

**STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
ACADEMIC, STUDENT AFFAIRS, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
NOVEMBER 15-16, 2006**

**TITLE: REVISION TO VCCS POLICY MANUAL – TABLE 5-1 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREES IN THE VCCS**  
(Academic, Student Affairs, and Workforce Development Committee, III.A.2.b)

**BACKGROUND:**

A subcommittee was charged in 2004 with reviewing Section 5 (Educational Programs) of the VCCS Policy Manual. It was felt that general education and Table 5-1 warranted more in-depth study than the policy review subcommittee could provide. Therefore, the VCCS Task Force on General Education and Table 5-1 was created by the Chancellor in 2004. Its charge included examining the current status of general education in relationship to SCHEV core competencies requirements and SACS guidelines for general education and reviewing and revising, if appropriate, Table 5-1. The eleven-member Table 5-1 Task Force included representation at the vice president, dean, and faculty levels, as well as a director of institutional research knowledgeable about VCCS core competency assessments and a system office staff member.

The Task Force first tackled what general education means for degree graduates in the VCCS. Draft general education goals and student learning outcomes were shared widely within the VCCS for feedback to the Task Force. Since several of the general education goal areas were identical to SCHEV Core Competency areas, the Task Force drew heavily upon the work of the Core Competency Faculty Advisory Groups. The Task Force carefully considered feedback from vice presidents, deans, and faculty. Particular discussion points surfacing regularly were the role of physical education and wellness in personal development, and information literacy as it relates to computer competency requirements. After much consideration, the Task Force determined that colleges should choose whether a physical education course is required to meet the personal development general education goal, and that while information literacy is a general education goal, computer competency is now a basic skill for VCCS students. Following many months of discussion and consideration of feedback, a final draft was presented to the Academic and Student Affairs Council (ASAC) at its March 2006 meeting and was approved. Advisory Council of Presidents (ACOP) and SBCC next approved the goals and outcomes.

The Task Force turned its attention to Table 5-1 (a distributive table showing general education degree requirements) in early spring 2006. Many models were considered by Task Force members, with regular feedback from the colleges influencing the revisions. The Task Force recommended a revision of Table 5-1 to ASAC at the May 2006 ASAC meeting. After much discussion, this item was returned to the Task Force for further study, along with some guidelines recommended by ASAC. In late summer, a questionnaire was distributed to ASAC members from the Task Force requesting feedback on a number of critical issues and comments on three new revisions. The Task Force presented a different recommended model to ASAC in September 2006. After much discussion, the ASAC Educational Programs Committee proposed to ASAC a revision and expansion of the current Table 5-1 into two tables: 5-1A and 5-1B. This recommendation was approved by ASAC and was subsequently approved by the Advisory Council of Presidents at its October 2006 meeting.

Table 5-1A addresses the general education goals and objectives across the curriculum and allows colleges to map specific curricular courses to each of the general education goal areas. Table 5-1B is a revision of the current Table 5-1 that emphasizes the MINIMUM subject area requirements for Associate Degrees in the VCCS. Colleges are free to exceed these minimum subject area requirements to meet local needs.

This flexible credit-hour distribution model: (1) diffuses general education outcomes across the curriculum; (2) reflects the purposes of various degree programs; (3) follows accepted principles of good practice in curriculum development; and (4) provides a framework for addressing general education goals, business and industry standards, four-year institution transfer requirements, SCHEV guidelines, and SACS principles to ensure integrity of the curriculum.

A summary of the activities of the Task Force is given below:

- 2004 Group convened to review Section 5 Educational Programs of the *VCCS Policy Manual*. The group recommended separate review of Table 5-1.
- 2004 Ten-member Task Force established by Chancellor DuBois to review and if appropriate, revise Table 5-1. Representatives included academic vice presidents, deans, faculty, a coordinator of institutional research, and a system office staff member.
- 2004 - 2006 Task Force develops a new vision of general education for VCCS degree graduates through monthly meetings. Task Force members regularly shared with dean and faculty groups, as well as appropriate committees, at their ten colleges. Ongoing discussions with academic officers occurred. Formal and informal feedback received and reviewed from faculty, particularly physical education and information technology faculty.
- Nov 2005 Draft general education goals presented to Council of Deans. Feedback received.
- Mar 2006 General Education goals approved by ASAC. Revisions to Table 5-1 discussed.
- Apr 2006 General Education goals approved by ACOP.
- May 2006 General Education goals approved by SBCC. Task Force presents a revision of Table 5-1 to ASAC. Returned for discussion and more input.
- Jun-Aug 2006 Task Force discusses Table 5-1 further. All academic officers are surveyed for input. Two new drafts are developed.
- Jul 2006 Removal of computer competency requirement approved by ASAC.
- Aug 2006 Academic Policy Update listing approved General Education Goals sent to academic officer dlist (includes CFAC leader). Removal of computer competency requirement approved by ACOP.
- Sept 2006 After much discussion and some revision, the new drafts become Tables 5-1A and 5-1B and are approved by ASAC. Removal of computer competency requirement approved by SBCC.
- Oct 2006 Tables 5-1A and 5-1B approved by ACOP.

