UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

GENERAL REPORT

November 19, 2026

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General Education Council Report to the Board

In its November 20, 2025, meeting, the Utah Board of Higher Education gave the General Education Council (GEC) a charge to address three specific areas related to the General Education (Gen Ed) program in the Utah System of Higher Education:

- Complete the comprehensive review of distinguished national Gen Ed programs and draw from this study to streamline and improve our Gen Ed offerings.
- Align our Gen Ed purposes to support workforce and citizenship needs of the state by focusing on program-level Gen Ed learning outcomes to emphasize durable skills and civic engagement and to ensure our institutions are preparing students in areas of generative artificial intelligence.
- Design and implement a plan to assess Gen Ed learning outcomes.

This document fulfills the Board's call for the GEC to report on its efforts to address the three points above at the Board's November 19, 2026, meeting.

I. Completion of the Comprehensive Gen Ed Review

The academic affairs team in the Commissioner's office conducted a comprehensive national research study on Gen Ed programs. The team selected 50 institutions and studied the sixteen *Value Rubrics* developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).[1] The study examined Gen Ed programs at private and public universities, small and large institutions, state systems of higher education, and liberal arts colleges. The research team was particularly interested in ways to increase and maintain faculty engagement in Gen Ed, discovering the learning outcomes the best Gen Ed programs in the country have adopted, learning how courses have been designed to fulfill these learning outcomes, and determining the best steps for assessing Gen Ed, particularly at the program level. The full report was presented and discussed in detail at a day-long GEC meeting in January 2026. GEC representatives then shared the report with their institutions' General Education Committees, and it was presented to USHE Chief Academic Officers and Senior Academic Officers. On September 25, 2026, attendees at the USHE General Education Summit received a summary of the report's findings.

Here is an overview of the four focuses of the report, including recommendations for establishing and maintaining high-quality Gen Ed programs:

[1] American Association of Colleges and Universities, General Education Value Rubrics https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics , October 26, 2026.

Faculty Engagement

- A top priority of institutions should be to recruit faculty who demonstrate promise as Gen Ed teachers.
- All faculty should be formally oriented and trained as Gen Ed instructors.
- For faculty who teach Gen Ed courses, the assessment of Gen Ed teaching should comprise an important part of the regular promotion and tenure review process.
- Institutions' faculty leaders should place General Education at the heart of the undergraduate academic experience as Gen Ed provides the foundation for what every educated person should know and prepares students to be lifelong learners.
- Institutions should strive to increase the visibility of General Education by bestowing teaching awards to gifted Gen Ed teachers, developing co-curricular support for the Gen Ed program, and communicating Gen Ed successes to the campus community and the public.

Developing Effective Learning Outcomes

- Academic leaders should select the best Gen Ed faculty teachers to design and implement Gen Ed learning outcomes. They should empower faculty to find ways to fulfill the Gen Ed learning outcomes that are important to legislators, employers, faculty colleagues, and students.
- The GEC should develop comprehensive Gen Ed learning outcomes based on the AAC&U *Value Rubrics*.
- Faculty Area Working Groups and the GEC should thoughtfully consider Gen Ed course content for core and breadth areas and use measurable indicators to provide a framework for implementing and assessing learning outcomes.

Creative General Education Course Design

- Faculty should recognize that no area of Gen Ed exclusively belongs to a single academic discipline.
- The faculty should rely on the comprehensive learning outcomes and core and breadth outcomes of the USHE general education program to guide course development.
- Faculty creating new courses and redesigning existing courses should employ organizational elements of seminar-style and special topic-style courses to ensure the focus of Gen Ed courses is timely and attractive to students.
- Faculty designers should ensure that Gen Ed courses use high-impact teaching and learning practices, are discussion-based, and require high levels of in-class student collaboration.

