contextual changes that occur that were not appreciably anticipated when the framework was established.

As announced by the Chancellor via the policy agenda that accompanied the State of the University address in May 2024 and during the Board of Trustees meeting in June 2024, two updates to the SUNY General Education Framework will respond to important 21st century contextual changes, as follows:

- Revise the Information Literacy core competency to explicitly identify artificial intelligence as part of the information landscape students navigate.

- Add a new core competency in Civic Discourse in Democracy (previously announced as Civil Discourse) to ensure students are provided opportunities to learn how to engage in dialogue for their preparation as contributors to and participants in civic life and to secure the future health of our democracy.

If these updates to the State University of New York General Education Policy are adopted by the SUNY Board of Trustees, the anticipated effective date is fall 2025 for new students entering A.A., A.S., and all baccalaureate degree programs, and fall 2026 for new students entering A.A.S. and A.O.S. degree programs.

Currently, there are two core competencies: 1. Critical Thinking and Reasoning and 2. Information Literacy. Core competencies are required of all undergraduate degree-seeking students within the first two years or 60 credits of their program. They extend beyond discipline-specific knowledge and cut across the student learning experience. Core competencies are typically integrated into programs in a manner other than standalone courses. As with all aspects of the SUNY General Education Framework, the core competencies are intended to establish a foundational set of expectations for all undergraduate students. They are intended to be a meaningful baseline, not an all-encompassing means to produce experts on any identified component.

A working group was constituted and charged with making recommendations to the SUNY Provost about how to incorporate these updates into the current SUNY General Education Framework. Specifically, the working group was tasked to develop draft student learning outcomes and guidance that would be part of an updated Memorandum to Presidents.

The working group included faculty governance leadership, faculty and staff with subject matter expertise in artificial intelligence or civic discourse, Academic Affairs leadership from each of the four campus sectors, and staff from System Administration.

The draft language presented herein is the outcome of the efforts of the working group.

Draft Language

Information Literacy

Note: the red text represents additions/deletions to the existing language of this core competency

Students will
- locate information effectively using tools appropriate to their need and discipline;
- evaluate information from a variety of sources, including but not limited to artificial intelligence, with an awareness of authority, validity, and bias, and origin;
- demonstrate an understanding of the ethical dimensions of information use, creation, and dissemination, whether from traditional sources or emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

Guidance

Students need to acquire information literacy appropriate to the demands of the 21st century citizen, and campuses., which includes applying all three learning outcomes of this core competency to all sources of information, including as produced through emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Campuses must have flexibility to implement and assess these learning outcomes across a diverse range of academic programs.

The Information Literacy core competency is not necessarily associated with any one course, though the student learning outcomes may be required in one or more specific courses. In either case, campuses must ensure that the required learning outcomes are included in each undergraduate degree curriculum.

Civic Discourse in Democracy (previously announced as Civil Discourse)

Students will
- Identify the features of discourse in a functioning pluralistic democracy, including the role of collaborative decision-making and dissent.
- Demonstrate the discourse skills necessary to
    - be informed, engaged, and ethical contributors to a pluralistic society;
    - navigate discourse and disagreement, given their importance as essential parts of civic practice.

Guidance

This core competency is intended to focus on students acquiring the knowledge necessary to understand the importance of, and requirements for, Civic Discourse in Democracy, rather than to assess behavior.

The phrase "civic discourse" is intended to reflect reasoned discussion of multiple perspectives on civic issues. It should be noted that all three core competencies are interdependent. Critical Thinking and Reasoning, along with Information Literacy, form a foundation for defining the terms "informed, engaged, and ethical" that are part of the Civic Discourse in Democracy core competency.

Students need to acquire skills in civic discourse appropriate to the demands of the 21st century, and campuses must have flexibility to implement and assess these learning outcomes across a diverse range of academic programs.

The Civic Discourse in Democracy core competency is not necessarily associated with any one course, though the student learning outcomes may be required in one or more courses. In either case, campuses must ensure that the required learning outcomes are included in each undergraduate degree curriculum.