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:**

That the State Board for Community Colleges approve the proposed revisions to replace the current Table 5-1 of the *VCCS Policy Manual* with Tables 5-1A and 5-1B as a more flexible credit-hour distribution model.

**PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED BY:**

- ✓ VCCS Academic Services and Research staff

- ✓ VCCS Academic and Student Affairs Council
- ✓ VCCS Advisory Council of Presidents

### **RATIONALE:**

- Approving a more flexible model does not significantly alter the distribution requirements currently reflected in Table 5-1 and will allow colleges to be more responsive in meeting local requirements for career/technical education and transfer to four-year institutions. The new competency-based model will also clarify for students the difference between a “required” course and a “general elective,” potentially decreasing the number of courses taken that do not advance the student toward degree completion, while allowing flexibility to include “free” electives in the student’s program.
- SACS requires a minimum of 15 semester hours of general education in associate degree programs, or 25% of credits required in a 60-credit degree (including one course each from the humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural science or mathematics). SACS further requires that these courses be general in nature and not “narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.” The proposed model meets minimum SACS standards.
- VCCS policy currently defines a “major” as 30 semester hours and a “specialization” as differing from the parent major by 9-15 credits. The proposed distribution model is consistent with the policy definitions.
- By definition, the general education core is a shared collegiate experience that distinguishes associate degree programs (AA, AS, AA&S, AAS, AAA) from other credit and non-credit programs within the VCCS (certificates/diplomas). The VCCS general education goals and objectives apply to all degree programs regardless of degree type, but the courses selected to address the requirements may differ. While the AS and AA degree programs are intended to prepare students for transfer into a BS or BA degree program respectively, four-year institutions do not consistently require distinctly different—or similar, general education components for the two baccalaureate degrees. The proposed distribution model allows flexibility for VCCS colleges to tailor their degree programs to mirror the requirements of those institutions to which their students transfer (e.g., a BA degree program that does not require foreign language at the intermediate level).
- The competency-based distribution model is purposeful in providing foundation courses for development of general education competencies as well as opportunities for enhancement of skills and knowledge across the curriculum. The model defines more explicitly for employers and four-year institutions the minimum levels of achievement they can expect from VCCS associate degree graduates, and necessitates a comprehensive assessment program to ensure students achieve desired outcomes and to demonstrate program quality.

### **RESOURCE PERSONS:**

- Dr. Monty Sullivan, Vice Chancellor, Academic Services and Research, [msullivan@vccs.edu](mailto:msullivan@vccs.edu), 804.819.4970
- Dr. Susan S. Wood, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Educational Programs and Instructional Technology, [swood@vccs.edu](mailto:swood@vccs.edu), 804.819.4936
- Mr. William Hightower, Director of Educational Programs, [bhightower@vccs.edu](mailto:bhightower@vccs.edu), 804.819.4696

**Table 5-1A**  
**VCCS Degree Requirements**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Distribution</b>						
<p><b>GENERAL EDUCATION</b> General education is that portion of the collegiate experience that addresses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values characteristic of educated persons. It is unbounded by disciplines and honors the connections among bodies of knowledge. The associate degree programs within the VCCS support a collegiate experience that focuses on seven goal areas: <i>communication; critical thinking; cultural and social understanding; information literacy; personal development; quantitative reasoning; scientific reasoning.</i>) The general education goal areas outlined below are to be introduced in the foundational courses and enhanced in program and elective courses. (NOTE: Some of the categories include two goal areas when a single course may provide foundations in both goal areas.)</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>I. Foundations In Communication: Courses designed to enable students to interact with others using all forms of communication, resulting in understanding and being understood.</p> </td> <td> <p>II. Foundations In Critical Thinking And Information Literacy: Courses designed to enable students to evaluate evidence carefully and apply reasoning to decide what to believe and how to act, and to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use it effectively.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>III. Foundations In Cultural And Social Understanding: Courses designed to enable students to have an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the interconnectedness of the social and cultural dimensions within and across local, regional, state, national, and global communities.</p> </td> <td> <p>IV. Foundations In Personal Development: Courses designed to enable students to strive for physical well-being and emotional maturity.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> <p>V. Foundations In Quantitative And Scientific Reasoning: Courses designed to enable students to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to apply the use of logic, numbers, and mathematics to deal effectively with common problems and issues, and to adhere to a self-correcting system of inquiry (the scientific method) and rely on empirical evidence to describe, understand, predict, and control natural phenomena.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>I. Foundations In Communication: Courses designed to enable students to interact with others using all forms of communication, resulting in understanding and being understood.</p>	<p>II. Foundations In Critical Thinking And Information Literacy: Courses designed to enable students to evaluate evidence carefully and apply reasoning to decide what to believe and how to act, and to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use it effectively.</p>	<p>III. Foundations In Cultural And Social Understanding: Courses designed to enable students to have an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the interconnectedness of the social and cultural dimensions within and across local, regional, state, national, and global communities.</p>	<p>IV. Foundations In Personal Development: Courses designed to enable students to strive for physical well-being and emotional maturity.</p>	<p>V. Foundations In Quantitative And Scientific Reasoning: Courses designed to enable students to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to apply the use of logic, numbers, and mathematics to deal effectively with common problems and issues, and to adhere to a self-correcting system of inquiry (the scientific method) and rely on empirical evidence to describe, understand, predict, and control natural phenomena.</p>		<p><b>Minimum 15 credits</b>  <b>(Students must take at least one course in each of the five areas listed, to total at least 15 credits.)</b></p>
<p>I. Foundations In Communication: Courses designed to enable students to interact with others using all forms of communication, resulting in understanding and being understood.</p>	<p>II. Foundations In Critical Thinking And Information Literacy: Courses designed to enable students to evaluate evidence carefully and apply reasoning to decide what to believe and how to act, and to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use it effectively.</p>						
<p>III. Foundations In Cultural And Social Understanding: Courses designed to enable students to have an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the interconnectedness of the social and cultural dimensions within and across local, regional, state, national, and global communities.</p>	<p>IV. Foundations In Personal Development: Courses designed to enable students to strive for physical well-being and emotional maturity.</p>						
<p>V. Foundations In Quantitative And Scientific Reasoning: Courses designed to enable students to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to apply the use of logic, numbers, and mathematics to deal effectively with common problems and issues, and to adhere to a self-correcting system of inquiry (the scientific method) and rely on empirical evidence to describe, understand, predict, and control natural phenomena.</p>							
<p><b>PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS</b> Major Field Core Related/Specialization Courses Electives</p>	<p>Minimum 15 credits* Maximum 15 credits 0-15 credits</p>						
<p><b>TOTALS</b></p>	<p><b>AA/AS/AA&amp;S: 60-63 credits**</b></p>						
	<p><b>AAA/AAS: 65-69 credits***</b></p>						

