

## **Colorado General Education Credentialing Task Force Mission Statement**

The Colorado General Education Credentialing Task Force aims to highlight, reinforce, and apply the value of Colorado higher education institutions' general education program by packaging it into quality academic micro-credentials, including digital micro-credentials. It recognizes that skills and competencies gained through Colorado's general education program are directly and broadly applicable and are in increasingly high demand. This credentialing initiative addresses the following objectives:

1. Provide guidance for Colorado higher education institutions to create and implement GE credentials
2. Facilitate portability and transferability among higher education institutions
3. Highlight the nature and value of Colorado's general education program
4. Support students, employers, and other constituents in understanding and articulating skills and competencies gained through Colorado's general education program as well as their value and application
5. Provide evidence of attainment of broadly applicable skills and competencies
6. Recognize early career and foundational academic achievements that promote student persistence, retention, and completion
7. Offer additional stackability toward two- and four-year degrees and encourage advanced study of foundational skills

### **Why should institutions adopt such credentials?**

A "foundational skills certificate" or other recognition of completion of general education requirements will allow students to celebrate milestones in their educational trajectory by earning a meaningful accomplishment on the way to an associate and/or bachelor's degree. Packaged below the size of an associate degree, the foundational skills certificate or other credential may be completed in as little as one academic year. The credits from this certificate or other credential will likewise serve to encourage student persistence and stackability toward higher degrees, owing to the inclusion of GT Pathways courses. The inclusion of GT Pathways courses will likewise allow for maximum transferability as well as ease of transferability between institutions.

### **Why would employers find value in such a credential?**

On the career front, employers struggle to quantify the value and relevance of "some college" as well as in some cases the potential relevance of certain degrees at the associate and bachelor's level. At the same time, they value the skills developed through a liberal arts or general education curriculum: communication, critical thinking, creativity, literacy, adaptability, interpersonal skills, and empathy. Packaging and presenting such a curriculum as foundational skills will provide employers with the means to assess the difference between a seemingly random assortment of completed courses and the sort of coursework that contributes to a well-rounded employee possessing basic communication and quantitative literacy skills, among other competencies. Additionally, a foundational skills certificate or other credential will allow students to signal their basic intellectual competency and workforce readiness beyond the level of a high school diploma, thereby contributing to their hireability and preparation for today's rapidly changing workforce.

## **General Education Credential Framework**

- Title: Colorado Collegiate GenEd Credential (CCGC) -- potentially to be trademarked
- Alternative Titles considered:
  - GT Pathways Completion Recognition (using the term “completion” signals that gen ed requirements are complete/finished--no additional courses required)
  - GT Pathways Completion Award (decided to keep “GT Pathways” out of the title because the term has limited meaning outside of Colorado’s public colleges and universities)
  - Colorado Foundational Skills Award
  - Colorado’s Foundational Skills Completion Award
- Credits: 31 (completion of all GT Pathways requirements or aligned 31-credit completion)
- This credit-bearing sub-baccalaureate credential recognizes foundational competencies in the following broadly applicable skill areas:
  - Written communication
  - Quantitative literacy
  - Problem solving
  - Inquiry and analysis
  - Critical thinking
- Requirements that align with statewide GT Pathways requirements:
  - 6 credits (2 courses) of written communication (GT-CO 1-3)
  - 3 credits of math (GT-MA1)
  - 7 credits (2 courses) in the natural sciences, including at least one course with a lab (GT-SC 1-2)
  - 6 credits (2 courses) in the arts and humanities (GT-AH 1-4)
  - 3 credits of history (GT-HI1)
  - 3 credits in the social and behavioral sciences (GT-SS 1-3)
  - 3 additional credits in history, the arts and humanities, or the social and behavioral sciences

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Q: Why is the Colorado Collegiate GenEd Credential needed? How is it valuable?*

A: The Colorado Collegiate GenEd Credential (CCGE, or CoGeC) signifies to students, family members, and employers that an individual has completed courses designed to develop key foundational competencies and skills in written communication, quantitative literacy, problem solving, inquiry and analysis, and critical thinking. These skills are regularly identified by employers as key to success in the workplace (for example, see [The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes](#)). The credential also signals to students that they have achieved a key milestone in the completion of their larger academic goals and affirms the return on the investment they have made in completing the general education curriculum.

