



February 2026
General Education Steering Committee
MINNESOTA STATE

General Education Redesign Phase II Project Update

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Executive Summary

Minnesota State's multi-year review of Minnesota State's lower division general education, a shared endeavor between students, faculty, staff and administrators was launched in fall 2022, to address a systemwide need to modernize and improve the flexibility and transferability of lower-division general education. National research, internal data, and extensive stakeholder feedback consistently point to misalignment between the current MnTC structure, and the realities faced by today's learners, workforce expectations, and evolving civic and societal challenges. Based on Phase I Feedback, while campuses strongly support retaining the MnTC goal-area framework (76% of respondents) and preserving the ability to transfer general education as a package (81% of respondents), stakeholders also emphasized that students' increasingly complex, multi-institutional enrollment patterns require more predictable transfer pathways, simplified requirements, and greater consistency in how goal areas are implemented across institutions. These needs, paired with rising demand for flexible modalities and clearer navigation, underscore the imperative of updating a framework that has remained largely unchanged since 1994.

Phase II modeling advanced the work by drafting structures, identifying domain areas, and outlining a potential new general education model. However, the Phase II feedback revealed deep and unresolved tensions that prevented the draft from moving forward. Stakeholders expressed significant concerns about unintended consequences, particularly the perceived devaluation of writing, humanities, ethics, and critical thinking. Some opposed reducing writing to a single 3-credit course and objected to reductions in Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts, which they view as foundational to civic understanding, empathy, and intellectual development. There was broad concern about moving Ethics and Civic Engagement into exploratory categories, alongside strong calls for establishing Critical Thinking as a standalone requirement rather than embedding it. Additional tensions surfaced around DEI-related domains, the splitting of science requirements particularly for students in high-credit majors like engineering, potential impacts on small departments if courses could count in only one area (no double-dipping), and the vagueness and assess ability of embedded requirements such as Information Literacy.

Stakeholders also raised operational concerns: implementation complexity, transfer equivalency challenges, the need for stronger advising structures, and worries that the proposed model might confuse students or reduce flexibility. Many questioned the feasibility of major changes during a period of institutional strain marked by budget pressures, workload capacity limits, and the parallel Workday transition. These collective concerns, spanning academic design, political climate, capacity constraints, and system coherence, resulted in highly variable support and no actionable consensus. As a result, the General Education Steering Committee concluded that the draft model could not advance at that time and reconvened in Fall 2025 to determine how best to continue the work. After discussion and debate in late fall 2025 and early spring 2026, the committee determined that to move forward

effectively, they need to reclarify the committee's purpose. This could include a) a stop to the work, b) a structured pause, c) continuing to pursue a full redesign, or d) a focused standardization effort within the existing MnTC. The committee expects that stakeholder feedback on these options will provide direction for the next phase of action.

Project Background and Purpose

Steven Mintz in his article, “Gen Ed: Its Past, Present, and Possible Future: Moving beyond today’s smorgasbord of disconnected courses,” shares that innovation in lower general education that results in more coherent and meaningful curriculum are the product of teams of engaged faculty members whose shared vision centers on a more coherent and meaningful lower general education curriculum (2023). Institutions across the nation have been redesigning and re-envisioning their general education in the past few years to capitalize on what Hanstedt (2024) *General Education Essentials*, points out are essential components to reforming general education which are, 1) the complexity of students’ lives, 2) the changing nature of the workplace, and 3) the challenges of citizenship in today’s world.

The current lower-division general education program, the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC), has been in place since 1994. The 1994 MnTC was established with the intent to transfer as a completed package. Although students transfer without the completed MnTC package and receive goal areas in transfer, Minnesota State institutions are not consistent in how the MnTC is offered. This is evident in the total number of credits that the MnTC is worth, how many goals are needed, how goals are distributed, and how many credits or courses are required in a goal area. If a student does not complete the MnTC at one campus prior to transferring, it can cost them time for graduation and money.

In addition to higher education research on the subject, the Minnesota State Transfer Governance Team recommended a Minnesota State redesign, due to years of frustration about transfer from students and staff regarding the transferability of courses. In the summer of 2022, representatives from the Minnesota State System Office, IFO, and MSCF convened a design implementation group to develop a shared governance structure to review and revise the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC), the general education curriculum for Minnesota State institutions of higher learning. The General Education Steering Committee is the guiding structure for this process and has been meeting regularly since the fall of 2022. An initial discovery was done by a representative body to determine the process and scope of this work and a charge for the General Education Steering Committee (GESC). In Fall 2022, the GESC was formed and charged with developing the overarching philosophy and characteristics of a 21st-century lower-division general education curriculum. The committee has conducted research of general education models across the nation, examined transfer data from the Minnesota State system and nationwide, and acquired feedback about the current curriculum from students, faculty and staff within the system. The committee has run various scenarios in order to determine issues that emerge in our current transfer structure.