Assessing General Education Learning Outcomes and Courses

- Each institution should develop its own program-level and core and breadth-based assessment plan. Institutions should conduct assessments on an ongoing basis.
- In designing the assessment plan, faculty should use multiple measures of assessment, such as portfolios that include student course evaluations, course artifacts (syllabi, assignments, student

work, etc.), information gathered from focus group discussions, and faculty peer evaluations to assess both the learning outcomes of the course and the individual teaching performance of professors.

- Academic affairs staff in the Office of the Commissioner should collect assessment reports from institutions and create a summary report to present to the Utah Board of Higher Education, Chief Academic Officers, and other relevant entities.

During this academic year, an academic team member will visit each institution's General Education Committee, share the report recommendations, and invite institutions to implement them to strengthen their Gen Ed programs.

II. Strengthening Program-Level Gen Ed Learning Outcomes

Board Policy R470, *General Education*, defines program-level learning outcomes and core and breadth area learning outcomes. The program-level learning outcomes focus on durable skills and principles of good citizenship. Employers most often cite these as the skills they want in college graduates. No single course in any core or breadth area can fulfill these outcomes; they depend on the whole Gen Ed program engaging students to build and sharpen skills in adaptability, literacy, teamwork, creative and critical thinking, problem solving, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement.

The comprehensive Gen Ed research study found that the best Gen Ed programs in the nation use the institutions' best Gen Ed teachers to develop learning outcomes and ensure those outcomes guide course development. The GEC is calling upon Faculty Area Working Groups in the arts, humanities, life sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, quantitative literacy, American Institutions, and written communication to study learning outcome rubrics produced by AAC&U and the top Gen Ed programs in the country and apply them to USHE's learning outcomes. The GEC membership is comprised of professors and academic leaders who work with their institution's General Education Committees. Gen Ed Committees discuss these learning outcomes and determine how best to design and teach them and make General Education the most important component of an undergraduate degree.

At the 2026 USHE General Education Summit, sessions focused on Gen Ed learning outcomes and how new Gen Ed courses and redesigns of existing Gen Ed courses are transforming the Gen Ed experience for students. Utah State University, the University of Utah, Southern Utah University, and Utah Valley University shared how innovative teaching strategies have invigorated learning in Gen Ed coursework. GEC members organized panels on Gen Ed principles, the importance of program-level learning outcomes, and how to build Gen Ed programs that engage students. GEC representatives believe USHE is at a pivotal point in our system's Gen Ed program. The GEC's goal is to build the most engaging and successful system-level Gen Ed program in the United States. This starts with designing strong learning outcomes and reimagining how we present them to students in dynamic Gen Ed courses.

When the Board revised Policy R470 in December 2023, institutions began redesigning their Gen Ed offerings. This has resulted in substantial reductions in the number of Gen Ed offerings and significant revisions to existing Gen Ed courses. The table below provides a snapshot of Gen Ed courses discontinued, revised, and newly adopted to better engage students in general education.

General Education Course Review

Institution	Gen Ed Courses Reviewed for Program Fit Since 2024	Gen Ed Courses Discontinued Since 2024	Gen Ed Courses Significantly Redesigned Since 2024	New Gen Ed Courses Developed Since 2024
SLCC	Yes	140	Yes	0
Snow	Yes	62	Yes	11
SUU	Yes	18	Yes	-
UU	Yes	~250	Yes	-
USU	Yes	-	Yes	22
UT	Yes	6	Yes	-
UVU	Yes	16	Yes	-
WSU	Yes	30	Yes	-
Total	-	522	-	33

As institutions go through the cyclical Gen Ed program review process in the future, they will discontinue more courses and replace them with redesigned, innovative courses.

General education learning outcomes include preparing students to understand the importance of generative artificial intelligence (genAI) tools. All eight degree-granting institutions have taken steps to incorporate genAI learning in appropriate and productive ways. Every institution has active genAI agendas that include:

- Teaching students to use genAI safely and securely.
- Training faculty to use genAI effectively in the classroom and to design syllabi that include assignments to help students learn to use genAI in their coursework.
- Teaching genAI techniques across the curriculum.
- Focusing on genAI techniques that are likely to be used in the professions.
- Incorporating genAI instruction in centers for teaching and learning.
- Organizing offices, task forces, committees, and specialists who monitor genAI safety and engagement.

