

UW System Administrative Policy 115 (formerly ACIS 1.3)

Associate Degree Standards

Related Regent Policies

HISTORY

SCOPE

PURPOSE

POLICY STATEMENT

Related Regent Policies

[RPD 4-4 Minimum Requirements for an Associate Degree \(https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/minimum-requirements-for-an-associate-degree/\)](https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/minimum-requirements-for-an-associate-degree/)

[RPD 4-6 Granting of Degrees, Honors and Awards \(https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/granting-of-degrees-honors-and-awards/\)](https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/granting-of-degrees-honors-and-awards/)

HISTORY

RPD 4-4 Res. 3850 adopted 7/10/87.

RPD 4-6 Res. 4035 adopted 4/8/88; replaces 76-3.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all University of Wisconsin System institutions offering or planning to offer an associate degree, such as the Associate of Science(s), the Associate of Arts, or the Associate of Arts and Sciences. Policies relating to the minimum requirements for an associate degree have been in existence since 1987. The UW System does not offer applied associate degrees.

The minimum requirements for an associate degree granted by a University of Wisconsin System institution and the minimum University of Wisconsin System general education breadth requirements for the associate degree, as proposed by the systemwide Associate Degree Standards Committee, are accepted as the systemwide policy on general education requirements for the associate degree, effective spring 2015.

The policy contains recommendations for the alignment of associate degree standards with general education and graduation requirements and the UW System transfer policy, last revised June 1, 2015.

A student who has earned an associate degree containing those systemwide requirements from an institution in the University of Wisconsin System, and who transfers to an institution in the University of Wisconsin System, will be considered as having fulfilled the general education distribution or breadth requirements of the university, in accordance with the transfer credit principles of accommodation outlined in [UW System Administrative Policy 135 \(SYS 135\)](https://www.wisconsin.edu/uw-policies/docs/uw-system-undergraduate-transfer-policy/), [UW System Undergraduate Transfer Policy \(https://www.wisconsin.edu/uw-policies/docs/uw-system-undergraduate-transfer-policy/\)](https://www.wisconsin.edu/uw-policies/docs/uw-system-undergraduate-transfer-policy/), Sec. IV(C).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to guide coordination and adaptation of common standards for associate degrees across the UW System. This policy is intended to help those institutions interested in starting up or expanding an associate degree program in meeting systemwide learning goals and in meeting national standards for two-year degrees.

This policy (1) also defines different types of associate degrees conferred by UW System institutions, (2) recommends minimum requirements for an associate degree granted by a UW System institution, (3) recommends incorporation of High Impact Practices, and (4) sets the distribution of credits to achieve general education breadth in associate degrees through the UW System Shared Learning Goals.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Types of Associate Degrees that can be conferred within the UW System:

- a. **Associate of Arts** – This degree is primarily intended to provide a broad liberal arts background and is designed to be the foundation for most bachelor degree programs and to satisfy general education requirements.
- b. **Associate of Science(s)** – This degree is primarily intended to provide a basic liberal arts background with an enhanced focus on knowledge of the physical and natural world and quantitative literacy. It is designed to provide the foundational courses in preparation for a bachelor's degree with highly structured major

requirements (e.g., art, engineering, business, and the sciences including biology, chemistry, and pre-professional programs).

- c. **Associate of Arts and Sciences** – This degree is intended to provide a broad, balanced liberal arts and sciences background to satisfy the general education breadth requirements at four-year institutions. It is primarily awarded by institutions that offer a two-year terminal degree.

2. Minimum requirements for an Associate Degree granted by a UW System Institution, including Depth Requirement

- Completion of a minimum of 60 semester credit hours of college level work.
- Completion of a minimum of 40 semester credit hours fulfilling the University of Wisconsin System minimum general education learning goals (see Table 1).
- Achievement of a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 grading system.

3. Depth Requirement

- Each associate degree must contain a two-course sequence in which the first course provides the foundation for the second.

4. Distribution of Credits

- Table 1 below illustrates the Associate Degree Standards Committee's recommendation of credits for each UW System Learning Goal, as differentiated by type of associate degree.

Table 1: Recommended distribution of credits to achieve general education breadth in associate degrees via the UW System Undergraduate shared learning goals (adopted in 2009).

UW System Shared Learning Goal	Degree		
	Associate of Arts	Associate of Science (s)	Associate of Arts and Sciences
Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World	18-20 Credits are focused toward the area of Human Cultures	20-25 Credits are focused toward and include additional coursework in the area of the Natural World	21-24 Credits are balanced between both areas
Critical and Creative Thinking	3	6	3
Effective Communication	6	6	6
Intercultural Knowledge and Competence	6	3	3
Individual, Social, and Environmental Responsibility	6	6	6
Total General Education Credits	39-41	41-46	39-42
Electives leading to an emphasis or coursework related to a desired baccalaureate degree	19-21	14-19	18-21
Total Credits to Degree	60	60	60

- *Knowledge of Human Cultures* represents a breadth of knowledge and ability to think across disciplines and typically includes coursework in social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and world languages.
- *Knowledge of the Natural World* represents a breadth of knowledge and ability to think across disciplines and typically includes coursework in biology, chemistry, geology, physics, and mathematics.
- *Critical and Creative Thinking Skills* includes inquiry, problem solving, and qualitative and quantitative reasoning proficiencies, and may be typically included as learning goals in different disciplines throughout the university curriculum.
- *Effective Communication* includes listening, speaking, reading, writing, and information literacy proficiencies, and typically includes coursework in multiple communication modes, including Speaking/Listening, Writing, English, Communication, and Media Studies.
- *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence* includes proficiencies to interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Typically, content in this area satisfies the UW System Diversity requirement, and includes coursework in the social sciences, humanities, fine arts, foreign languages, and ethnic studies.
- *Individual, Social, and Environmental Responsibility* are typically addressed in courses that employ High Impact Practices such as internships, study abroad, and service learning.

Additional Considerations: High Impact Practices and Responsibilities as Learning Outcomes

The following High Impact Practices should be considered for inclusion in associate degree programs: first-year seminars, learning communities, writing intensive courses, undergraduate research, collaborative assignments and projects, diversity/global learning opportunities, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. Systematic incorporation of these active learning practices can result in increased student achievement of learning outcomes.

Desirable learning outcomes for all associate degree holders include an understanding and enactment of individual, social, and environmental responsibility. This set of responsibilities spans all categories of learning and all breadth requirements and competencies. As citizens, graduates of the University of Wisconsin System exercise their responsibilities both as individuals and as members of communities. Graduates are expected to demonstrate knowledge of sustainability and its applications as well as civic knowledge and engagement at the local and global level. High Impact Practices, such as service and community-based learning as well as global experiences such as study abroad, can help to develop intercultural knowledge and competence in students. In considering individual, social, and environmental responsibility, students will become competent in ethical reasoning and action and thus lay foundations and develop skills for lifelong learning. These skills will be developed through real-world challenges and active involvement with diverse communities.

Oversight, Roles, and Responsibilities

Institutions may adopt policies or practices consistent with this UW System policy. Oversight lies with the Office for Academic and Student Affairs.

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