To date, the GESC has completed Phase I (approved name and philosophy for the lower-division general education program). Phase II is currently in process, with a revised general education model and requirements drafted but not finalized. At this stage, the GESC is reflecting on the scope of the work and how best to move forward. The intent of this report is to inform our stakeholders of the status of the work and to gather feedback on potential next steps.

Phase I Summary

Phase I spanned academic years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. During these two years, the GESC reviewed transfer data for Minnesota State, they researched other higher education models in the U.S., they drafted a philosophy statement a new general education model for Minnesota State, they reflected on new needs for the 21st Century student in equity-minded ways (as implied in the draft philosophy statement), and the group engaged feedback loops (surveys and listening sessions) regarding the draft philosophy statement and possible changes to the MnTC.

Model & Transfer Analysis

In 2022/2023, the GESC reflected on transfer data on MnTC students and different general education models across the U.S. The GESC’s analysis of the 2019 Transfer Student Survey suggested that variance in the way that different institutions satisfy goal areas (both at the goal level and at the course level) impacts efficient student transfer. Individual members of the GESC also researched different higher education systems in 22/23 in order to identify the benefits and challenges of diverse models. The purpose was to consider whether other models may offer advantages in comparison with our own MnTC distribution model in meeting the needs of students pursuing their general education. In 2023/2024, the GESC formed temporary ad hoc committees to analyze the comparison of these models in order to consider whether any of these other models better addressed the needs of the 21st-century student while supporting transfer in a way that is consistent with the new drafted philosophy statement for Minnesota State Foundational Studies. No clear benefit was identified for changing to another model (too many trade-offs). Given this, stakeholder feedback was sought from students, faculty, staff and administrators in the form of a survey polling participants' opinions on possible shifts in a distributive model (e.g., the MnTC). Survey results below:

Response Summary from Phase I ¹Stakeholder Survey (2023)

Recommendation	% of Respondents that Strongly Agree/ Agree
Minnesota State general education should continue to utilize the existing MnTC Goal Area model as a basis for review and revision, with a focus on how it is implemented consistently across campuses and further exploration of possible changes and modification.	76%
Minnesota State general education should continue to support transfer of lower division general education as a “package” while ensuring that GA and individual courses are transferable.	81%

¹ Summary reports for all stakeholder feedback rounds can be found on ASA Connect.

Minnesota State should standardize the way that goal areas are satisfied for general education curriculum across the system but allow local institutions to place their own courses within those areas.	69%
Minnesota State should standardize breadth requirements within goal areas 1, 5 and 6. Standardize the way breadth requirements within these goal areas are met.	61%
Minnesota State should require only certain courses to have the same goals across the system while allowing each institution to designate its own goals for each course outside those identified as required to have the same goals.	47%
Minnesota State should continue to allow double-dipping but there needs to be better definition about how this is done consistently across the system.	80%
Minnesota State should remove goal area 2 as it is currently defined and charge a faculty group in Phase II with determining how Critical Thinking and/or Info Literacy is fulfilled.	57%

Philosophy Statement

In the Fall of 2023, the GESC had a retreat in order to draft a philosophy statement for the new general education model for Minnesota State. The draft was shared out for stakeholder feedback (students, faculty, staff and administrators). Overall, respondents indicated agreement that the draft philosophy statement accurately represents the purpose and philosophy for lower division general education for Minnesota State (75% strongly agree/agree). Short answer comments indicated the following segments of the statement were liked the most:

- “Inspire ethical, curious, compassionate and engaged globally informed citizens”
- “Readily transferable”
- “Engages learners with varied ways of knowing, thinking, and creating”
- “Transparent structure”
- “Elevating the power of diverse perspectives and individuals”

In addition, respondents indicated the draft philosophy statement was comprehensive, holistic, and human-centered, and included goals aspirational and action-oriented.

Based on the feedback provided, the final draft of the philosophy was approved.

“The General Education program for Minnesota State, “Minnesota Foundational Studies,” equitably serves learners throughout Minnesota State institutions in their pursuit of academic, professional, and personal success. This essential core curriculum has a transparent structure that is readily transferable between Minnesota State institutions. Through an intentional and foundational design, this program engages learners with varied ways of knowing, thinking, and creating by teaching the core

competencies that encompass the vast array of human experiences, thus elevating the power of diverse perspectives and individuals. These studies aim to inspire ethical, curious, compassionate, and engaged globally informed citizens who are prepared to contribute to the diverse communities in which they live in Minnesota and beyond.”