Students are assigned work that involves the ethical use of genAI. Most institutions offer faculty incentives, such as stipends, grants, and professional development, to encourage the use of genAI in

research and pedagogy. Institutions have designed genAI protocols as standalone policies or incorporated genAI protocols into existing institutional policies. Academic degree programs include genAI curricular components in nearly all undergraduate and graduate programs.

III. Designing and Implementing an Effective Plan to Assess Gen Ed

While the USHE Gen Ed program has common program-level and core and breadth learning outcomes, the courses designed to fulfill those outcomes vary from one institution to another. Gen Ed courses may be discipline-based surveys, special topics, interdisciplinary, case studies, or other specialized courses. Gen Ed Committees at each institution build their Gen Ed programs based on faculty specializations and on curricula developed to fulfill learning outcomes at their institutions. While the system establishes learning outcomes, faculty experts who deliver Gen Ed at the institution level assess General Education programs.

To this end, the GEC provided general guidelines to system Chief Academic Officers and institution Gen Ed Committees. The GEC called for professors and academic leaders to collaborate to identify the appropriate tools and methods for conducting the assessment. The GEC recommended best practices institutions should consider as they design their Gen Ed program assessment plan:

1. Direct assessment of student learning:

    a. *Develop a Student Learning Rubric*: A rubric will ensure all courses are assessed against the same standard. The AAC&U's 16 *Value Rubrics* for assessing Gen Ed programs are comprehensive and measurable. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), now Northlight, also has a rubric for assessing General Education learning outcomes. These rubrics can be modified to include additional assessment criteria designed by individual institutions.
    b. *Evaluate Course Artifacts*: Well-designed course assignments and the evaluation of student work are central to the Gen Ed assessment process. The AAC&U *Value Rubrics* provide excellent guidelines for identifying and assessing Gen Ed content. Collecting Gen Ed course artifacts aligned with essential learning outcomes, such as syllabi, completed exams, research papers, essays, and other signature assignments, reveals much about how students demonstrate mastery of learning outcomes in their academic work. Similarly, Gen Ed assessment requires examining formative and summative assignments, as well as other faculty-prepared documents.
    c. *Regularly Assess Student Achievement*: Assessment plans should establish criteria for assessing Gen Ed learning outcomes over time. This allows faculty and academic leaders to use comparative data on the institution's effectiveness in meeting essential learning outcomes.

2. Indirect assessment of learning outcomes:
    a. *Administer End-of-Course Student Surveys*: Surveys usually contain multiple-choice questions. The best surveys include questions that call upon students to be self-reflective, such as:

i. *How does your thinking about the subject matter of this course compare to your thoughts at the beginning of the course?*
ii. *What are the most important ideas you have learned from this course?*
iii. *How has the course changed the way you view societal problems, your relationships with others, and individual challenges?*
iv. *How has your study of science impacted the way you view scientific inquiry, nature, and your place in the universe?*
v. *How has this writing course impacted the way you make compelling arguments?*
vi. *What have you learned about the creative arts that have helped you understand human creativity and artistic ideas about human experience?*

b. *Conduct Focus Group Discussions/Interviews*: Focus group discussions and interviews invite students to reflect on their Gen Ed experiences. Faculty design questions that assess student achievement with respect to Gen Ed learning outcomes. Summaries of these discussions should be included as course artifacts in the review of Gen Ed courses and programs.

