

Essential Studies Policy Manual

Addressing policies affecting the ES Program and the ES Committee

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Introduction

This document serves as the repository for information pertaining to the UND Essential Studies Program, including policies adopted by the ES Committee, the Bylaws of the ES Committee, and the duties and responsibilities of the ES Director.

As would be expected, policies pertaining to the Essential Studies Program may change according to the shifting needs of the program and the University. When such changes occur, the policies and bylaws contained in this document will be revised. The current version of this document may be obtained by going to the ES website or by contacting the ES Director.

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Essential Studies Program Mission Statement

UND's Essential Studies Program is committed to producing graduates who are prepared for productive and fulfilling public, private, and professional lives. To this end, the program provides an education through which students acquire knowledge across a range of disciplines and develop intellectual skills that are key for future success.

Essential Studies Committee Mission Statement

To provide faculty guidance and oversight of the University's general education program—"Essential Studies"--by defining the principles and goals of Essential Studies, developing and implementing Essential Studies policies, and setting standards for courses that carry Essential Studies credit. To offer guidance and advice to the Director of Essential Studies regarding the administration of the Essential Studies program and to the Senate University Assessment Committee regarding the assessment of the Essential Studies program.

Essential Studies Director Mission Statement

The mission of the Essential Studies Director at the University of North Dakota is to make it possible for students and faculty to focus their attention on the important aspects of the Essential Studies Program – learning related to the ES Program's goals. The ES Director handles all administrative matters pertaining to the Program, accepts and responds to student and faculty inquiries, assists individuals and offices across campus with matters pertaining to the Program, works in conjunction with the ES Committee to formulate Program policy and revisions, and serves as the UND connection point with the wider general education community.

University Senate Charge to the Essential Studies Committee

Purpose: To provide faculty guidance and oversight of the University’s general education program—“Essential Studies”—by defining the principles and goals of Essential Studies, developing and implementing Essential Studies policies, and setting standards for courses that carry Essential Studies credit. To offer guidance and advice to the Director of Essential Studies regarding the administration of the Essential Studies program and to the Senate University Assessment Committee regarding the assessment of the Essential Studies program.

Membership: Academic Dean or designee (one) (voting)
Faculty (twelve, including Chair and Chair-Elect)
Past-Chair (one, voting)
Students (three)
Vice-President for Academic Affairs or designee (one)(voting)
Registrar or designee (non-voting)
Dean of Libraries or designee (non-voting)
Director of Essential Studies; appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs (non-voting)

Terms: Academic Dean or designees - one year
Faculty - three years
Past Chair - one year
Students - one year
Vice President for Academic Affairs or designee - concurrent with office
Registrar or designee - concurrent with office
Dean of Libraries or designee – concurrent with office
Director of Essential Studies – concurrent with appointment

Selection: Academic Dean or designee - elected by Dean’s Council in April and assuming responsibilities May 1.
Faculty - one third elected each year by the Senate in April and assuming responsibilities May 1. At least one member from each of the colleges with undergraduate programs, and at least four members from the College of Arts and Sciences (one from each of its divisions: Humanities; Fines Arts; Sciences; and Social Sciences). Candidates are selected from colleges in accordance with membership criteria as described above.
Students – three by the Student Senate in April and assuming responsibilities May 1.
Vice-President for Academic Affairs or designee - ex-officio
Registrar or designee - ex-officio
Director of Essential Studies – ex-officio

Functions and Responsibilities:

Acting in conjunction with the Director of Essential Studies, upon the request of the Senate and/or others, the Committee shall assume the following responsibilities:

1. Address all issues regarding Essential Studies (ES) requirements, including possible Essential Studies program revision. Forward recommendations for ES Program change to the University Senate for final approval.
2. Heighten University-wide interest in Essential Studies and its role in providing a strong liberal arts foundation for UND undergraduates.
3. Foster interdisciplinary discussion about Essential Studies.
4. Encourage experimental courses that align with Essential Studies goals.
5. Define the principles of Essential Studies, set criteria for ES courses, and review courses for inclusion within the ES requirements. Forward recommendations for inclusion of courses in the ES Program to the University Senate for final approval.
6. Through regular reporting via the Director of Essential Studies, maintain an active line of communication with the University Curriculum Committee in order to receive and provide feedback on issues of mutual concern.
7. Establish guidelines for implementation of ES policies.
8. Serve as an appeal board regarding determinations of the applicability of transferred work to meet the ES requirements. In those cases where general education articulation agreements are recommended by the committee, forward those recommendations to the University Senate for final approval.
9. Act on student petitions for exceptions to ES requirements.
10. In conjunction with the ES Director, keep current the content of the committee website.