Phase I Findings

The committee found support for working from a distributive model (e.g., the MnTC) as a basis for review and revision. Phase I final recommendations focused on standardizing the way that goals are handled between colleges at the goal level, supporting student transfer (both as a package and at the individual course level), preserving institutional autonomy at the course level, and exploring how important 21st-century skills might be addressed within the general education model. The focus moving into Phase II was on addressing these recommendations in a way that supported the Minnesota State Foundational Studies Philosophy Statement.

Phase II Work Objectives and Current Status

Phase II Objectives

1. Infrastructure planned and in place to support Phase II – completed.
2. Define the details of the general education model.
 - a. Identify domain areas – draft completed
 - b. Identify the size of the general education program – draft completed
 - c. Identify how domains are completed (requirements) -draft completed
 - d. Identify where requirements/structures are flexible – draft completed.
 - e. Identify learning outcomes within each domain – not started
3. Engage stakeholder groups in feedback loops at key milestones - completed

Draft General Education Model Versions and ²Feedback Loops

Background and Process

The GESC convened a subgroup of the committee and charged them with drafting recommendations for each of the identified Phase II objectives. Those recommendations were brought forward to the full GESC for review before being shared broadly for stakeholder feedback. The 2024-2025 GESC work was structured in two parts:

1. Fall Semester
 - a. Identify the size of the general education program.
 - b. Identify skills to be included within the general education program.
2. Spring Semester
 - a. Identify the domain areas and which skills should be included within those domains.
 - b. Identify how the domains are completed (requirements)
 - c. Identify where requirements/structures are flexible.

Size and Skills Recommendations

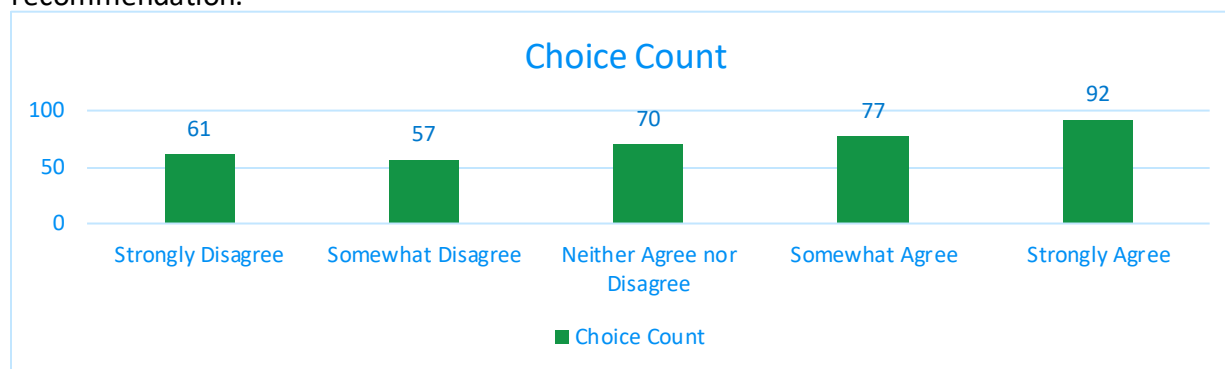
Based upon the work completed in Phase I, the GESC proposed a set of skills to include within the general education curriculum. The GESC used current MnTC goal areas and learning outcomes, national lower division general education model research completed in Phase I, revised U of M lower division general education model, as well as GESC documentation (philosophy statement, meeting notes and skills brainstorming results) to inform their proposal. In November 2024, the GESC recommended a set of skills and asked for feedback from stakeholders (students, faculty, staff and administrators) on how these skills should be offered within the curriculum (required, embedded, optional, etc.). GESC also asked stakeholders which skills should be kept, combined or eliminated.

² Summary reports for all stakeholder feedback rounds can be found on ASA Connect.

In November 2024, the GESC shared a video detailing the rationale and recommendations for skills to include within the general education curriculum. The committee also held several information sessions and feedback gathering sessions to share information and collect responses. An online survey was also conducted to gather feedback. The following summarizes the feedback collected:

Size Recommendations

The GESC recommended that the Minnesota Foundational Studies program for Minnesota State should be reduced to less than 40 credits, if possible, but the final version should not exceed 40 credits. The following graph illustrates stakeholder’s level of agreement with that recommendation.



