CONNECTICUT COMMUNITY COLLEGES
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT, CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

Discussion Paper: The Required General Education Component in Associate Degree Programs and Requirements for the Associate in Arts Degree

1. Board of Trustees Policy. "The general education component of associate degree programs shall include a balanced distribution of required courses or restricted electives in the humanities, arts, natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and social sciences, comprising at least one-third of the minimum requirements for the degree. All courses which are available to the general college population shall be considered in the calculation of the general education component."
(Board Policy 3.3.4, adopted May 18, 1987)

2. Rationale for the Requirement. Students who attend colleges and universities have always been expected to become knowledgeable of, and inculcated with, the general cultural values and traditions of our society. This has been the case since the first American universities were established, and has continued to hold true ever since, for post-secondary institutions of virtually all types and sizes. It is reasonable and appropriate to expect that graduates of these institutions should know something of our civilization: its history, art, scientific developments, etc. This concept has traditionally been the underpinning of all liberal arts and sciences programs, and figures in other programs of study as well. (This is a succinct summary of the rationale behind the Board's policy. More extensive studies and commentaries can be found in the writings of philosophers from Plato to Dewey – almost all philosophers have addressed the issue, since all philosophy is, in one way or another, philosophy of education.)

3. The Distribution Requirement. The Board's policy identifies five separate areas: humanities, arts, natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and social sciences. It also requires a balanced distribution. Some colleges have interpreted this requirement as a totality of credits: that is, as long as one-third of the credits and courses can be found in *some* of these areas, the requirement has been met; it is not necessary to require courses in *all* of the areas, and the concept of balance is ignored. However, if the term "balanced distribution" is to mean anything, it must mean *at least one course in each of the five areas that the Board has taken the trouble to identify.*

4. Defining the Five Areas. Some college catalogs do not define five separate areas. Terms such as "liberal arts and sciences", "arts/humanities", "mathematics/science", etc., appear in catalogs. However, the Board's policy does not mention "liberal arts and sciences" at all, and it does not combine any of the areas. As noted in the preceding paragraph, there is a *distribution* requirement, which implies *differences.* Following is a list of which courses fall into the five areas, based on the customary understandings of the courses:

Arts: art/dance/film/fine arts/music/photography/theatre, appreciation/history courses

Humanities: communication, English, foreign languages including intermediate ESL, history, literature, philosophy, speech

Mathematics: mathematics, statistics

Natural and Physical Sciences: astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, meteorology, physics, and survey courses in general science

Social Sciences: anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, political science, psychology, sociology

5. Defining One-Third. It would seem clear enough that this means one-third of the credits required for a degree. On the other hand, the Board's policy says "courses", not "credits", so it could also be taken to be one-third of the courses. Further, at times it has been held that it means one-third of the minimum legal requirement for an associate degree, without regard to what may be required by a college: *i. e.,* 60 credits. However, since colleges prescribe the courses of study, then the number of credits they specify for the degree must be taken to be the minimum required; the minimum cannot be measured against a notional (legal) 60 credits. Further, since requirements for graduation are based on the number of credits earned, the measurement by credit, rather than number of courses, should govern. This gives the following table, showing the number of credits required for a degree in the left column, and the one-third minimum in the right column:

60 – 20	63 – 21	66 - 22
61 – 21	64 – 22	67 - 23
62 – 21	65 – 22	68 – 23

6. Constructing a Requirements Table. The following table shows how the distribution and one-third requirements can be met. The first column lists the five areas. The second shows a minimum distribution, based on a usual two-course English/literature requirement, and a 3-4 credit natural or physical science course. The third and fourth columns show how additional courses might be added to reach a one-third component for a degree.

Area	Must Have	Could Have	Could Have
Arts	3	3	3
Humanities (1)	6	9	9
Mathematics (2)	3	6	3
Natural/Physical Sciences (3)	3-4	3-4	6-8
Social Sciences (4)	6	6	9
Total	21-22	27-28	30-32

These are illustrative only. Depending on the program (math/science heavy, literature heavy, etc.) the requirements would differ. But there must always be at least one course in each of the five areas. Some specific notes.

(1) If six of the credits in Humanities are in English (English Composition and Writing, for example), a third requirement must be from another area

(2) Some colleges have four-credit mathematics courses, which would change the numbers.

(3) If two courses were required, it would be preferable to specify that they be from two separate areas: biology and geology, chemistry and astronomy, for example.

(4) If one of these courses is specified as a psychology course, a second requirement must be from history or political science.

7. Catalog Notations. College catalogs should be written to reflect the Board's policy, as clarified and defined in this paper. This means that a listing of course requirements for a degree must show, for the general education component, *five separate lines, titled as above.* Lines such as "liberal arts and sciences", "arts/humanities", "mathematics/science", or anything other than the five component areas as defined by the Board's policy should not be used to describe these requirements.

8. The Associate in Arts Degree. The Board of Trustees has described the associate in arts and associate in science degrees as follows:

"The associate in arts degree parallels the first two years of a baccalaureate degree program and permits transfer to a four-year institution or provides enrichment in liberal arts for those wishing to acquire only an associate degree. The associate in arts degree may require completion of a foreign language course sequence. Within specific distribution requirements, associate in arts programs are sufficiently flexible to allow students to plan exact course patterns to facilitate transfer to a variety of baccalaureate institutions.

"The associate in science degree is designed to include a general education component and electives and courses in a major field which often emphasize career preparation. An associate in science degree program may be a transfer program, depending on the specific objectives of the program."

(Board policy 3.3.2, adopted May 15, 1987)

The Board's policy implies that the associate in science (A. S.) programs are more highly structured, and designed around a particular career area, than those in associate in arts (A. A.) programs. While both can be transfer, the A. A. has greater flexibility. Since the community colleges began offering degrees, there has been tremendous expansion in the A. S. programs, reflecting the statutory and adopted missions of the system. There has been some development of new A. A. programs, but they are very few in number, and actually related to careers: graphic design, film, *e. g.*

In one sense, there is little difference between the two. Many A. S. programs have almost the same flexibility as can be found in A. A. programs. But the Board has established two separate degrees, and while there are similarities, there are also differences. If the term "arts" is to mean anything, it must mean that there is a heavy dose of the arts and humanities in any program culminating in the A. A. degree. However, some colleges award an A. A. with few if any art, foreign language, or philosophy courses. One might ask whether there is any real difference, if there are no such requirements for an A. A., between it and a General Studies A. S. program.

The arts and humanities component must predominate in any program which awards an A. A. degree. Such programs of study might require at least one-third of all courses/credits be in the two areas of arts and humanities. An additional one-third could be in the remaining areas of general education. For many programs, the art component will be substantial because they are indeed art programs, designed for artists and musicians, thespians and designers. For others, if they are to be considered as the first two years of a baccalaureate education, a heavy liberal arts presence is implied, and mandatory. Such programs should require a foreign language, in order to meet the transfer requirements of almost all four-year institutions, and the programs should be designed to parallel those whenever possible.

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