Functions & Responsibilities of the ES Director

The Director of Essential Studies provides vision, leadership, and advocacy for excellence in general education for all undergraduate students. The Director coordinates the Program; collaborates with academic units in the development, implementation, and ongoing validation of a broad array of Essential Studies courses and curriculum; and works closely with faculty, staff, advisors, and students to inspire innovative teaching and learning and support student success.

The Director reports directly to the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, assisting academic leadership throughout the university to develop, promote, and achieve strategic initiatives and innovation across the undergraduate Essential Studies curriculum, and works closely with the University Senate Essential Studies Committee (ESC), academic units, faculty, and campus advisors to ensure academic quality and integrity.

Primary Responsibilities

Vision, Leadership, and Advocacy

- Provide vision and leadership for the ES Program, particularly in communicating with students, faculty, staff, and administration the importance of the ES Program, its objectives, and its requirements.
- Serve as ES liaison to academic units and leadership throughout the university, and to support units, including SASCE, TTaDA, Student Affairs, Registrar's Office, and Enrollment Services.
- Align ES Program with national and university best practices in general education, state higher education policies, and university mission and vision.
- Serve as ex-officio member on the University Senate Essential Studies, Curriculum, and Assessment Committees.
- Serve as UND's delegate and spokesperson for ES and general education at state and national meetings and conferences. Participate in such events to ensure that UND is part of state and national conversations in matters relating to general education.

Implementation and Coordination of ES Program

- Work with faculty, chairs, and deans to ensure that optimal number of ES courses will be offered each semester, on campus and online, in relation to ES goals and requirements, departmental four-year plans, and university retention, persistence, and completion goals.
- Work with faculty, chairs, and deans to promote the creation of innovative or interdisciplinary ES courses, especially those integrating High-Impact Practices (HIPs) in teaching and learning.
- Facilitate the implementation of the ES Program and address issues that may arise in coordination with departments, colleges/schools, and other university units.
- Work with departments to educate and support their chairs, faculty, and advisors about the validation & revalidation of ES courses. Work with the ES Committee to support a positive and effective process for the ES validations and revalidations.
- Work with students who have questions or concerns about their ES programs of study. This includes helping and advising them about petitions, course choices, and alternative options for successfully completing their ES work.
- Collaborate with advisors—both professional and faculty—to provide advice and guidance about ES that is accurate and helpful. Support advisors by providing up-to-date ES information and help them educate students about the purposes and value of ES learning.

- Collaborate with ES course instructors so they are knowledgeable about the ES purposes and value and so they are aware of their course's specific contributions to the ES program (as per the course's validation).

Assessment of ES Program

- Work with the Director of University Assessment & Accreditation to develop, manage, and conduct assessment activities for Essential Studies, including its effectiveness in promoting student learning outcomes as well as student retention and completion. This includes direct assessments by ES learning outcome and other assessments that might be developed to help UND examine what our students are learning in their ES work.
- Host (or co-host) campus discussions on the results of assessment activities so that UND "closes the loop" on assessment activities for the purpose of analyzing and goal-setting related to the improvement of student learning in ES.

Promotion of Essential Studies

- Develop web-based or social media and other informational materials that help prospective and current students, parents, faculty, staff, and advisors understand and promote the purposes and benefits of a quality general education, with specific links to Essential Studies as a means for students to gain a quality general education that will help them succeed in the workplace and in their communities.

Faculty Development

- Develop and implement ES instructor and advisor support system for delivering and promoting Essential Studies learning.