Additionally, open-ended comments reported support for reducing, if possible, but reflected perceived challenges of covering the list of skills identified in less than 40 credits.

Key Skills Recommendations

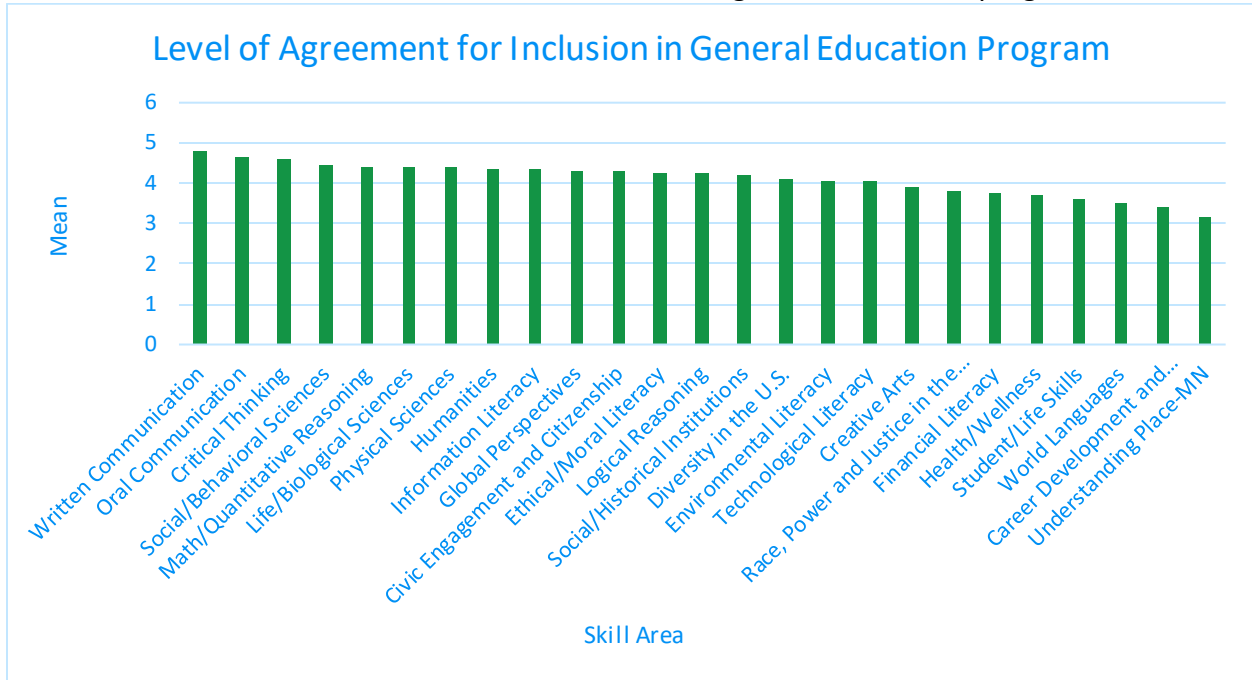
Stakeholders provided feedback that identified their level of agreement with including the listed skill within the lower division general education, whether it should be required, optional or embedded, and if it could be paired with additional skill areas. The following section breaks down the feedback received on this element as well as the recommendations and follow-up made by the GESC.

