## TOPIC: APPROVE REVISIONS TO CCHE POLICY I, PART L: STATEWIDE TRANSFER AND GT PATHWAYS POLICY

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**I. SUMMARY**

This item presents for action changes to the Commission’s Statewide Transfer and GT Pathways policy to codify additional roles and responsibilities for public institutions of higher education and members of the General Education Council (or “GE Council”) regarding statewide transfer articulation agreements; and to include the new general education completion credential framework, recently endorsed by the Commission, that formally recognizes students when they have fulfilled all GT Pathways requirements.

**II. BACKGROUND**

In 2001, §23-1-108.5, Colorado Revised Statues[[1]](#footnote-1), charged the Commission to “oversee the adoption of a statewide articulation matrix system of course numbering for general education courses” that “every student…must successfully complete to attain an associate’s or bachelor’s degree”. Statute also created the General Education Council, which was charged with developing and maintaining the articulation matrix. The Council—working closely with institutional faculty—developed content criteria and competencies (student learning outcomes) to guide institutions in mapping existing courses, and creating new courses, to align with the matrix. GT Pathways courses are grouped into 6 broad categories, 14 sub-categories, and 10 competencies. The 31 required credits are distributed among the categories and sub-categories in a manner articulated by Commission policy.

In 2010, the General Assembly further charged the Commission to create a number of statewide transfer articulation agreements, which are defined in statute as agreements “among all of the state institutions of higher education for the transfer of an associate of arts or an associate of science degree” in “common degree programs” (§23-1-108(7)(g)(III), C.R.S.). Statewide transfer articulation agreements allow students to graduate from a two-year institution with a 60-credit Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.) Degree with Designation (e.g., Associate of Arts in Psychology); enroll, with junior status, at a participating four-year institution if the student successfully completes the A.A. or A.S. degree that is subject of the statewide transfer articulation agreement; and complete the bachelor’s degree in no more than 60 additional credits at the receiving four-year institution (for a total of 120 credits).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Statewide transfer articulation agreements help students by improving the simplicity, transparency, equity, and portability of transfer systems. As a result, students have advanced information about transferability and are able to apply more of their earned credits toward their degree. Students who use statewide transfer articulation agreements are more likely to earn an A.A. or A.S. prior to transferring and are more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree and earn their bachelor’s degree in less time and with fewer completed credits compared to students who do not use statewide transfer articulation agreements. Department staff estimate that statewide transfer agreements have saved students over $5 million since their initial launch.

The *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential* is a formal recognition of an undergraduate student’s completion of all GT Pathways requirements at a Colorado public institution of higher education. The credential rewards students for achieving a significant milestone in their degree pathways and highlights the in-demand skills and competencies that are developed through general education—competencies that employers indicate again and again are foundation for workplace success.

**III. STAFF ANALYSIS**

Statewide transfer articulation agreements, like all academic programs and curricular pathways, are not designed to be evergreen. Changes in curriculum, in the academic disciplines, in accreditation and professional requirements, and in employer expectations collectively dictate that an occasional review of the agreements is merited. In the fall of 2019, Department staff – in partnership with the GE Council – launched a process to “Revisit, Revise, and Renew” all then-34 existing agreements. The process was paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restarted in the fall of 2021.

The review process was launched to ensure that the agreements are in alignment with the current and evolving state of the disciplines and that they best prepare students for upper-division study and eventual success in their chosen career. Each review is conducted in collaboration with faculty, academic advisors, and academic staff from both two-year and four-year institutions from across the state. Proposed revisions are then reviewed by Department staff and GE Council, who together ensure compliance with statute and Commission policy. Review teams may be convened on more than one occasion for further discussion and attempts to arrive at consensus. GE Council members then facilitate institutional adoption of revisions. As of June 2024, all existing agreements have been reviewed and are in different stages of revision and adoption. During revision meetings, teams are asked to consider:

* How the agreements might be revised to better prepare students for upper-division study in the discipline and the evolving needs of employers in related areas
* How the agreements could be simplified to maximize their portability, in part by minimizing the number of included exceptions, conditions, and divergent pathways specific to a particular institution
* Whether the required math course(s) are best aligned with the type of quantitative literacy needed for success in upper-division study
* Whether required courses are taught with sufficient frequency and location to merit their continued inclusion in the agreement

Based on experience with the reviews, the GE Council has recommended that agreements be reviewed no less frequently than every five years, and that expectations be codified on both process and requirements for institutions who exit an agreement due to the sunsetting of specific academic programs.

Discussion of the need to formally recognize the significance of completing all general education requirements began in 2019 but was postponed, like many initiatives in progress, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021 and 2022, the Department engaged in two initiatives to encourage institutions to develop shorter-term credentials on the way to a bachelor’s degree, or that could stack into a bachelor’s degree while functioning as standalone vehicles for workplace advancement. Out of these efforts emerged a renewed focus on the role and value of general education in preparing students for advanced study in a specific major or academic discipline, as well as preparation for career through the timeless, foundational skills that are developed through the general education curriculum.

In August 2023, Department staff convened a General Education Credential Task Force to develop a framework for a completion award using the GT Pathways competency matrix. The resulting framework and recommendations were endorsed by the General Education Council at its January 8, 2024 meeting. At its May 2024 meeting, the Commission approved a resolution endorsing the Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential Framework and encouraging institutions to create and implement academic awards that align with the framework.