Program Management

- Manage ES related business.
- Ensure proper and effective keeping and maintaining of ES records. Coordinate records management with the Office of the Registrar and with the ES Committee.
- Ensure support for campus ES stakeholders: students, faculty, advisors, administration, and the public.

Policies of the Essential Studies Program

1. Course Credits Not Earned at UND

These policies are contained in the document “Guidelines for ES Course Transfer” (GUEST), included as an appendix to this policy manual, and also available on the Essential Studies webpage.

2. Student Petitions for Essential Studies Credit

Policies:

- 2a. Per UND’s Advising Policy, students have a responsibility for knowing the requirements for graduation and for taking an active role in their academic planning. Therefore petitions will not be approved solely on the basis of expediency, such as a petition being filed in a student’s last semester before graduation where the only argument is impending graduation.
- 2b. If a student is requesting a petition because of advisor error, a letter from the advisor should be submitted in support of the petition.
- 2c. Petitions may be approved for courses which were not ES courses at the time they were taken but which were validated for ES the following semester AND were taught in a way that met the ES goals as evidenced by the course syllabus or a letter from the instructor.
- 2d. Petitions to substitute a course or experience for an ES requirement must either demonstrate that the student has met the ES goal through college-level, academic-oriented work or study or petitions for off-campus or work experiences may be approved if the student can provide evidence of their theoretical and/or conceptual learning in relationship to the goal.
- 2e.
- 2f. High school courses cannot be petitioned to meet ES requirements.
- 2g. College credits earned through tests (such as AP and CLEP) may not be counted towards special emphases.
- 2h. In cases where multiple students are petitioning for the same reason, a group petition may be submitted by an instructor on behalf of the group of students.
- 2i. Petitions must be received by the ES Director 5 business days in advance of the next meeting of the ES Committee in order to be put on the next meeting agenda.
- 2j. A sub-committee of at least two voting committee members, as determined by the ES Committee, plus the Director of Essential Studies, reviews the petitions and makes one of 3 recommendations to the full committee: to approve the petition, to deny the petition, or to have the full committee discuss the petition (in the case when the sub-committee is not unanimous in its recommendation).
- 2k. The full committee votes on each petition.
- 2l. Petitions submitted in the summer may be acted on by the petition review sub- committee in lieu of the full ESC since the ESC does not meet in the summer.
- 2m. The student may appeal the decision a maximum of one time by submitting a revised petition.
- 2n. The Essential Studies Committee grants the Director of Essential Studies authority to rule on petitionable matters, and requires the Director to include in an annual report to the committee the number and type of such actions. Such rulings by the Director do not preclude the student from submitting a petition on the same matter to the ES Committee.

Notes and Additional Considerations:

- Decisions on petitions should take into account previous petition decisions for similar issues and be thoughtful about making precedents that will affect future petitions.
- The Essential Studies Director facilitates the student petition process and answers students' questions about petitions.
- Full information on how to submit a petition plus information on reasons why petitions may be denied are listed on the ES website.
- The Essential Studies Director notifies the student of the committee's decision.

3. ES Course Validation

Policies:

- 3a. When there is a desire to add a special emphasis designation to a currently-validated ES course, that course must go through course validation, using the validation form provided, prior to approval for the special emphasis.
- 3b. All special emphasis requests must be approved through the ESC as a whole rather than through a subcommittee.
- 3c. Newly validated ES courses are included in the listing of ES course (and thus eligible for ES status) by the Fall semester following the year approved (if the approval is completed by February 15). If the approval occurs after February 15, the course will be eligible for ES status and listed in the online catalog by the following Fall semester (typically a bit more than a year away). [Note: This policy is to maintain ES program compliance with expectations for the online course catalog.]

Notes and Additional Considerations:

- The committee provides guidance for the ES director in generating text that explains expectations for ES courses, including specifying expectations for how the identified ES goal is taught in the course and how alignment of all required ES elements should be clarified. This includes providing clarity regarding the expectation to ensure that appropriate language about the designated ES goal is included on the syllabus for an ES course.