General Education Structure Recommendations

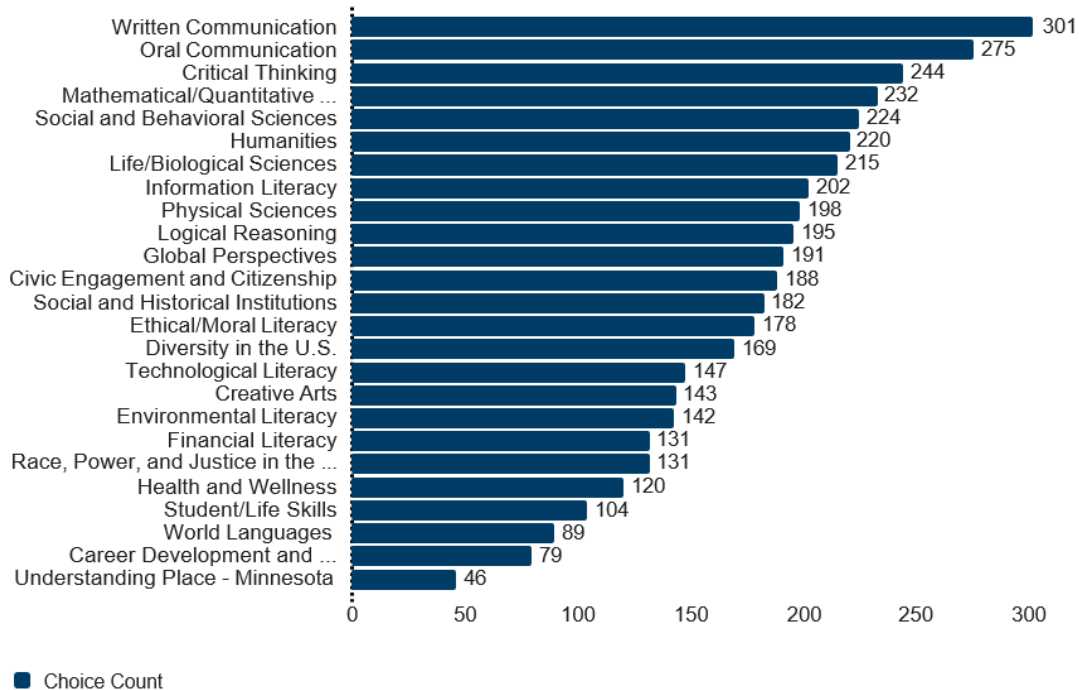
In Spring 2025, based on the feedback provided, the GESC drafted a general education model, identifying which skills should be stand-alone or combined with other skills, which should be required vs. optional, and which should be embedded. The following table outlines the feedback that was provided on which skills should be required, optional, and/or embedded.

Required Skills

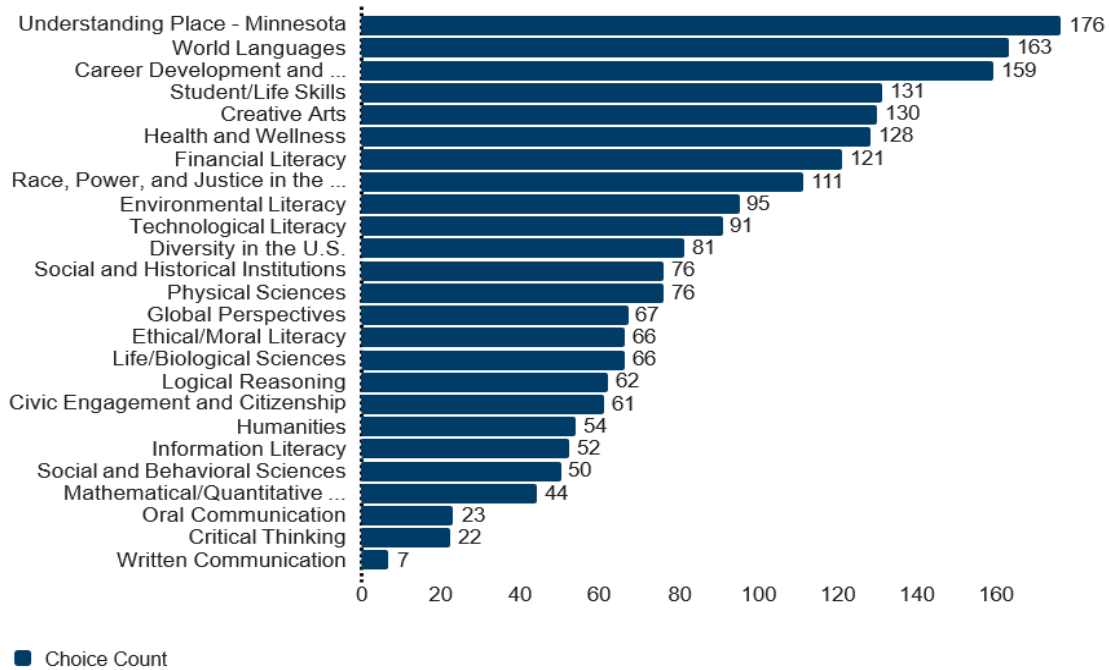
The GESC recommended a list of skills for inclusion within the lower division general education based on Phase I feedback. The following graph highlights the mean level of support by stakeholders for inclusion of each skills/area within the general education program.