*Q: Does my institution need to participate?*

A: Decisions about which academic credentials to award and when to award them are the prerogative of individual institutions. As such, institutions are strongly encouraged, but not required, to participate.

*Q: Can my institution implement a general education completion award that differs from these requirements?*

A: The CCGC is designed to be awarded to students who have completed all GT Pathways requirements. Recognizing that some institutions require additional general education courses that go above and beyond GT Pathways, and institutions may require students to meet the institution's full general education requirements before issuing the award. That being said, keeping the credential simple, identifiable, and consistent across institutions will benefit students across institutions and provide increased credibility to employers and other stakeholders.

*Q: If a student transfers after receiving this award, can the receiving institution require additional coursework to meet general education requirements (such as with some institutions' diversity requirements)?*

A: Ideally, a student who completes the Colorado Collegiate GenEd Credential at one institution should fulfill all general education requirements statewide and not be required to complete any additional courses post-transfer—similar to students who complete a Degree with Designation (DwD). However, until such time that this expectation is codified into Commission on Higher Education policy, institutions may require incoming transfer students to take additional required courses that are outside of the statewide GT Pathways program.

*Q: Must the credential be added to the student's academic transcript?*

A: Ideally, the CCGC would appear on the academic transcript similar to other academic credentials including degrees, certificates, minors, and areas of concentration. Transcribing the credential gives it legitimacy and a cachet that is greater than awards and recognitions that are not transcribed. Appearance on the transcript also communicates authenticity and validity to employers and others who might require academic transcripts for hiring or admission. Institutions that decide not to transcribe the award (and those that do) might provide students with comparable collateral such as electronic notification or a printed document of recognition.

*Q: Must the credential be awarded to students at the time it is completed?*

A: The credential has maximum value to students if it is awarded when it is earned – that is, at the time when all course requirements have been completed. By doing so, institutions signal progress toward the

degree in the short term and provide an opportunity for students to communicate the value of their efforts to employers before completion of a larger degree program. In an ideal scenario, institutions would award the credential as one of several stackable credentials building to an associate or bachelor's degree.

*Q: Why should (or why shouldn't) we call this a "certificate"?*

A: Each institution defines "certificate" differently, in some cases reserving use of the term for credentials that fall below a certain number of credits. The term "certificate" might be reserved for credentials that are connected to career and technical programs or that are reported to the U.S. Department of Higher Education or to SURDS. Some institutions may prefer to avoid potential policy implications, including being subject to federal Gainful Employment regulations, that could follow the awarding of a "certificate." In response to these concerns, the proposed name of the award includes the more generic term "credential" (but nothing prevents an individual institution from calling the award a "certificate").

*Q: How should my institution administer this credential? Where should it be housed?*

A: Recognizing institutional variability, the location and administrative logistics for this credential is up to the discretion of individual institutions.

*Q: Is this a financial aid-eligible award?*

A: Provided the student has declared an academic program that includes general education requirements, the completion award should be aid-eligible; that being said, each institution defines financial aid eligibility for programs and students depending on their accreditation approvals and Title IV Participation Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. (Note: High school concurrent students are not eligible for state or federal financial aid.)

*Q: How will we brand and promote the award?*

A: The Colorado Department of Higher Education will partner with institutions to develop a branding and outreach strategy, along with selected marketing collateral designed for students to communicate the value of their general education experience and the completion credential to family members and employers. This will include working with a third-party strategy firm using external dollars.

*Q: What are the next steps?*

A: The General Education Council will endorse the proposed framework at an upcoming meeting. This will be followed by presentation to the Academic Council (provosts and other chief academic officers) with proposed additions to the [CCHCE policy on Statewide Transfer and GT Pathways](#) to codify the framework and criteria for the completion award. Institutions would then follow their individual internal curriculum approval processes to create an aligned credential that can be awarded to students as soon as practicable.