4. ES Course Revalidation

Policies:

- 4a. All revalidation requests must be submitted by October 1 of the scheduled year.
- 4b. ESC members will review the revalidation proposals during the October 1 – January 31 time period, with subcommittee review preceding whole committee action.
- 4c. The ESC must take final action on all revalidation requests in time for decisions to be reflected in the next academic catalog, which typically means a February 15 final action due date. The exact date needs to be worked out in advance with the Registrar who oversees catalog publication.
- 4d. No revalidation work will be brought to the ESC as a whole until at least two reviews have occurred by different readers.
- 4e. If any reviewer should note concern about materials submitted for revalidation, the course submission will be brought to the full committee for discussion.
- 4f. Any revalidation action that includes a delay in the decision (e.g., request for more information) should specify the need to be addressed prior to revalidation. This should be in writing, with the comments available both to the revalidating department/individual and members of the ESC.

Bylaws of the Essential Studies Committee

The Essential Studies Committee charge, including membership and the committee's functions and responsibilities, as adopted by the University Senate and contained in the University Senate Committee Manual, appears in an earlier section of this document.

1. Committee Operations

Policies:

- 1a. Quorum for the ESC is 1/3 of all voting members, as per University Senate rules.
- 1b. Each ESC member is expected to serve as a member of a subcommittee (in addition to serving on the ESC itself) as assigned by the chair. Involvement in other ESC work (e.g., additional ad hoc subcommittees, Assessment Week planning) is generally at the discretion of the member.
- 1c. ESC meeting times and places (for the semester) are to be publicly posted as soon as they are determined. ESC agendas are to be publicly posted at least one day prior to each meeting in order to enable interested parties to attend if desired. [Note: Names of student petitioners should not be identified on agendas.]

Notes and Additional Considerations

- All committee members should go through training prior to involvement with validations, revalidations, or other outreach to campus generally.

2. Roles of Committee Officers

Policies:

- 2a. The chair of the ESC calls all meetings, prepares agendas, and presides over ESC meetings.
 - i. The chair will serve on the executive committee.
 - ii. The chair of the ESC, in consultation with the past-chair and ES director, appoints subcommittees, including a chair for each subcommittee.
- 2b. An ESC chair-elect will be identified in the fall semester, ideally fairly soon after the semester begins.
 - i. The chair-elect will serve on the executive committee.
- 2c. The past-chair remains an official member of the ESC for a full year after the chair term is over.
 - i. The past-chair will serve on the executive committee.
 - ii. The past chair assists with any outreach and follow-up on extensions or other business carried over from the previous year.
- 2d. An executive committee of the ESC is comprised of the past-chair, current chair, and chair-elect.
 - i. Meetings (face-to-face or electronic) of this body will occur at the request of the ES Director to provide input or guidance as needed, e.g., in planning activities related to ES.
 - ii. The executive committee does not stand in for the ESC in making any committee decisions.
 - iii. Chairs of subcommittees may be invited to participate in any executive committee meetings as the ES Director sees appropriate.

3. ESC Relationship with the ES Director

Policies:

- 3a. The ES Director writes letters for all non-approved course proposals and petitions, explaining the committee's decisions and/or any needed next steps.
- 3b. When the ESC acts to deny a petition or postpone action on a course (grant an extension or a provisional revalidation, or request more information for a validation), the ES Director should keep records of the reason for the delay or denial in order to improve clarity and consistency in future communications with the same individual or department.
- 3c. The ESC Director ensures timely action on all requests to the committee, whether for petitions, validations, revalidations, or other decisions. All requests of any sort are tracked and files are maintained to ensure appropriate and timely responses.
- 3d. The ESC Director is responsible for ensuring that all letters needed to report committee actions are sent, on a timely basis, to students or faculty submitting requests of any sort. In cases where the letter is to be written by another individual, the ESC Director still serves as the conduit, tracking progress and ensuring timely reports back.
- 3e. The Director of the ES program is responsible for maintaining a record of policy decisions of the ESC and updating this record of policies on a timely basis. Revisiting previous policy decisions will occur when either the Director or the ESC perceives a need.