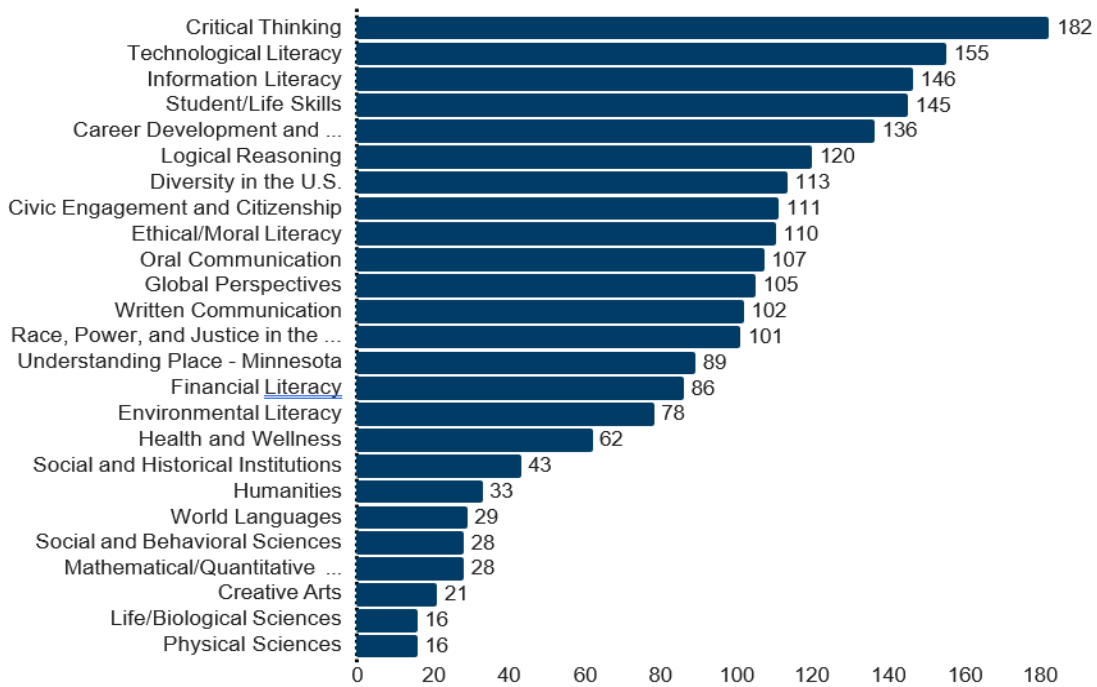
The following graph shows the number of respondents indicating that the listed skill should be **required** within the general education program.



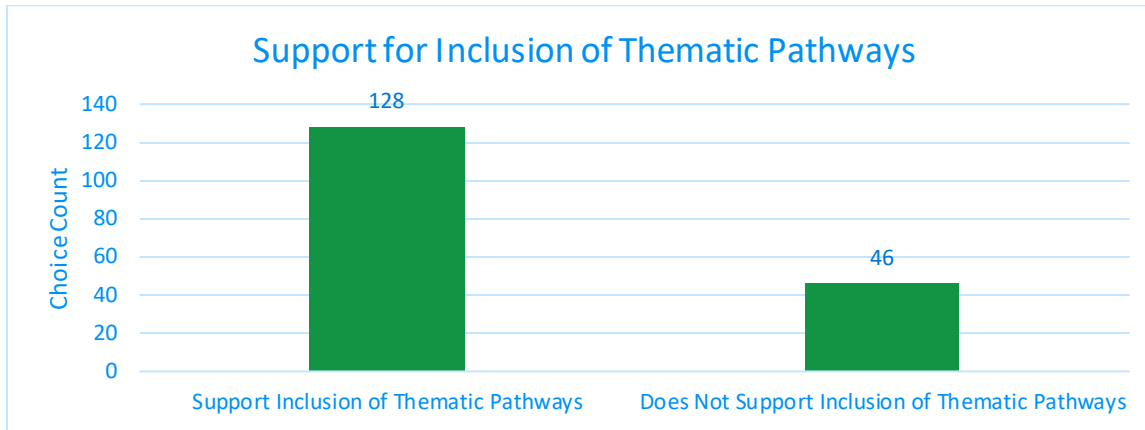
The following graph shows the number of respondents indicating that the listed skill should be **optional** within the general education program.



The following graph shows the number of respondents indicating that the listed skill should be **embedded** within the general education program.



The GESC also asked questions of stakeholders regarding whether or not there was support for including thematic pathways within the general education program. The following chart shows the number of survey respondents that supported or didn't support this approach.



The survey also allowed stakeholders to identify which skills could be combined together within the general education program. The following skills were identified as those that could be combined together:

1. Written Communication & Oral Communication
2. Physical Sciences & Life/Biological Sciences & Global Perspectives
3. Mathematical/Quantitative Reasoning
4. Social and Behavioral Sciences & Social and Historical Institutions & Global Perspectives
5. Humanities & Global Perspectives

Based on all of the feedback provided, the GESC developed a draft general education structure (domains, skills, and requirements). The following illustrates the first draft that was proposed and shared by the GESC in March 2025 with stakeholders for feedback.

