

Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Procedures

Effective Date: July 1, 2022

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I. Purpose

The Mid-Atlantic Region Commission on Higher Education (MARCHE), doing business as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission) seeks to ensure that institutions are responsible for consistency, fairness, and transparency in the evaluation and acceptance of credit earned at another institution or credits awarded through the assessment of experiential learning, prior non-academic learning (including military service), competency-based education, direct assessment, and other alternative learning approaches. The purpose of these procedures is to implement the *Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Policy*.

II. Procedures for Commission Review of Transfer of Credit Policy

- A. The institution will develop a transfer of credit policy and/or procedures that align with student learning outcomes, academic goals, and strategic priorities, are fair and equitable to students, and take into consideration new and innovative methods or sources for learning and alternative assessment methods.
- B. The institution is responsible for ascertaining applicable local education agency (LEA), state, federal, or other law or regulations that pertain to the institution related to transfer of credit.
- C. The institution will establish written criteria regarding transfer of credit that does not discriminate against particular institutional settings or modes of delivery and addresses the following considerations:
 1. The educational quality of the learning experience which the student seeks to transfer;
 2. The equivalency of course content, expected learning outcomes, curriculum, and/or other standards;
 3. The comparability of the nature, content and level of the learning experience to that offered by the receiving institution; and
 4. The appropriateness and applicability of the learning experience to the programs offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals.

- D. The institution's transfer of credit policy and/or procedures are transparent and provide a clear rationale for why credits are accepted or not accepted.
 - 1. The circumstances under which credits and or grades are accepted and not accepted should be clear and publicly stated in accessible, specific, and easy to understand terms.
 - 2. Transparency is key to aiding and empowering students in their decision-making process when deciding to transfer to or from an institution.
- E. In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.23(f)(2), all credits and degrees earned and issued by an institution or program holding Candidate for Accreditation Status (pre-accreditation) from a nationally recognized agency are considered by the United States Secretary of Education to be from an accredited institution or program.
- F. While accreditation is an important factor in determining the educational quality of the learning experience which the student seeks to transfer, it should not be the sole determinant or criterion for the acceptance of credit.
- G. If an institution has programmatic or specialized accreditation, it may establish criteria based on the curricular, licensure, or other specific requirements of those accreditors so long as the institution is transparent and explains the rationale for those requirements.
- H. The institution may create separate policies and/or procedures for the review and evaluation of international transfer credits. Institutions may find it helpful to utilize a credentials evaluation service to evaluate credit earned through a non-U.S. or international institution or program of study.
- I. The institution will involve faculty and other appropriate professionals in the creation, review, and implementation of transfer and prior learning policies and/or procedures.
- J. The institution will provide training to faculty and other appropriate professionals to properly advise both incoming and outgoing transfer students, offer counseling (including any impact on financial aid eligibility), and refer students to other support services that are available.
- K. In accordance with the Commission's *Public Disclosures Policy and Procedures* and federal regulations 34 CFR § 668.43(a)(11), the institution will make a statement of its transfer of credit policies and procedures readily available to prospective and current students, which will include, at a minimum:
 - 1. Any established written criteria the institution uses regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution and any types of institutions or sources from which the institution will not accept credits;
 - 2. A list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement; and

3. Written criteria used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experience including, but not limited to, service in the armed forces, paid or unpaid employment, or other demonstrated competency or learning.
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- L. The institution will clearly communicate how credit for prior learning and transfer will be recorded on transcripts and how credit hour will be assessed for coursework, experiential learning, prior non-academic learning (including military service), competency-based education, direct assessment, and other alternative learning approaches.
 - M. The institution will minimize additional fees or finance charges related to the evaluation of transfer of credit for prospective students and will be transparent about any additional financial charges or fees, if any.
 - N. The institution will conduct evaluations of transcripts and prior learning in a timely manner and institutional decision-making regarding individual students will be swift and definitive.
 - O. The institution will inform students in writing when their expectations for the transferability of learning credits to other institutions may not be fully realized. The institution should notify students as early as possible in order to be informative and helpful to students for decision-making.
 - P. The institution will regularly review its transfer of credit, experiential and prior learning, and articulation policies, procedures, and/or methodologies and utilize outcomes assessment data to evaluate the effectiveness of transfer of credit policies and procedures.
 - Q. In accordance with federal regulation § 602.24(e)(1-2), the Commission will review the institution's policy and/or procedures for transfer of credit to ensure they are publicly disclosed and include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.
 - R. The institution will provide, at a minimum, the following information to the Commission as evidence of compliance at the time of application, grant of candidacy, grant of accreditation, self-study evaluation, and at any other time deemed relevant by the Commission:
 1. Policies and procedures on the decision-making process about acceptance and transfer of credit earned at other institutions (regardless of modality);
 2. Policies and procedures on the decision-making process on credits awarded through the assessment of experiential learning, prior non-academic learning (including military service), competency-based education, direct assessment, and other alternative learning approaches;
 3. The URL and any other source of information where students and the public can access the policy and procedures with evidence that such information is regularly evaluated to ensure accuracy.

