

Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit

Introduction

These guidelines were developed by the two national associations whose member institutions are directly involved in the transfer¹ and award of postsecondary academic credit, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, along with the American Council on Education (ACE), which makes credit recommendations for learning gained outside of traditional college classrooms.

Students increasingly are pursuing their education in a variety of institutional and extra-institutional settings. Social equity and the intelligent use of resources require that validated learning be appropriately recognized wherever it takes place. Individual institutions must have the autonomy to make the ultimate decision regarding transfer of credit according to their own academic mission and standards. Below are important considerations for institutions to take into account in developing credit transfer policies or accepting credit students seek to apply from another institution or an extra-institutional setting such as workplace courses or military occupations and training.

General Principles

This statement is directed to colleges and universities and others concerned with the transfer and award of academic credit between higher education institutions or recommended credit based on learning that occurs outside of the college classroom. An essential principle is that every institution is responsible for determining its own policies and practices with regard to the transfer of credit. Institutions are encouraged to review their policies and practices regularly to ensure that their credit transfer/award policies align with their academic missions and strategic priorities, and function in a manner that is fair and equitable to students and take into consideration new sources for learning and alternative assessment methods. General guidelines such as this or others should be used as tools to help develop specific institutional policies and practices, not in lieu of such institutional policies.

Transfer and award of credit is a concept that increasingly involves transfer between dissimilar institutions and curricula and recognition of extra-institutional learning, as well as transfer between institutions and curricula with similar characteristics. As their personal circumstances and educational objectives change, students seek to have their learning, wherever and however attained, recognized by institutions where they enroll for further study. It is important for reasons of social equity and educational effectiveness for all institutions to develop reasonable and well-articulated policies and procedures for the consideration of credit for such learning experiences, as well as for the potential transfer of credits earned at another institution. Such policies and procedures should provide maximum consideration for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. It is the receiving institution's responsibility to provide reasonable and well-articulated policies and procedures for determining a student's knowledge in required subject areas. All sending institutions have a responsibility to furnish transcripts,

¹ "Transfer" as used here refers to the movement of students from one college, university or other education provider to another and to the process by which credits representing educational experiences, courses, degrees or credentials that are awarded by an education provider are accepted or not accepted by a receiving institution.

syllabi and other documents necessary for a receiving institution to judge the quality and quantity of the student's work. Institutions also have a responsibility to advise the student that the work reflected on the transcript may or may not be accepted by a receiving institution as bearing the same (or any) credits as those awarded by the provider institution, that the evaluation of credit is not always consistent among institutions, or that the credits awarded will be applicable to the specific academic degree or credential the student is pursuing.

Inter-Institutional Transfer of Credit

Transfer of credit from one institution to another involves at least three considerations:

- (1) the educational quality of the learning experience which the student seeks to transfer;
- (2) the comparability of the nature, content and level of the learning experience to that offered by the receiving institution; and
- (3) the appropriateness and applicability of the learning experience to the programs offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals.

Accredited Institutions

Accreditation addresses primarily the first of these considerations, serving as the basic indicator that an institution meets certain minimum standards. The goal of accreditation is to give students and policymakers confidence in the effectiveness of an institution's or program's academic quality and that it has the resources necessary to accomplish its goals. Accreditation speaks to the probability that students have met acceptable standards of educational accomplishment.

Users of accreditation are urged to give careful attention to the accreditation conferred by accrediting bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education. Both have a formal process that requires that all recognized accrediting bodies meet the same standards. Although accrediting agencies vary in the ways they are organized and in their statements of scope and mission, all accrediting bodies that meet the CHEA and Department of Education standards for recognition must demonstrate that they require the institutions or programs to meet generally accepted standards.