First Draft of General Education Model (2025)

Core Requirements	Courses	Min. Credits
1. Written Communication	1 course	3 credits
2. Oral Communication	1 course	3 credits
3. Physical Sciences	1 course, *at least one course from domains 3 & 4 must have a lab.	3-4 credits
4. Life and Biological Sciences	1 course, *at least one course from domains 3 & 4 must have a lab.	3-4 credits
5. Mathematical/Quantitative Reasoning & Logical Reasoning	1 course	3 credits
6. Social and Behavioral Sciences & Social and Historical Institutions	1 course	3 credits
7. Humanities & Fine Arts	1 course	3 credits

8. Diversity in the U.S. & Race, Power and Justice	1 course	3 credits
9. Global Perspectives	1 course	3 credits
Total	9 courses	28 -31 credits
Embedded Requirements		
Embedded requirements are embedded into courses within the Core Requirements (1-9). By completing the requirements of the Core Requirements, students complete this requirement.		
Critical Thinking	0 courses	0 credits
Information Literacy	0 courses	0 credits
Exploratory Requirements	Requirement	
Civic Engagement and Citizenship	Complete 9-12 credits with courses from at least 3 exploratory areas.	
Life Skills		
Health and Wellness		
Environmental Literacy		
Creative Human Expression		
World Languages		
Ethical/Moral Literacy		
Applied Writing		
Total		
Additional Credits to reach 40 credits total	Take credits from any Core or Exploratory Requirements to reach a total of 40 credits.	
Total Credits:	40 credits	

Stakeholder Feedback on Draft Model

In April 2025, the GESC held another round of stakeholder feedback sessions and open-ended question surveys with students, faculty, staff and administrators. The feedback included a wide range of perspectives, from strong support to deep concerns. Many appreciated the simplification efforts and the attempt at consistency across institutions. However, there were significant concerns about unintended consequences and perceived devaluation of humanities, ethics, and critical thinking. The following outlines the key themes and concerns of stakeholders:

1. Simplification & Transferability
 - a. Support for clearer structure and eliminating course overlap which could help students navigate requirements more easily.
 - b. Concerns about implementation challenges, especially with transfer and course equivalency across institutions.
 - c. Desire to retain double-dipping across goal areas.
2. Reduction of Requirements in Key Areas
 - a. Strong opposition to reducing writing (composition) courses to a single 3-credit course. Many recommend a 4-credit minimum or allowing for two courses.

- b. Concern about reducing requirements in Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts, which are seen as essential for critical thinking, civic understanding, and empathy.
- 3. Ethics, Civic Engagement & Critical Thinking
 - a. Concern about relegating Ethics and Civic Engagement to "exploratory" domains. Many argue that these should remain required as a combined goal.
 - b. Support for making Critical Thinking a standalone requirement, rather than relying on it being "embedded" across domains.
- 4. Content & Political Tensions
 - a. Mixed views on the inclusion of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) topics and courses like Race, Power, and Justice. Some see these as essential; others view them as politically biased or divisive.
 - b. Several suggest reframing or renaming controversial categories to align better with political and institutional realities.
- 5. Science and Math Requirements
 - a. Concerns that splitting science into two categories (physical and biological) creates challenges for students in high-credit majors like engineering and physics.
 - b. Suggestions to combine the two science requirements and require one with a lab component.
 - c. Some suggest strengthening math requirements, including a call for a dedicated logic or computational thinking requirement.
- 6. Course Classification & Flexibility
 - a. Many fear that limiting courses to only one requirement area will:
 - b. Reduce course flexibility.
 - c. Decrease enrollment in smaller disciplines.
 - d. Complicate transfers due to inconsistent classification across schools.
- 7. Embedded Requirements & Assessment
 - a. Concerns about the vagueness and enforceability of embedded requirements (e.g., Information Literacy, Critical Thinking).
 - b. Desire for clear outcomes and assessment strategies.
- 8. Student Support & Advising
 - a. Repeated emphasis on the need for strong advising structures so students can make informed choices.
 - b. Worries that the new structure will confuse students or result in missed opportunities without sufficient guidance.
- 9. Implementation Challenges
 - a. Many commenters feel the timing is poor, citing institutional stress, resource limitations, and major concurrent transitions (e.g., budget cuts, software changes).
 - b. Skepticism over whether the changes represent real improvement or just rebranding of existing systems.