- S. The institution will provide any additional evidence as requested by Commission representatives.
- T. The Commission will provide training to peer evaluators on how to review transfer of credit policies and/or procedures to make a reasonable determination of whether they meet the requirements of this policy and procedures.
- U. If peer evaluators find deficiencies in the institution's transfer of credit policy and/or procedures, the Commission will take an accreditation action in accordance with the Commission's *Accreditation Actions Policy and Procedures*.

III. Procedures for Commission Review of Articulation Agreements

- A. The institution may elect to enter into articulation agreements and/or memoranda of understanding (MOU) with institutions or programs which specify the acceptability of courses in transfer toward meeting specific degree or program requirements, provide transparency to students, facilitate the process of transfer, and minimize the loss of credits for students.
- B. If the institution has articulation agreements or memoranda of understanding with other institutions, it will publicly disclose a list of those institutions in accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 668.43(a)(11).
- C. The Commission will conduct a review to verify that the institution has publicly disclosed the list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements, if any, at the time of application, grant of candidacy, grant of accreditation, self-study evaluation, and at any other time deemed relevant by the Commission in accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 668.43(a)(11).

IV. Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy and/or procedures:

- A. Articulation agreement.** An agreement between or among institutions of higher education that specifies the acceptability of courses in transfer toward meeting specific degree or program requirements.
- B. Clock hour:** (1) A period of time consisting of (i) A 50- to 60-minute class, lecture, or recitation in a 60-minute period; (ii) A 50- to 60-minute faculty-supervised laboratory, shop training, or internship in a 60-minute period; (iii) Sixty minutes of preparation in a correspondence course; or (iv) In distance education, 50 to 60 minutes in a 60-minute period of attendance in (A) A synchronous or asynchronous class, lecture, or recitation where there is opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students; or (B) An asynchronous learning activity involving academic engagement in which the

student interacts with technology that can monitor and document the amount of time that the student participates in the activity. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2).

- C. Competency Based Education (CBE).** A program that organizes content according to what a student knows and can do, often referred to as a “competency.” CBE programs also generally have very clear claims for student learning, stress what students can do with the knowledge and skills they acquire and have assessments that provide measurable evidence of competency. Student progress is determined by mastery of each competency. Because CBE focuses on whether students have mastered these competencies, there is a focus on learning outcomes rather than time spent in a classroom. Direct assessment is a subset of competency-based education (CBE).
- D. Credit for prior learning.** Academic credit granted for demonstrated college-level equivalencies gained through learning experiences outside of the college classroom, using one of the well-established methods for assessing extra-institutional learning, including third-party validation of formal training or individualized assessment, such as portfolios. (definition from American Council on Education and Center for Education Attainment & Innovation).
- E. Credit hour.** An amount of student work defined by an institution, as approved by the institution’s accrediting agency or State approval agency, that is consistent with commonly accepted practice in postsecondary education and that reasonably approximates not less than (i) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different period of time; or (ii) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in (i) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours; and permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2)
- F. Direct assessment.** Alternative means to measure student learning in lieu of clock or credit hours.
- G. Direct assessment program.** An instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others and meets the conditions of 34 CFR § 668.10. Direct assessment of student learning means a measure of a student’s knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide evidence of the student’s proficiency in the relevant subject area. Direct assessment is a subset of

competency-based education (CBE).

- H. Distance education.** Education that uses one or more of the following technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously: (i) the internet; (ii) one-way or two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (iii) audio conference; or (iv) Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above. Please see the complete federal definition of distance education, including substantive interaction in the *Substantive Change Guidelines*. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2)
- I. Educational program.** A legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that: (i) Leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential, or is a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program, as described in 34 CFR part 668, subpart O; and (ii) May, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilize direct assessment of student learning, or recognize the direct assessment of student learning by others, if such assessment is consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment and with the provisions of § 668.10. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2) The Commission may also use the terms certificates and/or degree levels (Standard III – Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience).
- J. Prior learning assessment.** The process for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level learning acquired outside of the classroom. There are several ways in which students can demonstrate this learning and earn credit, including but not limited to, standardized examination, program challenge exam, portfolio-based or other individualized assessment, evaluation of non-college programs, etc. (definition adapted from the Center for Law and Social Policy).

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Federal Regulations: 34 CFR Part §602 The Secretary’s Recognition of Accrediting Agencies, §602.24(e)(1-2) Transfer of credit policies; §602.23 Operating procedures all agencies must have; 34 CFR Part §600.2 Definitions; 34 CFR Part §668.43(a)(11) Institutional information;

Standards: Standard IV, criterion 2;

Related Documents: *Accreditation Actions Policy; Accreditation Actions Procedures: Substantive Change Policy; Substantive Change Procedures; Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Policy; Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Guidelines; Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations; AACRAO-CHEA/CIQC, ACE Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit(2021);Statement on Principles on Acceptance of Credit(April 16, 2020);*