

UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block

A. Background

The University of Maine System Credit Transfer/General Education Workgroup (an ad hoc group with representation from all seven campuses) developed a UMS General Education transfer block to facilitate transfer within the University of Maine System. This block transfer agreement was adopted by all 7 campuses in the UMS during 2014 and became effective in fall 2015.

Throughout 2014-2015, the UMS Credit Transfer/General Education Workgroup has worked extensively with our Maine Community College System counterparts to define a comparable general education transfer block facilitating student transfer from the MCCS to the UMS campuses. Much like the UMS block transfer work, our collaborations with the MCCS have focused on review and alignment of learning outcomes. The UMS-MCCS project employs AAC&U's LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes¹ as articulated in the VALUE rubrics² as the general framework for outcomes review and alignment. The LEAP ELOs thus provide the framework and common language for identifying the points of alignment in the general education outcomes of both the UMS and the MCCS, while the LEAP VALUE rubrics provide a more specific articulation of the level of performance expected for each general education area.

The most significant result of this review and alignment work was the adoption by the entire MCCS of the UMS' General Education Transfer Block as the basis of the MCCS' own general education curriculum and as the focus of its own assessment plans. Thus, the MCCS has adopted the same block of general education requirements that formed the basis of the UMS block transfer agreement approved at all UMS campuses in 2014.

In sum, through collaborative conversations and important decision-making by MCCS faculty and leadership, we are now at a point where the UMS and MCCS have a shared conception of the essential shared components of general education, a common set of essential learning outcomes, and are preparing broad assessment principles which will guide future work on collaborative assessment approaches.

¹ Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a national public advocacy and campus action initiative of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). The project assists campuses with designing, implementing and assessing curricula that help students "acquire the broad knowledge, higher order capacities, and real world experience they need to thrive both in the economy and in a globally engaged democracy." (<https://www.aacu.org/leap>) The essential learning outcomes (which have informed general education reform in the UMS and MCCS) provide a framework to guide students' cumulative progress through college. (<https://aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes>)

² VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) is a campus-based assessment initiative sponsored by AAC&U as part of its Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. Teams of faculty and other educational professionals from institutions across the country developed rubrics for sixteen Essential Learning Outcomes. The rubrics are used by institutions across the country as a basis for designing assessment of student learning. (<https://www.aacu.org/value>)

The MCCS has already reached key milestones in aligning their curriculum with the UMS learning domains and outcomes. For example, they revised their curricular outcomes in fall 2015 and will be using those revised and expanded outcomes to increase their liberal studies curriculum to include a 34+ credit hour block during spring 2016. This curricular modification across the MCCS will bring their general education requirements into full alignment with the UMS block.

The UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block proposed here is based on the block transfer policy adopted by all UMS campuses in 2014.

B. UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block Process, Applicability and Definition

Students who have completed the UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block at any UMS or MCCS institution currently accredited by NEASC will be regarded as having completed the General Education requirements at every other UMS or MCCS institution, except for up to eleven credits of additional General Education coursework to be specified by the receiving institution.

Each faculty Senate (or that Senate's designee) in the University of Maine System will be responsible for determining which additional credits, if any will be required for students transferring within the UMS-MCCS general education transfer block agreement to their campus, with a maximum limit of 11 additional credits. UMS institutions which require any additional credits will be responsible for publishing information about these specified credits in a manner that is accessible and clear to the appropriate audiences (e.g., students, advisors, etc.).

Similarly, the appropriate governing body at each Maine Community College System campus will be responsible for determining which additional credits, if any will be required for students transferring within the UMS-MCCS general education transfer block agreement, with a maximum limit of 11 additional credits. MCCS institutions which require any additional credits will be responsible for publishing information about these specified credits in a manner that is accessible and clear to the appropriate audiences (e.g., students, advisors, etc.).

As nearly as possible, policies should be arranged so that transfer students satisfy the same outcomes and proficiencies as native students. The limitation of eleven credits of additional coursework does not include major program of study requirements (if any) that would normally be satisfied by specific general education courses.

