New England Commission of Higher Education
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210, Wakefield, MA 01880
Tel: 781-425-7785 I neche.org

Guidelines for Proposals for Reduced-Credit Baccalaureate Degrees

The Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* includes the following language regarding baccalaureate degrees:

> 2.5 A bachelor's degree consists of a minimum of 120 credits, an associate's degree a minimum of 60 credits, a master's degree a minimum of 30 credits. An institution must have approval to offer specific modified degrees with fewer credits (see Policy on Innovation, and Guidance for Institutions Preparing Proposals to offer Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degrees). At the bachelor's level, curricula include substantial requirements at the advanced undergraduate level, with appropriate prerequisites.

All proposals for Reduced-Credit baccalaureate degrees need to be submitted both following the Commission's Policy on Innovation and guidance below:

1. **Authority from the Appropriate Governmental Agency requirement:** The institution must provide evidence that it has the authority from the state or other appropriate governmental agency to offer reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees. That evidence should be included as an appendix to the institution's innovation proposal.

2. **Naming requirement:** The name of the degree is important and should clearly distinguish by means of a prefix in front of baccalaureate/bachelor's – to potential students and the public at large – that what is proposed is not a traditional baccalaureate degree with a minimum degree requirement of 120 semester credits. The transcript should also reflect the name of the degree, including the prefix.

3. **Transparency requirement:** Institutions must include a provision informing potential students and their families in all marketing and admissions materials, including as part of the institution's website description of the program, that some graduate programs, professional schools, and employers might not accept a reduced-credit baccalaureate degree. The disclosure language should include the following text:

   Reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees may not be sufficient for admission into graduate level programs and may not be considered equivalent to a traditional 120-credit bachelor's degree by some employers.

   The norm for a baccalaureate degree remains 120 credits. Reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees will be highly structured with limited elective credits.

   The institution must also make sure students and their families are informed of existing pathways to a four-year degree, as required in #5 below, noting potential limitations on financial aid:

   Reduced-Credit baccalaureate degrees are eligible for Title IV federal financial aid. However, students who complete a reduced-credit baccalaureate degree and choose to then complete either a traditional baccalaureate or other undergraduate certificates or programs may not be eligible for federal financial aid.

4. **Assessment requirement:** Proposals for reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees need to include learning outcomes for each program as well as an assessment plan that evaluates student achievement of the learning outcomes and other student success metrics including, but not limited to, (a) retention and persistence rates; (b) student attainment of general education and subject area learning outcomes; (c) student graduation rates; (d) job placement rate for graduates in their field; and (e) admission to graduate programs. In addition, the institutions should develop plans for remediation when assessment results reveal that students are not meeting the learning outcomes established.

5. **Curricular requirement:** The reduced-credit baccalaureate degree program of study should have an applied or career-focused/workforce orientation and include an appropriate mix of credits in the major, in general education, as well as electives. In addition, the degree program should be at least 90 credits in length (including at least 30 credits with substantial advanced work in the major awarded by the institution). Further, a pathway to a traditional 120-credit baccalaureate degree should exist for students enrolled in a reduced-credit degree or who have earned the reduced-credit degree. As part of its proposal, institutions should provide a sample pathway for each reduced-credit baccalaureate degree program that shows the courses and total required credits students will need to complete each semester to achieve a traditional baccalaureate degree.

6. **General Education requirement:** As noted in the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation,* "Reduced-credit Baccalaureate-level degrees include general education courses totaling at least one-third of the overall credits and provide students with the opportunity to take electives" (2.6).

7. **Number of reduced-credit baccalaureate degree offerings requirement:** As reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees are still in the early stages of implementation, little if any data exists on the efficacy of such programs. Accordingly, institutions are limit to offering no more than five such degrees until evidence of their effectiveness is more widely available.

Per the Commission's Policy on Innovation, a site visit will be required to review the institution's success in implementing its proposed reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees.

April 2026