All institutions developed their Gen Ed assessment plans and sent summary reports to staff in the Commissioner's Office. There are common features of the plans:

- All institutions are focusing on assessing program-level learning outcomes as outlined in Board Policy R470. These include durable skills such as critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, and teamwork and problem-solving.[2]
- These skills are taught within the core and breadth requirements, including written communication, quantitative literacy, American institutions, creative arts, humanities, life science, physical science, and social and behavioral science. No single core or breadth course fulfills a learning outcome. Learning outcomes are taught in overlapping areas as follows:

How Core and Breadth Requirements Address Program-Level Learning Outcomes

Gen Ed Curriculum Areas	Core and Breadth Area Courses	Durable Skills Addressed
Knowledge of Human Cultures	American institutions, creative Arts, humanities, written communication, social and behavioral science, quantitative literacy	Critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, and teamwork and problem-solving, ethical reasoning, civic engagement
Knowledge of the Natural World	Life science, quantitative literacy, physical science	
Personal and Social Responsibility	All core and breadth areas	
Integrative Learning	All core and breadth areas	

[2] Board Policy R470-6.1.1.

- All institutions are assessing Gen Ed not only to comply with the Board's charge, but also to address the general education assessment requirements of NWCCU/Northlight.
- Institutions are drawing from AAC&U's *Value Rubrics* and incorporating criteria into their own assessment rubrics.
- Assessing signature assignments within individual Gen Ed course areas is particularly important because such tasks call upon students to integrate and apply course content to significant personal, social, or professional questions. Signature assignments let professors evaluate how well students develop the durable skills that form the foundation of the Gen Ed program.
- Institutions are also employing a mix of student surveys, studying random selections of individual student portfolios, and focus group discussions to assess the effectiveness of their Gen Ed programs.
- Finally, institutions are using feedback processes to set goals and revise Gen Ed delivery on an ongoing basis.

Individual institutions have aspects of their plans that are unique to their Gen Ed programs. Here is a summary of these unique assessment tools (individual assessment plans for each institution are available for the Board to review upon request):

Salt Lake Community College

Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) began its current assessment cycle in the 2024 academic year, focusing on the quantitative literacy and communication components of its Gen Ed plan. In the 2025 academic year, SLCC assessed creative arts, humanities, and social and behavioral science. In the 2026 academic year, SLCC assessed the life science and physical science components. In the current academic year, SLCC will assess American institutions, quantitative literacy, and written communication. SLCC will repeat the three-year assessment cycle beginning in 2028.

SLCC faculty studied samples of 100 students' experiences for each Gen Ed core and breadth area. This included collecting signature assignments, gathering demographic data, and using that data to assess student completion of learning outcomes by considering gender, race, Pell-eligible status, and first-generation status.

Faculty have been specially trained to use AAC&U rubrics to assess the signature assignments. They will use AAC&U scoring to highlight student strengths and weaknesses in Gen Ed Areas and in their acquisition of durable skills. Their assessment of the signature assignments shows that students gain competency in program-level, core, and breadth-level Gen Ed learning outcomes.

Snow College

In 2025, Snow College developed a baseline survey to determine students' competency levels in the program-level durable skills. Snow has branded these skills as "Badger Skills" to highlight their importance to students. After students complete their Gen Ed program, they will retake the assessment exam in Spring 2027 and compare these scores to the 2025 scores.

Snow assessors examined individual Gen Ed courses in each of the Core and Breadth requirement areas, drawing from both AAC&U rubrics and additional criteria they have developed. They will assess Gen Ed on a five-year cycle, covering at least one area each year. They have already completed their first assessment of American institutions and social and behavioral science. During the 2026-2027 academic year, Snow is reviewing written communication, quantitative literacy, humanities, and creative arts, and will complete the durable skills survey in the spring semester. Next academic year, Snow will assess the life and physical sciences breadth areas. The assessment process has been designed to highlight strengths and weaknesses of the program by targeting specific student learning outcomes at the program level and at the core and breadth area level.

Southern Utah University

Southern Utah University (SUU) designed its Gen Ed assessment in three tiers: program level assessment, core and breadth area assessment, and NWCCU/Northlight standards. SUU professors will use a combination of grade distribution (to monitor completion of accreditation standards) and specific open-ended questions that focus on self-reflection in student surveys to measure mastery of core and breadth learning outcomes.