When the registrar at a "sending" MCCS or UMS institution certifies that a transferring student has completed the block at the sending institution, the "receiving" UMS or MCCS institution will accept the block as degree credit, with at least 34 credits counting as General Education credits, as described above. While individual course equivalents will continue to be assigned to each transferable course for students not eligible for the block, equivalents will be applied as a block to the general education portion of an eligible student's degree audit.

The Faculty Senates of the UMS and the governing bodies of the MCCS campuses will reconsider this agreement on a regular basis, as described below, and will either continue, revise, or terminate the agreement, as it seems best based on the assessment and recommendations of a representative group similar to the group which created this proposal.

The ***UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block*** is defined as follows:

1. It includes at least 34 credits of course work, with grades of C- or better in all courses.
2. Its outcomes align closely with the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.
3. Its outcomes include all of the following content (although not necessarily using this language) with the understanding that each institution's general education will undoubtedly contain many more outcomes. These outcomes are common to all University of Maine System and Maine Community College System campuses, and are expected to be included in each institution's transfer-out block:

1. Creative/Arts:

Students will experience a sustained engagement with at least one of the creative or performing arts, and will be able to participate in, identify, or evaluate artistic and creative forms of expression.

2. Natural Science:

Students will demonstrate both conceptual and practical understanding of scientific method, including the abilities of hypothesis development and testing through observation or experiment, and evaluation of results. Students will engage in laboratory or field work at a level consistent with standard college laboratory and field courses.

Students will demonstrate the ability to work with both qualitative and quantitative information in applying the scientific process.

2. Writing:

Students will be able to write clear, coherent texts with adherence to proper mechanics. Students will be able to adapt their writing appropriately for different disciplinary contexts or audiences. Students will be able to effectively use writing as a means to engage in and communicate processes of critical inquiry, including analysis, synthesis, and argumentation.

4. Quantitative Literacy:

Students will be able to reliably perform mathematical operations at the college level. Students will be able to understand and evaluate quantitative information both in their college work and in broader public discourses. Students will be able to apply mathematical concepts and techniques in practical situations, to solve problems.

5. Diversity/Cultural Knowledge:

Students will demonstrate knowledge of cultural differences.

6. Humanities:

Students will be able to analyze or interpret significant texts or other cultural artifacts. Students will be able to understand or think critically about meaning (significance) and value, from either an aesthetic, philosophical, literary, or multidisciplinary perspective.

7. Social Sciences:

Students will be able to analyze or explain causal forces which shape social structures, institutions, or behavior. Students will demonstrate knowledge of multiple cultures.

8. Ethical Reasoning:

Students will demonstrate the ability to do one or more of the following:

- understand social and cultural value systems;
- understand and evaluate ethical perspectives on environmental issues;
- understand and critically evaluate ethical theories or concepts;
- work effectively with ethical issues and theories through analysis and evaluation of the theoretical, literary, historical or artistic texts through which fundamental ethical ideas and problems are presented.
- critically evaluate disciplinary claims in the context of ethical, social, and environmental issues.

C. UMS-MCCS Block Transfer Evaluation and Revision/Block Transfer Committee

A committee composed primarily of faculty, with representation from every UMS and MCCS system campus, will meet starting at the beginning of the third year in which block transfer is in force to evaluate block transfer and recommend to the system faculty senates whether to continue, revise, or terminate the block transfer agreement. Records will be kept by each campus regarding which students transfer either in or out under the block transfer agreement, so that data regarding those students can be collected and analyzed by the committee. By the end of the third year, each faculty senate or other governing body will vote regarding whether to continue, revise, or terminate the block transfer agreement. If any faculty senate does not vote on this issue, that senate will be regarded as having voted for termination of the agreement at their campus.

In addition to this comprehensive third year review of the transfer impact of this policy, within one year of implementation, the General Education Transfer Work Group will propose to the faculty governance bodies of the UMS and MCCS a plan for collaborative assessment that will give all parties involved clarity regarding appropriate definitions of student mastery at different levels (e.g., rising junior transferring from a Maine community college to a Maine university), and confidence in student preparedness to succeed at our institutions. Any proposed assessment plans will respect assessment processes already in development or in place on each participating campus while ensuring consistency in expectations for student achievement across our systems.