Determining Comparability of Coursework

Accreditation does not address questions about the comparability of the nature, content, and level of potential transfer credit. These questions are as important in the evaluation process as the accreditation status of the institution where the student originally earned his or her credit. Since accreditation does not address these questions, this information must be obtained from catalogues, syllabi and other materials and from direct contact between knowledgeable and experienced faculty and staff at both the receiving and sending institutions. When such considerations as comparability and appropriateness of credit are satisfied, however, the receiving institution should have reasonable confidence that students from accredited institutions are qualified to undertake the receiving institution's educational program. In its articulation and transfer policies, the institution should judge courses, programs and other learning experiences on their learning outcomes and the existence of valid evaluation measures, including third-party expert review.

Admissions and Degree Purposes

At some institutions there may be differences between the acceptance of credit for admission purposes and the applicability of credit for degree requirements or about the appropriateness and applicability of the credit a student has earned at one institution to the programs offered by the institution where the student seeks to transfer that credit. Previous work, because of its

nature and not necessarily its inherent quality, may have no applicability to a specific degree to be pursued by the student and may be considered for elective credit only. Institutions have a responsibility to make this distinction, and its implications, clear to students before they decide to enroll. This should be a matter of full disclosure, with the best interests of the student in mind. Institutions also should make every reasonable effort to reduce the gap between elective credits and credits applied toward specific requirements of an educational degree or credential.

Additional Criteria for Transfer Decisions

These additional criteria are intended to sustain academic quality in an environment of more varied transfer, assure consistency of transfer practice, and encourage appropriate transparency about transfer policy and practice.

- *Balance in the Use of Accreditation Status in Transfer Decisions:* Institutions and accreditors should ensure that decisions about awarding transfer credit are not made solely on the source of accreditation of the sending program or institution. While acknowledging that accreditation is an important factor, receiving institutions ought to make clear their institutional reasons for accepting or not accepting credits that students seek to transfer. Students should have reasonable explanations about how work for which students seek transfer credit is or is not of sufficient quality when compared with the receiving institution and how work is or is not comparable with curricula and standards to meet degree requirements of the receiving institution.
- *Consistency:* Institutions and accreditors should reaffirm that the considerations that inform credit award decisions are applied consistently in the context of a higher education landscape where more students are trying to transfer more credit and there are a number of new higher education providers offering more potential sources of transfer credit. This increases the number and type of transfer credit issues that institutions will need to address—making consistency even more important in the future.
- *Effective and Transparent Public Communication:* Institutions and accreditors should ensure that students and the public are fully and accurately informed about their respective transfer credit policies and practices. The public has a significant interest in higher education's effective management of transfer credit, especially in an environment of expanding access and increased mobility. Colleges and universities are the stewards of significant taxpayer dollars, such as state investments in public institutions or federal student aid funding. This funding is accompanied by public expectations that the transfer credit process is built on a strong commitment to fairness and efficiency.
- *Commitment to Address Innovation:* Institutions and accreditors should be flexible and open in considering alternative transfer credit approaches that might benefit students, including credit earned through alternative means, such as competency-based, distance, and online learning and other applications of technology.

Evaluation of Extra-Institutional and Experiential Learning for Purposes of Transfer and Award of Credit

Transfer and award of credit policies should encompass educational accomplishments attained in extra-institutional settings, such as those gained in the workplace, military or community. Assessment and credit recommendations for extra-institutional learning, or prior learning, has been in place since World War I, when returning military veterans were provided opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in order to gain high school credentials and enter postsecondary education programs. Since then, nationally recognized methods of assessment and credit recommendations have been developed. Those methods include third-party validation of learning offered outside traditional classrooms by the military and civilian

organizations, including private employers, government agencies, training providers, institutes, labor unions, national examination programs and online education vendors. Institutions also have created tools for individualized assessment to document college-level equivalencies through informal learning. Like any transfer credit, colleges and universities have the responsibility for determining transfer awards for credit for prior learning options.

Uses of This Statement

Institutions are encouraged to use this statement as a basis for discussions in developing and reviewing institutional policies with regards to the transfer and award of credit for learning that has taken place in a variety of settings. Institutions may use the guidelines included in this statement to inform faculty, staff, students and other constituencies. It is also recommended that accrediting bodies reflect the essential precepts of this statement in their criteria.

Signed



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