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## Policy on Award of Credit

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### Background

While many institutions rely on the calculation of in-class time to determine the amount of credit awarded for a particular class, Accreditation Standards require that institutions award credit based on student achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The Accreditation Standards also require that the units awarded be consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms in higher education (Standard IIA.2.h.). In addition, institutions increasingly are providing more varied educational experiences as a means for students to earn college credits such as distance education, independent study, group project work, study abroad, work-experience, transfer of credits from other institutions, credit by examination, and through direct assessment programs. Institutional policy and practice in award of credit must assure the integrity of credit awarded to all educational experiences.

### Policy

Institutions must maintain policies and procedures that assure award of credit for educational experiences is based on achievement of stated student learning outcomes, comparability of that learning to other institutions in higher education, applicability and appropriateness of that learning experience for the program or degree offered, and generally accepted norms in higher education. Institutions must conform to a commonly accepted minimum program length as per the Commission Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credit. Institutions must also conform to U.S. Department of Education regulations defining a credit hour and to regulations regarding clock to credit hour conversions that may be applicable to non-degree undergraduate programs. Institutions must obtain Substantive Change approval and approval from the U.S. Department of Education for direct assessment programs<sup>1</sup>. The Commission will conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours used for federal program purposes.<sup>2</sup>

### Policy Elements

In the determinations about the award of credit, institutions have a responsibility to assure that the courses or other educational experiences that are awarded or assigned credit meet the following criteria:

- The courses or other educational experiences have identified student learning outcomes that students must meet at a defined level of performance to receive credit.

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<sup>1</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 668.10.

<sup>2</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 602.2, 602.24(f). The Commission will: review the institution's policies and procedures for determining the credit hours and the application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; make a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practices in higher education; review and evaluate the institution's policies and procedures for the award of credit through sampling and other methods in the evaluation; and take appropriate actions if an institution is found to be deficient, including notifying the U.S. Secretary of Education if the institution demonstrates systemic non-compliance with its own or the ACCJC's policies in one or more programs of study.

- The courses or other educational experiences meet standards of quality as defined by the institution.
- The credits awarded for a course or educational experience are comparable in quantity and nature to credits awarded to other courses at the institution.
- The credits are appropriate for higher education or for pre-collegiate education, and are defined as such.
- The credits are appropriate and applicable to the institution's own educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other defined educational outcomes.

Institutions have a responsibility to assure that work offered for credit is of sufficient quality to produce the student learning outcomes necessary to meet standards of quality in higher education of transfer institutions, and of employers, as well as the program and degree requirements of the institution itself.

Institutions have a responsibility to be consistent in award of credit, particularly in the award of credit to learning gained through alternative methods of delivery or by other providers of training and education. Consistency is especially important in assuring a comparable level of student competence and learning for different activities assigned comparable credit.

Institutions have a responsibility to maintain the integrity of award of credit by clearly stating requirements in policies, publishing those policies in documents used by faculty and students, and assuring that the policies are adhered to. The public has a significant interest in higher education student learning outcomes. Public funding and private donations and support are based on expectations that award of credit is directly related to student learning and student competencies.

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