

Essential Education FAQ for Faculty and Staff

General Overview

Q: What is Essential Education and why are we changing from General Education?

A: Essential Education is a transformative approach that integrates essential skills across all disciplines through themed pathways. Unlike traditional General Education, this model connects courses around real-world challenges (like Artificial Intelligence) while maintaining the same 30-credit hour structure. The change addresses evolving student needs, workforce demands, and technological advances that make incremental changes to our current system insufficient. All courses in the new Essential Education will satisfy existing requirements in terms of assessment and accreditation.

Q: When will Essential Education begin?

A: Essential Education will launch in Fall 2026, starting with the Artificial Intelligence pathway. Faculty development and course approval processes begin in 2025.

Q: What is the timeline for courses to join the Essential Education program in Fall 2026?

A: The EETC and University General Education Committee will hold workshops in the Fall of 2026, and faculty will identify the courses for the revised program in the months leading up to the October 30, 2025 CAA meeting.

Q: Who is leading this transformation?

A: This is a faculty-led initiative with administration support. Dr. Matt Winslow chairs the Transformation Committee (TC), Dr. Anne Cizmar and Dr. Jade Robinson serve as Vice Chairs, while Drs. Sara Zeigler and Tanlee Wasson lead the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) that provides strategic oversight.

Pathway Structure

Q: What exactly is a pathway?

A: A pathway is a collection of courses from different Essential Education elements that examine a real-world problem from various disciplinary perspectives. Students take themed courses that connect to challenges like AI while still meeting all traditional academic requirements.

Q: How many courses make up a pathway?

A: Each pathway requires a minimum of 5 courses across at least 3 different Elements. Students need 5 or more pathway courses to receive formal pathway recognition on their transcript.

Q: Do students have to follow a pathway?

A: No. Students can take courses within multiple pathways or mix pathway courses with non-pathway courses as they see fit. The pathway model provides structure and coherence for those who want it while maintaining flexibility.

Q: What pathway themes are being considered?

A: The inaugural pathway is Artificial Intelligence, launching Fall 2026. Additional potential themes include entrepreneurship and wellness. New pathways will be added gradually (1-2 per year maximum) based on faculty capacity and student interest.

Faculty Impact

Q: Will I be required to teach pathway courses?

A: No. Faculty currently teaching General Education courses are invited to develop and propose pathway courses, but participation is voluntary. Many current General Education courses will continue without alteration.

Q: Can I propose a new pathway theme?

A: Yes. Faculty groups from at least 3 Elements can propose pathway themes. The proposal goes through UGEC for preliminary approval, stakeholder input, and final approval before individual courses are developed.

Q: What support will be available for course development?

A: FCT&L and other units will support faculty in pathway course redesign and Essential Employability Skills integration. Development workshops begin in August 2025.

Q: How will pathway courses be different from current General Education courses?

A: Pathway courses must align with the pathway theme in content, design, or format while still meeting existing Element goals and assessment requirements through established UGEC rubrics.

Curriculum and Assessment

Q: Are we reducing the number of General Education credit hours?

A: Yes. The program is a 30-hour program and elements have been reconfigured. The pathway model was developed separately from the change in Essential Education Program hours. The overall credit hours required to earn a degree (120) has not changed.

Q: What are Essential Employability Skills and how do they fit in?

A: These are 10 key skills identified in ECU's Graduate Profile, including communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and teamwork. They will be integrated throughout the Essential Education elements, with full integration completed by Fall 2028.

Q: Have the employability skills been assigned to the Elements?

A: No. Several working groups have made preliminary suggestions, but the campus community will have opportunities for input on the assignments.

Q: How will pathway courses be assessed?

A: All pathway courses must demonstrate how they prepare students to meet appropriate Element goals using existing UGEC Element rubrics. Each pathway will undergo comprehensive review every five years.

Q: Will this affect degree requirements in my major?

A: No. Essential Education replaces General Education requirements but doesn't change major-specific degree requirements or total credit hours for graduation.

Implementation Process

Q: What's the timeline for course development and approval?

A:

- Fall 2025: Pathway course development workshops begin
- Spring 2026: All pathway course approval process
- Spring 2026: Faculty development for Essential Employability Skills
- Fall 2026: All pathway pilot launch
- Spring 2027: Call for additional pathway themes

Q: How will students be recognized for completing a pathway?

A: Students will receive recognition on their transcripts. The specific format (minor, award, or transcript notation) depends on DegreeWorks programming capabilities and is still being determined.

Q: What if a pathway doesn't work out?

A: Each pathway undergoes comprehensive review every five years to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness. Pathways can be modified or discontinued based on student interest, faculty capacity, and societal relevance.

Practical Concerns

Q: Will this require additional resources or faculty lines?

A: The model is designed to capitalize on existing resources. New pathways will only be added as faculty and administrative capacity supports them, with a maximum of 1-2 new pathways per year.

Q: How will this affect transfer students?

A: Transfer processes will need to be updated to accommodate the pathway model, but specific procedures are still being developed. The 30-credit hour requirement and Element structure should facilitate transfer credit evaluation.

Q: What if students change their minds about their pathway?

A: Students have complete flexibility to switch between pathways or take a mix of pathway and non-pathway courses. There's no penalty for changing direction.

Getting Involved

Q: How can I stay informed about developments?

A: The Transformation Committee will provide regular updates through established communication channels. Faculty interested in pathway development should watch for workshop announcements beginning August 2025.

Q: Who should I contact with questions or ideas?

A: Contact Dr. Matt Winslow (Transformation Committee Chair) for pathway development questions or Dr. Sara Zeigler and Dr. Tanlee Wasson (ESC Co-Chairs) for strategic questions about the overall initiative.

Q: When will we know more details about specific requirements?

A: Additional details will be shared as the AI pathway courses are developed through 2025-2026. The pilot implementation will provide valuable experience for refining processes for future pathways.

This FAQ is based on the Essential Education Transformation Committee's Interim Report and will be updated as implementation progresses.

AI Acknowledgment: This FAQ document was created through a collaborative process where AI analyzed the Essential Education Transformation Committee's Interim Report and related documents provided by the user, then structured the content from the perspective of ECU faculty and staff who would need practical information about the upcoming changes. The user requested that AI focus on faculty and staff concerns, which guided the selection and framing of questions and answers to address implementation details, timeline concerns, and practical impacts on daily academic work.