\*Language in Section 5.1.0.0.1 of the VCCS Policy Manual states 25% of the courses in the degree program (15-18 credits) must be common across majors within a degree. The shared courses must be major or related/specialization courses.

\*\*Credit range for engineering programs is 60-72 semester hour credits.

\*\*\*Credit range for AAA/AAS programs is 65-69, including nursing. For other programs in the Health Technologies, the range is 65-72 semester hour credits.

**Table 5-1B**  
**Minimum Requirements for**  
**Associate Degrees in the VCCS**

	Minimum Number of Semester Hour Credits			
	(1) <u>AA</u>	(2) <u>AS</u>	(3) <u>AA&amp;S</u>	(4) <u>AAA / AAS</u>
<b>General Education:</b>				
Communication <sup>(a)</sup>	6	6	6	3
Humanities / Fine Arts	6	6	6	3
Foreign Language (Intermediate Level)	6	0	0	0
Social / Behavioral Sciences	9	9 <sup>(b)</sup>	9	3 <sup>(c)</sup>
Natural Sciences /	7	7	7	0
Mathematics	6	6 <sup>(d)</sup>	6 <sup>(d)</sup>	0 } 3 <sup>(c)</sup>
Personal Development <sup>(e)</sup>	2	2	2	2
<b>Other Requirements for Associate Degrees:</b>				
Major field courses and electives (columns 1-3)	18-21	24-27	24-27	49-53 <sup>(f)</sup>
Career/technical courses (column 4)	_____	_____	_____	_____
<b>Total for Degree<sup>(g)</sup> =</b>	<b>60-63</b>	<b>60-63<sup>(h)</sup></b>	<b>60-63<sup>(h)</sup></b>	<b>65-69<sup>(h)</sup></b>

Notes: The VCCS Policy Manual, Section 2-IV-C, defines general education within the VCCS. Sections 2.7.3, 3.4.10, and 3.5.1 of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Principles of Accreditation specify general education requirements. Colleges must address all SACS requirements, the SCHEV Core Competencies, and the general education goal areas listed in this VCCS Policy Manual.

- (a) Must include at least one course in English composition.
- (b) Only 6 semester hours of social/behavioral sciences are required for engineering majors who plan to transfer to a baccalaureate degree engineering program that requires 6 or fewer hours in this category, provided that the college/university publishes such requirements in its transfer guide.
- (c) While general education courses other than those designed for transfer may be used to meet portions of these requirements, SACS principles require that general education courses be general in nature and must not "...narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures peculiar to a particular occupation or profession."
- (d) Only 3 semester hours of mathematics are required for the General Studies major.
- (e) Personal development includes health, physical education, or recreation courses that promote physical and emotional well being and student development courses. Must include at least one student development course.
- (f) AAA/AAS degrees must contain a minimum of 15 semester hours of general education. Students should plan to take at least 30 hours in the major; the remaining hours will be appropriate to the major.
- (g) All college-level course prerequisites must be included in the total credits required for each program.
- (h) Credit range for engineering programs is 60-72 semester hour credits. Credit range for AAA/AAS programs is 65-69, including nursing. For other programs in the Health Technologies, the range is 65-72 semester hour credits.