Due to the variability in support for the drafted general education model, the GESC determined they were not in a position to move the model forward. The decision was made to come back together in the Fall 2025, to determine how best to continue the work. At the same time, work was continuing in other areas that impacted general education, including Workday preparation. There were conversations regarding whether or not the timing was right to continue the work of the general education steering committee or pause and focus energy on the work required of and supporting Workday planning and implementation.

Recommended Next Steps and Remaining Questions

The GESC committee's recent meetings have highlighted a growing uncertainty about its core purpose and the scope of its charge. Members expressed that clarity has eroded over time, prompting a need to revisit the existing charter, articulate guiding principles, and determine whether the group is pursuing a major redesign or a standardized refinement of the current Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC). Some GESC members have interpreted stakeholder feedback to date as leaning strongly toward improving and standardizing the existing MnTC framework. However, there is not unanimous agreement on this interpretation. When the purpose and scope of the initiative remain ambiguous, institutions cannot realistically plan for the level of effort required to implement the changes, sequence their internal work, or anticipate downstream impacts on catalog structures, coding practices, business processes, and student-facing tools. In this context, clarity is not simply a matter of good governance; it is a prerequisite for protecting institutional capacity, ensuring technical feasibility, and safeguarding the student experience across the entire transfer ecosystem.

Within the discussion groups, several cross-cutting themes emerged that reinforce the need for renewed alignment before moving forward. Participants noted fluctuating momentum, fatigue among long-serving members, changing membership across phases, and the perception of diminished institutional support, all of which underscore the urgency of reestablishing a shared understanding of the goal of the committee, whether related to transfer, general education philosophy, implementation inconsistency, or all of the above. Although there is strong interest in greater consistency and standardization to support students, concerns remain about balancing systemwide clarity with campus autonomy and recognizing that MnTC revisions alone will not resolve all transfer-related challenges. Members also called for more transparent communication practices, better documentation, and respect for prior work to maintain trust.

Given this uncertainty about direction, the GESC members feel that broad stakeholder feedback is needed to help guide major decisions about the path forward. This feedback should include structured surveys, clearer communication materials, and ongoing opportunities for input. At the same time, concerns about operational capacity have been raised, particularly considering the multi-year Workday transition that would necessitate an implementation timeline for any approved model starting no sooner than 2030. This leaves a few choices for the GESC, including suspending the committee, reconstituting the committee at a later time, or continuing the committee's work with a redefined scope based on stakeholder feedback on priorities and direction.

References

Paul Handstedt, *General Education Essentials: A Guide for College Faculty*, 2nd edition, Routledge, 2024.

Steven Mintz, "Gen Ed: Its Past, Present, and Possible Future," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 2, 2023 (<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/gen-ed-its-past-present-and-possible-future>).

Appendix A

General Education Steering Committee Membership

Name	Location	Org
Jesse Mason	System Office	ASA
Jessica Migler	System Office	ASA
Paul Shepherd	System Office	ASA
Aureliano DeSoto	IFO Statewide	IFO
Jenny Turner	Minnesota State University, Mankato	IFO
Stephen Kingsbury	Southwest Minnesota State University	IFO
Sarah Dimick Gray	Metro State University	IFO
Elizabeth Zold	Winona State University	IFO
Travis Ricks	Bemidji State University	IFO
James Heiman	Saint Cloud State University	IFO
Denise Gorsline	Minnesota State University Moorhead	IFO
Katie Smieja	St. Cloud Technical and Community College	MSCF
Korinne Cikanek	Normandale Community College	MSCF
Kristin Doneen	Anoka Ramsey Community College	MSCF
Jennifer Robey	Century College	MSCF
Jim Biederman	Anoka Ramsey Community College	MSCF
Matt Dempsey	Normandale Community College	MSCF
Kelly Hughes	Alexandria Technical and Community College	MSCF
Kurt Dershem	South Central College	MSCF
Lindsay Henderson	Minnesota State University, Mankato	MSUAASF
Jill Quandt	Winona State University	MSUAASF
Nicole Pazdernik	St. Cloud State University	MSUAASF
Denise Halverson	Minnesota State University, Mankato	MAPE
Amy Goman	North Hennepin Community College	College Administrator
Matt Borcharding	Minnesota State Community & Technical College	College Administrator
Deedee Peaslee	Saint Paul College	College Administrator
John Hoffman	Bemidji State University	University Administrator
Amy Gort	Metro State University	University Administrator
David Hood	Minnesota State University, Mankato	University Administrator
*Nicole Merz	System Office	ASA
*Sandi Quinones	System Office	ASA

*Non-voting Member

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