Guidance from the statutes listed below under “Statutory Authority” was used in developing proposed revisions to the policy. The following changes are proposed:

1. Section 5.00: Roles and Responsibilities
	1. New sub-section 5.03.17, add new text indicating that institutions “shall follow their standard teach-out provisions for academic programs when statewide transfer articulation agreements are revised or when an institution discontinues a program that is part of a statewide transfer articulation agreement”.
	2. In sub-section 5.06.06, revise language as institutional liaisons to assist the Department in the “creation and adoption” to “creation, adoption, and revision” of statewide transfer articulation agreements; “train academic advisors” to “training of academic advisors and other institutional staff members”; and “provide guidance to the Department in the resolution of transfer student disputes” to “providing guidance to the Department in the resolution of transfer disputes.”
	3. New sub-section 5.06.07, add text indicating that GE Council members “shall assist the Department in reviewing and revising statewide transfer articulation agreements no less frequently than every five years; facilitating meetings for discipline-specific faculty to negotiate revisions to their agreement; recruit discipline-specific faculty to participate in revision negotiations; and facilitate institutional adoption of revisions to statewide transfer articulation agreements.” This codifies the established practices that were developed by the GE Council – in partnership with Department staff – when the process to “Revisit, Revise, and Renew” all 34 existing agreements started in fall 2019.
2. Section 7.00 General Education and gtPathways Curriculum
	1. New sub-section 7.03, add language describing the *Colorado GenEd Foundational Skills Credential*. This credential formally recognizes students when they have fulfilled all GT Pathways requirements, rewards students for achieving a significant milestone in their degree pathways while also highlighting the in-demand skills and competencies that are developed through general education. Institutions may require additional general education courses that go above and beyond GT Pathways; therefore, it is the prerogative of institutions to determine whether to award the credential, as well as the credential name, documentation, and method of award.

The proposed revisions were presented to both General Education Council and Academic Council in May, prior to the June 6 Commission meeting.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends approval of the proposed revisions to CCHE Policy Section I, Part L: Statewide Transfer and GT Pathways Policy.

**V. STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

As noted previously, the statutory language used here does not reflect changes from the 2024 legislative session.

**C.R.S. §23-1-108**

**Duties and powers of the commission with regard to systemwide planning – reporting – definitions**

(1) The commission, after consultation with the governing boards of institutions and as part of the master planning process, shall have the authority to:

…

(7)(a) The commission shall establish, after consultation with the governing boards of institutions, and enforce statewide degree transfer agreements between two-year and four-year state institutions of higher education and among four-year state institutions of higher education. Governing boards and state institutions of higher education shall implement the statewide degree transfer agreements and the commission policies relating to the statewide degree transfer agreements. The statewide degree transfer agreements shall include provisions under which state institutions of higher education shall accept all credit hours of acceptable course work for automatic transfer from an associate of arts, associate of applied science, or associate of science degree program in another state institution of higher education in Colorado. The commission shall have final authority in resolving transfer disputes.
…

**C.R.S. §23-1-125**

**Commission directive – student bill of rights – degree requirements – implementation of core courses – competency test – prior learning**

(1) **Student bill of rights**. The general assembly hereby finds that students enrolled in public institutions of higher education shall have the following rights:

(a) Students should be able to complete their associate of arts and associate of science degree programs in no more than sixty credit hours or their baccalaureate programs in no more than one hundred twenty credit hours unless there are additional degree requirements recognized by the commission;
…

(3) Core courses. The department, in consultation with each Colorado public institution of higher education, is directed to outline a plan to implement a core course concept that defines the general education course guidelines for all public institutions of higher education. The core of courses shall be designed to ensure that students demonstrate competency in reading, critical thinking, written communication, mathematics, and technology. The core of courses shall consist of at least thirty credit hours but shall not exceed forty credit hours. Individual institutions of higher education shall conform their own core course requirements with the guidelines developed by the department and shall identify the specific courses that meet the general education course guidelines. Any such guidelines developed by the department shall be submitted to the commission for its approval. In creating and adopting the guidelines, the department and the commission, in collaboration with the public institutions of higher education, may make allowances for baccalaureate programs that have additional degree requirements recognized by the commission. If a statewide matrix of core courses is adopted by the commission, the courses identified by the individual institutions as meeting the general education course guidelines shall be included in the matrix. The commission shall adopt such policies to ensure that institutions develop the most effective way to implement the transferability of core course credits.
…

**ATTACHMENT**

Attachment A: Proposed Revisions to CCHE Policy I, L: Statewide Transfer and GT Pathways Policy

1. References to Colorado Revised Statues reflect statutory language through 2023 and do not include recent changes resulting from Senate Bill 24-162: Institution of Higher Education Transparency Requirements; none of the changes from this bill impact the CCHE policy revisions presented in this agenda item. The staff will prepare further revisions to this policy in response to the bill for Commission consideration at a later date. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Commission approved changes to this policy to allow for Degrees with Designation of more than 60 credits when the associated bachelor’s degree has been exempted from the 120-credit limit due to technical or accreditation-related requirements. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)