

TO: SUNY University Faculty Senate

FROM: Undergraduate Committee

RE: Resolution: Re-examining the Definition of Liberal Arts Courses

DATE: 178th Plenary, January 18-20, 2018

LOCATION: SUNY Polytechnic Institute at Utica

RESOLUTION #: 178-08-01

VOTE TALLY: 39 For; 1 Against; 1 Abstain

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS the New York State Education Department Policy Statement on Liberal Arts and Sciences (<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/lrp/liberalarts.htm>) on the required Liberal Arts core of an academic program indicates that "*The required liberal arts core shall not be directed toward specific occupational or professional objectives*"; and

WHEREAS characteristics NYSED identifies as "generally considered to be within the liberal arts and sciences" include creative writing, literature, history, appreciation, theory, comparative philosophy and comparative religion, dramatic interpretation, natural sciences, mathematics, communication, public speaking and subjects of a similar nature; and

WHEREAS many of the course types identified by NYSED as "generally not considered within the liberal arts and sciences" actually meet many or all of the criteria listed above as "generally considered to be within the liberal arts and sciences"; and

WHEREAS many studio and other courses, generally considered by NYSED to be "not within the liberal arts and sciences" are not directed toward specific occupational or professional objectives;

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the University Faculty Senate ask the SUNY Chancellor to request a re-examination and update of NYSED criteria for the liberal arts designation, and that such re-examination and update be undertaken by a team including members of NYSED,

SUNY System Administration and SUNY faculty governance of two-year and four-year institutions.

Some suggested guidelines for liberal arts courses:

1. The course is open to the entire college or school and is not designed to provide specialized professional training.
2. A significant proportion of the students in the class do not intend to become professionals in that field. Courses in the arts, including studio courses, whose primary goals do not include preparing students to become professionals should, by definition, be considered liberal arts courses. (The National Association of Schools of Music clearly identifies the Bachelor of Music degree as the "Professional degree" and the Bachelor of Arts as a liberal arts, non-professional degree).
3. In liberal arts classes, course descriptions and learning outcomes—including those of studio courses—are not created specifically to help the student become a professional in that field. Course descriptions may, however, include examination of form and content in historical or cultural context, while learning outcomes may include use of historical and contemporary examples, familiarity with the history of the field and the scholarly canon, exploration of the relationship between the work of the field (music, dramatic performance, visual art, computer program, business model, legal case study, etc.) and society, and development of the art of listening, seeing, and thinking intelligently and perceptively.
4. A course that meets the criteria to be classified as a liberal arts course should retain that classification even if the course is required in more than one major or is available as an elective.
5. Courses that included the study of subject areas through the lens of a cultural, historical, ethical, or General Education interdisciplinary framework should be considered liberal arts courses. Learning outcomes that include appreciation, history, theory, critical thinking, or the function of the arts in societal change and growth should be considered liberal arts courses by definition.