

**NM General Education Core Reforms**  
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10-5-2016

This note is meant to provide some background and context for the work currently taking place related to reforming the New Mexico general education core (or simply “core”).

**Background**

The first thing to recognize is that the core itself is stipulated in state law, and that state administrative code specifies the particular requirements for its implementation. For instance, the administrative code specifies the particular subject areas the core must cover, along with the number of credit hours that must be satisfied within each subject area.

New Mexico Statute [Chapter 21-1B Post-Secondary Education Articulation](#) is the relevant law, and [Section B-2-D](#) states that the: “general education core’ means the grouping of lower division general education courses of at least thirty-five hours that are established by the department for transfer and that are accepted by all institutions for transfer purposes.” [Section B-4-A](#) states that “[e]ach institution shall accept for transfer course credits earned by a student at any other institution that are included in a transfer module. Transfer credits shall be accepted to meet lower-division graduation requirements of an institution's degree-granting programs. This provision also applies to any course that is part of a transfer module.”

This state law has been “on the books” since 1978, and because we don’t have common course numbering, the state currently keeps track of how these transfer modules articulate from one institution to another through a large transfer articulation matrix (or “crosswalk” if you like). As you can imagine, this is quite complicated, and as a result, students often have extreme difficulty in navigating the transfer articulation process.

The statutory authority for the administrative code associated with this law is the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED). [Title 5, Chapter 55, Part 3](#) of the New Mexico Administrative Code lists the five subject areas currently associated with the core. It is important to recognize that these represent a minimum set of requirements. UNM currently does not meet the minimum requirements in Area III: Laboratory Sciences, as we only require seven credit hours, while the code stipulates eight. There are provisions in the code for exceptions, and I believe UNM obtained one many years ago for this area. With this exception, UNM meets the minimum requirements. In addition, UNM has added additional degree requirements related to Foreign Language and Diversity that in the best case add two additional credit hours to the state core in order to create UNM’s core.

**Current Work**

Along with the recognition that a bachelor’s degree should generally consist of four years of full-time study, amounting to 120 credit hours, the NMHED recognized that the general education core component is generally one year of full-time study, which normally consists of 30 credit hours. Because state law does not allow for the possibility of the latter, NMHED Secretary Barbara Damron decided to work with the state legislature in order to

investigate the possibility of modifying the law, and in particular to reduce the required minimum number of core credit hours to 30. As a part of this effort, she has asked the postsecondary institutions in the state to participate, and to take a holistic view of the reforms that might be implemented to better serve the students in this state. That is, in addition to working with the state legislature to change the law, she has asked the institutions to provide recommendations on how the NMHED might update the administrative code so as to accommodate any changes to the law. For this, the Secretary asked us to reimagine how the state might create a core that would better prepare New Mexico students for the future they face. The State General Education Core Committee was created for this purpose, and Secretary Damron has visited our campus on numerous occasions to explain this vision to various stakeholders.

As a part of the overall holistic vision, the NMHED would also like to improve transfer articulation by creating common course numbering for lower division courses across the state. This work is actually required by state law passed in 2015 as a part of House Bill 282.

In summary, a number of important clarifying points are:

1. The NMHED is working to create a set of minimum core requirements for the state that could be satisfied with 30 credit hours. The current state law precludes this.
2. Any new minimum would be just that, a minimum. If institutions want to add additional degree requirements on top of this minimum, they will continue to be free to do so.
3. If the state law were modified as described above, the NMHED would need to update the administrative code related to the core subject areas to allow a core of 30 credit hours to be constructed as a part of any curriculum.
4. The Secretary is asking for input from across the state on how to rewrite the administrative code in a way that best serves New Mexico students. Please feel free to engage and add your voice to this process; a number of forums are available for you to do so. The core impacts every student in the state, and therefore every academic program. Thus, we all have a stake in the outcome.
5. Once the state settles on its regulations for a new and improved core, UNM will need to do the work of identifying how it will designate courses for students to meet the new core requirements.