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## **Guidance for Proposals for Reduced-Credit Baccalaureate Degrees**

The Commission's 2026 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 must be submitted following the Commission's Policy on Innovation and align with the 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 must be included as an appendix to the institution's innovation proposal.
- 2. Naming requirement:** The name of the degree is important and must 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 will reflect the name of the degree, including the prefix.
- 3. Transparency requirement:** Institutions need to develop a required language provision that they will include prominently in their marketing, admissions, and advising materials. This would include a provision that some graduate programs, professional schools, and employers might not accept a reduced-credit baccalaureate degree and an expectation that that is made known to potential students and their families in all marketing and admissions material, including web site descriptions of the program. This language must also provide students with a pathway to a four-year degree as required in #4 below.

The disclosure language must include the following text:

*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.*

*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.*

4. **Assessment requirement:** Institutions need to include in their proposal the learning outcomes for the reduced-credit baccalaureate program as well as an assessment plan that evaluates student learning outcomes as well as other student success metrics, including, but not limited to, (a) retention and persistence, (b) student attainment of general education and subject area learning outcomes, (c) student graduation rates, (d) the ability for graduates to obtain employment in their field; and (e) admission to graduate programs. We further require that institutions develop plans for remediation when assessment results reveal that students are not meeting outcomes.
5. **Curricular requirement:** Curriculum must include an appropriate mix of credits in the major, in general education, and electives. The program of study should: have an applied or career-focused/workforce orientation; be at least 90 credits, with at least 30 credits, including substantial advanced work in the major, awarded by the institution; and include a pathway to a traditional 120-credit baccalaureate degree for a student who is enrolled in a reduced-credit degree or who has earned the reduced-credit degree. Institutions must submit a sample pathway for each reduced-credit baccalaureate degree program that shows the courses students will take each semester to achieve a traditional degree and indicate the total number of credits that path requires. Institutions must also include the courses in the pathway to the traditional baccalaureate degree.
6. **General Education requirement:** As noted in the Commission's 2026 *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 these programs are still in their early implementation phase, there is currently little, if any, data on the efficacy of these programs. As such, institutions must limit the number of reduced-credit baccalaureate degree programs they offer to no more than 5.

Per the Commission's Policy on Innovation, a site visit will be required for reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees.