

What is the Meaning of a California Community College Degree?

Educational Policies Committee 2004–2005

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Abstract

The Associate Degree has been subjected to numerous demands and external pressures and, as a result, has evolved somewhat independently at each California community college to meet local needs. Most colleges in the system have developed Associate Degrees based on completion of a general education curriculum. However, current Title 5 language limits the award of the Associate Degree to programs of study which include in-depth study in a specific field. Colleges are not consistent in the application of the titles Associate of Arts and Associate of Science to degree awards. This creates confusion within and outside of the system as to the meaning of the various Associate degrees. This paper reviews these two topics in depth, providing a discussion of the benefits and possible ramifications of changes to Title 5 and the establishment of a uniform application of titles to degrees. The value of the Associate Degree is reviewed and emphasized. The paper concludes with a recommendation calling for the creation of a task force that will develop formal proposals to address these and other issues related to the Associate Degree for future consideration by the Academic Senate.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF A \mathbb{R}

In short, the purpose of a degree is related not just to economic development of the individual and society but to the larger framework of education in a democratic society. Education provides the foundation of an informed citizenry, capable of effectively participating in and contributing to society. Therefore, the achievement of a degree is not only connected to a specific field of study but also related to the breadth of coursework included, often specified as general education requirements, that are geared to cover a broad spectrum of education for a well-rounded educational foundation.

The Associate Degree has also been subjected to the external pressure to function as a component of the transfer function to four-year colleges and universities. In 2000, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed without consultation of academic senates between the three systems of higher education in California to establish a "dedicated transfer degree." In response, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges passed the following resolution:

The broadness of the mission of the community colleges, not to mention the external pressures cited above, has manifested itself in the variety of Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate in Science (AS) degrees offered by community colleges. An informal statewide survey of community college catalogs suggests the following primary characteristics for the AA and AS degrees.

Associate of Arts Degrees include two types of degrees. The first is field specific and while meeting the requirements of Title 5 language, it is generally not viewed as a terminal degree. This degree develops the foundation in a specific field for students who intend to transfer to a university and pursue a Bachelor's Degree. It has been argued that a college degree should be able to stand alone; while the focus of this degree is on a continued educational objective, this degree may accomplish the goal of standing alone if the student is not seeking to transfer or is seeking an education for self-actualization purposes. Examples of degrees in this category include English, Anthropology, and Engineering.

The second type of Associate of Arts degree falls among the recent upsurge of degrees that focuses on a compilation of general education courses including the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) and the CSU General Education pattern. Such degrees have a variety of names, such as the Transfer Studies Degree, University Studies Degree, Multidisciplinary Studies Degree and General

Studies Degree among others. Transfer has been a long-held function of community colleges and with the passage of the Partnership for Excellence legislation in 1988, this function not only became more prominent, but community colleges were given performance benchmarks, including the number of degrees awarded, which incentivized the provision of such degrees.

The Academic Senate has traditionally opposed

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Under current Title 5 Regulation, degrees currently offered by community colleges such as the Transfer Studies Degree, University Studies Degree, Multidisciplinary Studies Degree, General Studies Degree, and Liberal Arts Degree should be disqualified due to the fact that they do not fulfill the requirement that the course of study be in a specified field. Such degrees fall under the category of Liberal Arts and Sciences, General (4901), and for the 2003-2004 year, colleges reported awarding 40,043 Associate of Arts degrees and 1,321 Associate of Science degrees in this area. At the current time, an exact count of degrees awarded that are focused on transfer is not possible using MIS data submitted to the System Office. Given the large number of such degrees, the question is whether or not Title 5 Regulation should be modified to allow for such degrees.

The general argument for revision to Title 5 is that community colleges play an important role in preparing students not only to enter the workforce but in preparing them to participate effectively in the civic functions of a democratic society. The general education provided with the aforementioned degrees provides the educational foundation necessary for such participation. In addition, the general education requirements in communication and analytical thinking also provide necessary skills for any type of employment, providing an economic value to the degree as well. Another justification is that receiving a degree for this preparation has social significance for students, in particular those who are the first in their families to attend an institution of higher

education. While the students themselves may be uncertain of the specific field they wish to enter, a general education degree provides a recognition of successful completion of an important component of higher education. E

AVE in hotel and motel services (terminal degree)

AVE in nursing (terminal degree).

Using the 2003-2004 MIS data available through the System Office Datamart, we get an idea of the effect of such a change. Using the examples above, currently all French degrees are offered as AA degrees, so there would be no effect in that category. Out of a total 41,364 Liberal Arts degrees, 1,321 would need to be reclassified as AA rather than AS degrees. Out of 416 biology degrees, 75 would need to be reclassified as AS rather than AA degrees.

References