Data gathered from the grade distributions and self-reflection surveys will be used to study durable skills. SUU will study the outcomes over the next three years, beginning in the current academic year with an assessment of written communication and quantitative literacy. Next academic year, the university will assess American Institutions, social science, and physical science. In the 2028-29 academic year, SUU will assess life science, humanities, and creative arts. Subsequent Gen Ed assessment will continue this three-year cycle.

University of Utah

The University of Utah (U of U) has also designed a three-tier assessment process that focuses on accreditation standards, USHE Gen Ed learning outcomes, and the institutional alignment and quality of the Gen Ed curriculum. The U of U bases its assessment model on a pilot they conducted last academic year.

The assessment plan focuses on durable skill development, using the rubric to ensure program-level learning outcomes lead to the acquisition of personal skills and leadership. The process requires assessors to determine whether the Gen Ed program engages students in applying durable skills, builds persistence and problem-solving, teaches students to respond creatively to problems, reason and act ethically, and collaborate effectively with peers. Faculty assessors will pay close attention to student artifacts as they measure student opportunities to practice skills and how students respond to those opportunities. An artificial intelligence tool will score student work.

The assessment also calls upon faculty to ensure that each Gen Ed course fits the learning outcomes established for each core and breadth area. The feedback process identifies patterns that indicate strengths and areas for improvement in the Gen Ed program.

Utah State University

Utah State University's (USU) Center for Civic Engagement reconfigured Gen Ed program-level learning outcomes to emphasize durable skill development by carefully designing new Gen Ed courses. Each course carries a new prefix (CIVC), indicating that a course has been designed with the sole purpose of fulfilling Gen Ed learning outcomes. CIVC courses primarily focus on program-level learning outcomes, with the core and breadth outcomes integrated into the courses. No single course is sufficient to complete a single Gen Ed area—it requires completion of the whole program to fulfill the learning outcomes at both the program-level and the core and breadth level.

USU faculty have been specially trained to assess signature assignments that students complete as part of the course and program requirements. A common rubric emphasizes durable skills, citizenship, and integrated learning across all Gen Ed courses. Students will be assessed through focus group discussions and student surveys. The program prioritizes faculty engagement in the assessment process through participation in charrettes.[3] The Gen Ed program will be assessed annually, with a focus on collaborative charrettes on durable skills and curriculum delivery. Charrettes will issue their first assessment and recommendations for improvement in the fall 2027 semester.

Utah Tech University

Under the direction of the institutional General Education Committee, Utah Tech (UT) faculty have designed rubrics for each Gen Ed core and breadth area. Students who are completing associate degree programs and who are applying for admission into baccalaureate programs will be assessed on how well they are prepared for upper-division coursework. These studies will be conducted at the academic

[3] The Center for Civic Engagement has organized faculty charrettes that have designed courses around Gen Ed learning outcomes and assess those outcomes on an ongoing basis.

department level, and chairs will prepare reports for the provost on how well signature assignments and other course artifacts demonstrate fulfillment of learning outcomes.

UT faculty will also use student focus groups to measure Gen Ed and capstone course preparation. Open-ended questions will also be asked in student course evaluations in Gen Ed courses and will be analyzed by the faculty.

All reports will be reviewed by the university's Gen Ed Committee. The Committee will write reports for each of the Gen Ed core and breadth areas and link these reports to the program-level learning outcomes.

Utah Valley University

The Gen Ed faculty at Utah Valley University (UVU) have organized their assessment plan into four areas: 1) civic and global engagement, 2) communication, 3) critical thinking, 4) quantitative and scientific literacy. Each year, UVU focuses on one area and completes the cycle every four years. The university completed the civic and global engagement assessment last academic year. This year, it will assess communication, followed by critical thinking in 2027-28 and scientific literacy in 2028-29.

