

Transfer and Award of Academic Credit

This statement is directed to institutions of postsecondary education and others concerned with the transfer of academic credit among institutions and award of academic credit for extra-institutional learning. Basic to this statement is the principle that each institution is responsible for determining its own policies and practices with regard to the transfer and award of credit. Institutions are encouraged to review their policies and practices periodically to ensure that they accomplish the institution's objectives and that they function in a manner that is fair and equitable to students. Any statements, this one or others referred to, should be used as guides, not as substitutes, for institutional policies and practices.

Transfer of credit is a concept that now involves transfer between dissimilar institutions and curricula and recognition of extra-institutional learning, as well as transfer between institutions and curricula of 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, as well as the wise use of resources, for all institutions to develop reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for acceptance of transfer credit and to ensure that these policies are easily available to students and prospective students. 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 definitive policies and procedures for determining a student's knowledge in required subject areas. It is the sending institution's responsibility to provide information on courses and methods of assessment in sufficient detail to serve as the basis for transfer evaluation. All institutions have a responsibility to furnish transcripts and other documents necessary for a receiving institution to judge the quality and quantity of the work. Institutions also have a responsibility to advise the students that the work reflected on the transcript may or may not be accepted by a receiving institution.

Both sending and receiving institutions have a responsibility to provide information to the public on academic factors that can be involved in transfer of credit decisions (e.g., existing course equivalencies, articulation agreements, grades, comparability, course level and content, course applicability toward a major or degree, and course or program prerequisites). Institutions also have a responsibility to provide information to the public on the specific steps that must be taken when attempting transfer of credits, including deadlines, material to be sent to receiving institutions, and obtaining needed assistance from sending and receiving institutions.

Inter-institutional Transfer of Credit

The accredited status of an institution is an important, but not the sole factor, to consider in transfer of credit decisions. Transfer of credit from one institution to another involves at least three considerations:

- A. the educational quality of the institution from which the student transfers;
- B. the comparability of the nature, content, and level of credit earned to that offered by the receiving institution; and
- C. the appropriateness and applicability of the credit earned to the programs offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals.

Accredited Institutions

Accreditation speaks primarily to the first of these considerations, serving as the basic indicator that an institution meets certain minimum standards. Users of accreditation are urged to give careful attention to the accreditation conferred by accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Both bodies have formal processes of recognition which require that any accrediting body so recognized must meet specified standards or criteria. Both the Department of Education and CHEA have recognized a number of accrediting bodies, including:

- A. regional accrediting Commissions (which historically accredited the more traditional colleges and universities but which now accredit proprietary, vocational-technical, and single-purpose institutions as well);
- B. national accrediting bodies that accredit various kinds of specialized institutions; and
- C. certain professional organizations that accredit free-standing professional schools, in addition to programs within multi-purpose institutions. (CHEA annually publishes a list of recognized accrediting bodies, as well as a directory of institutions accredited by these organizations.)

Although accrediting agencies vary in the ways they are organized and in their statements of scope and mission, all recognized accrediting bodies function to assure that the institutions or programs they accredit have met generally accepted minimum standards for accreditation.

Accreditation affords reason for confidence in an institution's or a program's purposes, in the appropriateness of its resources and plans for carrying out these purposes, and in its effectiveness in accomplishing its goals, insofar as these things can be judged.

Accreditation speaks to the probability but does not guarantee that students have met acceptable standards of educational accomplishment.

Comparability and Applicability

Comparability of the nature, content, and level of transfer credit and the appropriateness and applicability of the credit earned to programs offered by the receiving institution are as important in the evaluation process as the accreditation status of the institution at which the transfer credit was awarded. Since accreditation does not address these questions, this information must be obtained from catalogues or 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.

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 purposes. A receiving institution may accept previous work, place a credit value on it, and enter it on the transcript. However, that previous work, because of its nature and not its inherent quality, may be determined to have no applicability to a specific degree to be pursued by the student.

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 credits accepted and credits applied toward an educational credential.

Unaccredited Institutions

Institutions of postsecondary education that are not accredited by the Department of Education or CHEA-recognized accrediting bodies may lack that status for reasons unrelated to questions of quality. Such institutions, however, cannot provide a reliable, third-party assurance that they meet or exceed minimum standards. That being the case, students transferring from such institutions may encounter special problems in gaining acceptance and transferring credits to accredited institutions. Institutions admitting students from unaccredited institutions should take special steps to validate credits previously earned.

Foreign Institutions

In most cases, foreign institutions are chartered and authorized by their national governments, usually through a ministry of education. Although this provides for a standardization within a country, it does not produce useful information about comparability from one country to another. Equivalency or placement recommendations are to be evaluated in terms of the program and policies of the individual receiving institution.

Validation of Extra-institutional and Experiential Learning for Transfer Purposes

Transfer-of-credit policies should encompass educational accomplishment attained in extra-institutional settings as well as at accredited postsecondary institutions. In deciding on the award of credit for extra-institutional learning, institutions will find the services of the American Council on Education's Office of Educational Credit helpful. One of the Office's functions is to operate and foster programs to determine credit equivalencies for various modes of extra-institutional learning. The Office maintains evaluation programs for formally structured courses offered by the military, and civilian non-collegiate sponsors such as business, corporations, government agencies, and labor unions. Evaluation services are also available for examination programs, for occupations with validated job proficiency evaluation systems, and for correspondence courses offered by schools accredited by the National Home Study Council. The results are published in a Guide series.

Another resource is the General Education Development (GED) Testing Program, which provides a means for assessing high school equivalency.

For learning that has not been validated through the ACE formal credit recommendation process or through credit-by-examination programs, institutions are urged to explore the Council for Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) procedures and processes. Pertinent CAEL publications designed for this purpose are available.

Uses of This Statement

Institutions are encouraged to use this statement as a basis for discussions in developing or reviewing institutional policies with regard to transfer. If the statement reflects an institution's policies, that institution might want to use this publication to inform faculty, staff, and students.

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