**Important Issues for Discussion of Civic Learning**

Compiled by Jeremy Vetter, Associate Professor of History & Chair of University-Wide General Education Committee (UWGEC), 10/21/2024 (version 5)

The information below is meant to supplement the official Policy Revision proposals for General Education Attributes and General Education Curriculum as they move through the shared governance review process, in order to facilitate the most meaningful discussion across campus and on shared governance bodies, including potential alternatives that have been discussed for the name of the attribute and how it will be implemented, along with several other significant issues. The previous versions of this document have been revised to incorporate many valuable additions from the Executive Director of the Office of General Education, as well as members of UWGEC and the ad hoc General Faculty General Education Committee, who have offered their ideas and concerns, after these issues were presented to them for initial discussion. This document will be updated as deliberations proceed through shared governance bodies, especially following the upcoming meeting of the CLCK (Civic Learning-Civic Knowledge) advisory group, until it superseded by other documents to accompany the movement of policy revisions through shared governance.

Table of Contents

1. Proposed Student Learning Outcomes for Civic Learning
2. Alternatives for Naming the Attribute
3. Alternative Models for Implementing the Attribute
4. Further Potential Adjustment to the Attributes
5. Transfer Credit and Credit-by-Exam
6. Timing of Implementation of Civic Learning and the Attributes as Graduation Requirements

**1. Proposed Student Learning Outcomes for Civic Learning**

The General Education student learning outcomes (SLOs) for each attribute are not part of the policy language, but draft versions of these appear below. The outcomes are managed and interpreted by the Office of General Education (OGE) and the University-Wide General Education Committee (UWGEC) as they consider courses for approval or policy changes for the curriculum. The overarching learning outcome is based closely on the ABOR language for American Institutions, while the seven more specific student learning outcomes below were drafted by a faculty task force on Civic Education that was convened in 2022-23. The outcomes will be revised in response to feedback from across campus.

Comprehensive course (must be in Building Connections category) learning outcome:

Students will analyze and evaluate multiple perspectives on American institutions, focusing on how U.S. history has shaped the present, principles of constitutional democracy and how they have been applied under a republican form of government, debates over the U.S. Constitution and other founding documents, Supreme Court cases and their effects on law and society, civic participation and civil dialogue, and economic knowledge for public policy and personal or professional decisions.

Depth courses must include one or more of the learning outcomes, as appropriate:

I. Identify key events, processes, and periods in United States history, examine conflicting perspectives on those topics, and analyze how those parts of United States history continue to shape the present.

II. Identify and assess different perspectives on the basic principles of United States constitutional democracy, including its structure, rights, and fundamental protections, and analyze how these principles have been applied under a republican form of government as it evolved over time.

III. Examine the United States Constitution, including one or more amendments, major constitutional debates, and theories of constitutional interpretation, and analyze their impact on subsequent historical developments.

IV. Analyze primary philosophical, historical, and political documents that influenced the founding of the U.S. government and its structure, and evaluate the role these documents played in shaping U.S. institutions.

V. Evaluate landmark Supreme Court cases and assess the court’s role in shaping law and society.

VI. Demonstrate and apply the skills necessary for effective citizenship, including civil dialogue and civic participation, shaped by effective problem-solving and information literacy, by employing active learning opportunities, community-engaged learning, service learning, or experiential learning.

VII. Explain and assess how economic data, tools, and theories are applied to compare and evaluate current or historical public policies, as well as professional and personal decisions.

Further issues that could be considered when these learning outcomes are revised include the following, which have been suggested so far by members of UWGEC and the ad hoc General Faculty General Education Committee:

* Including option for courses to focus on international comparisons to American institutions, which could be incorporated in one or more of the outcomes
* More emphasis on information literacy, which is already present in learning outcome VI, but could potentially be made more prominent in Civic Learning
* More inclusion of native/Indigenous governance, which is thus far only present in a few of the interpretive notes on the learning outcomes
* Clearer incorporation of HSI and border issues in Civic Learning
* Including another potential option in learning outcome VI for not only the students’ own civic engagement but also study of historical and contemporary examples of civic engagement by others as part of Civic Learning

**2. Alternatives for Naming the Attribute**

The name used for this attribute in the policy, which comes from ABOR policy language, is “**Civic Learning**,” which also aligns with one of the ABOR assessment areas. Other names for this in ABOR policy include “**Civic Knowledge**” and “**American Institutions**.” In the tri-university assessment rubric for this part of the curriculum, the three universities agreed to use the term “U.S. Institutions” or “United States Institutions” instead of “American Institutions.” Which of these names (or something else) is the best choice for UA?

**3. Alternative Models for Implementing the Attribute**

The Policy Revision documents initially presented in September were based on an implementation model that has been called the **“Breadth + Depth” model**, which includes two courses: a comprehensive course in the Building Connections (BC) category[[1]](#footnote-1) that addresses all of the seven areas identified in ABOR policy for American Institutions, and a depth course in any category across the entire GE Curriculum that allows students to exercise student autonomy and develop more intensive civic learning in one (or more) of the seven areas. This model has been presented to ABOR already in a preliminary version, but some other models have also been discussed, which are worthy of discussion and comparison, including:

**A/B Model**: Would also have two courses required for Civic Learning within General Education, but instead of one course being comprehensive and the other course addressing just 1 area in depth, each course would address 3 or 4 of the areas. One proposed version of this model would have an “A” course on the American System of Government (required to address outcomes 2, 3, 4, and 7 above) and a “B” course on The Evolution of Political and Economic Rights in the United States (required to address outcomes 1, 3, 5, and 6 above). In this model, both would replace BC courses in the General Education curriculum. Other configurations of 3-4 areas and student learning outcomes are also possible.