The AAC&U Value Rubrics form the basis for assessing the Gen Ed program-level outcomes at UVU and will also be used to assess the core and breadth learning outcomes. As with other institutions, signature assignments will be emphasized to determine how students use Gen Ed knowledge to assess societal, personal, and professional issues and challenges. Other assignments, class activities, and exams will also be measured against the learning outcomes in the rubrics. Student surveys have been redesigned to ask students to self-report what they learned from their Gen Ed coursework in each of the four assessment areas.

Weber State University

Faculty at Weber State University (WSU) are using signature assignment reviews as the focus of their Gen Ed assessment. The goal is to identify what is working well in their Gen Ed program and what improvements are needed to enhance students' critical and creative thinking skills, as well as other skills that will lead to career success and civic engagement. The WSU Gen Ed Committee has trained colleagues to design and assess the signature assignments for both on-campus and concurrent enrollment sections. The signature assignments will be reviewed to assess both program-level learning outcomes and core and breadth learning outcomes.

The WSU Gen Ed Committee has developed rubrics and supervised training for faculty assessors. Assessors will write the reports and submit them to department chairs. Last academic year, all Gen Ed courses underwent a preliminary assessment and had to be resubmitted to the Gen Ed Committee for

approval to be taught as Gen Ed courses. These courses will be evaluated on a cyclical basis, with each course formally reviewed every five years.

Student evaluations will be connected to the signature assignments to provide specific insights into how students apply Gen Ed content to analyze the social, scientific, and personal challenges humans experience. WSU will also organize focus groups that give students opportunities to discuss Gen Ed content.

IV. Moving Forward

The completion of the Gen Ed Review, the focused study on program-level learning outcomes, and the ongoing assessment process have given the GEC a focused plan to improve General Education in the Utah System of Higher Education. In the 2026-27 academic year, the GEC will work closely with institutions' General Education Committees, ensuring that the findings from the Gen Ed Review guide us in building the most effective system-level General Education Program in the United States:

- Are we effective in recruiting, training, and rewarding faculty who teach Gen Ed courses? Do we have the best faculty designing courses and leading the Gen Ed efforts at each institution?
- Do program-level learning outcomes drive the core and breadth Gen Ed courses, and are students in our Gen Ed programs becoming adaptive and literate learners? Are they acquiring skills as collaborators, and are they developing abilities as critical and creative thinkers? Are they problem solvers who are imbued with moral judgment, and are they prepared to be civically engaged leaders in their communities?
- Are USHE institutions designing courses that are the most exciting and engaging Gen Ed courses of any system in the United States? Are students thriving in their Gen Ed courses because they are challenged and acquiring the skills to be lifelong learners?
- Are we sufficiently prepared to use the findings from our Gen Ed assessments and make substantial changes to Gen Ed design and delivery?

The GEC is planning the 2027 Gen Ed Summit and is creating sessions to assist institutions in several key areas:

- Sessions will be organized to showcase how institutions have designed and implemented exciting Gen Ed courses that fulfill both program-level and core and breadth learning outcomes.
- Faculty who are winners of the core and breadth teaching awards will give formal presentations at the conference to share best practices with summit attendees.
- Sessions will be organized to address Gen Ed delivery through concurrent enrollment courses in high schools.
- Early findings from institutional assessments of Gen Ed will be shared.

This report shows that USHE is far ahead of most state systems of higher education in the design of Gen Ed learning outcomes, transferability of Gen Ed within the system, and collaboration on Gen Ed matters

among sister institutions. The study helped us realize that we can learn not only from the top-rated Gen Ed programs at individual institutions, but also that our collaborative experience will help us develop the best Gen Ed program of any state system in the United States. We believe our Gen Ed program is transformational and will better prepare students for their careers, as citizens, and as lifelong learners. We are excited about the challenges and opportunities ahead and believe we are well on our way towards building a marquee Gen Ed program.