**One-Course Model**: Would require only that students take one comprehensive BC course that carries the Civic Learning attribute, with no second Civic Learning course required.

**Foundations Model**: Instead of implementing Civic Learning within the BC and Exploring Perspectives (EP) curriculum, a fourth Foundations area would be established, in addition to Writing, Math, and Second Language. To create space for 1-2 Civic Learning Foundations courses without expanding the overall number of credits required for General Education as a whole would mean reducing some other requirement, such as the number of BC courses.

\*\*\*It is important to note that there could be other models that combine different aspects of the above models, or that envision something else entirely. (The CLCK Advisory Group leadership has proposed to call this the “Ruminate Model”!)

**4. Further Potential Adjustment to Attributes**

The current GE curriculum requires a Diversity and Equity course that is US-focused (and one that can be focused on any topic), two Writing attribute courses, two Quantitative Reasoning courses, and one World Cultures & Societies (WCS) course.

Some potential adjustments to the attributes, beyond the addition of Civic Learning, might include (none of these have yet been proposed formally, but are just for discussion):

* To avoid inadvertently shifting the General Education curriculum too much in a US-centric direction, one proposal is to increase the number of WCS courses to 2. This would increase the number of attribute requirements from 7 (currently) to 9-10 (depending on the number of Civic Learning courses required). Meeting these attribute requirements with the 7 required BC and EP courses is possible because every course must have at least 1 attribute and can have 2. But it would complicate completion of the attribute requirements.
* If it is discovered that most or all students are taking courses already with the desired pattern of attributes in them, simply because they are 1-2 of them are already required to be present in all approved BC and EP courses, then it might not be necessary to do require each student to take them in the specified distribution as graduation requirements. However, it should be noted that Civic Learning, if implemented as an attribute, would likely need to be tracked for all students, since it is a specific ABOR requirement and would not otherwise be present in the General Education curriculum.
* Students might only be required to take one course with each attribute, or the attribute requirements for students could be reduced in some other way.
* The Diversity & Equity attribute, which currently requires at least one course have a U.S. focus, could be consolidated into a single attribute designation, no longer distinguishing between U.S. and international/comparative courses.
* The implementation of the attributes as graduation requirements that must be tracked for all students could be delayed beyond Fall 2026, which is the date specified in the most recent policy revision (see item 6 below).

The Office of General Education has offered to provide data soon on how students have been taking attributes during the first two years of the GE curriculum, which could inform the feasibility of any of these ideas. We would also need to consider any limitations that some majors have on how students meet certain General Education requirements through multiple use of courses to meet GE and major requirements.

**5. Transfer Credit and Credit by Exam**

As with other components of the General Education curriculum, transfer credit and credit by exam would typically be determined by the course equivalencies established for University of Arizona courses, and the category and attribute(s) attached to those courses. While it cannot be guaranteed that similar courses taught at other institutions, or exams such as Advanced Placement (AP), have exactly the same alignment with all the attributes, including Civic Learning, as the equivalent University of Arizona courses, there will often be sufficient alignment, although this will merit further study during the rollout of the attributes as graduation requirements and ongoing consideration by the academic units that establish each of these course equivalencies. In the case of Civic Learning, for example, the guidelines for AP exams in American Government and U.S. History, appear to demonstrate strong alignment with American Institutions areas as defined by ABOR.

**6. Timing of Implementation of Civic Learning and the Attributes as Graduation Requirements**

The two Policy Revision proposals presented in September do not change the timeline that is in the current policy for the implementation of the attributes as graduation requirements tracked for all students in Fall 2026, which was based on the time needed to potentially incorporate Civic Learning as an attribute. One possible further issue for discussion is whether there is sufficient reason to postpone this. As an updated set of policy revision proposals (or multiple proposals) are brought forward by the Office of General Education, following the collection of input through the Civic Learning/Civic Knowledge advisory group, for review and deliberation by shared governance bodies, we will collectively determine whether we are ready to move forward on this timeline, or something close to it. Some buffer has been built into the proposed timeline already, but the deliberation process itself will determine if this is sufficient. The Office of General Education has set up a single page with links to resources and also for each shared governance body or group to provide input: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Et5pr_GCvBKnBXM7uDeomYJngUBZBI0R/view>.

1. The comprehensive course options for Civic Learning would need to be BC courses for at least two reasons: (1) Civic Learning is an inherently multidisciplinary and multi-perspective taking area of learning as defined by ABOR, so it will be important for courses to reflect this; and (2) since students are required to take 3 BC courses but only 1 course in each EP area, it is important to avoid dramatically reducing enrollments and student opportunities to take courses on other topics, including non-US or global topics, within the EP-Social Scientist and (to a lesser extent) EP-Humanist categories. Depth courses could be in any category, since they could be offered in a wider variety of subject areas, disciplines, and academic units across the campus. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)