

Regulation on Awarding Undergraduate Credit for Prior Learning

I. Purpose. The following regulation (“this regulation”) is designed to provide system-wide consistency and clarity regarding implementation of the Policy on Awarding Undergraduate Credit for Prior Learning (“the policy”), Section 700.10.1 of the UNC Policy Manual.

Among the goals of the policy and this regulation are to enable improvements to student progression and completion according to student mastery of college-level material, while avoiding awarding credit for material that a student has not mastered or placing a student into a course for which they are not prepared.

Faculty representing relevant academic departments should be engaged in institutional decisions for the implementation of the policy and this regulation, to ensure that decisions are informed by the standards of applicable disciplines. Another benefit of faculty involvement in the implementation of the policy and this regulation will be to ensure that implementation is in alignment with the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)ⁱ and of accrediting bodies for specific disciplines and professions.

II. Definitions. The following operational definitions apply to the policy and this regulation:

- A. “Certification.” An industry-recognized credential or designation that is obtained once the student has successfully passed a certification exam. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is a validation of specific industry-valued competencies and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.
- B. “Challenge exam.” A departmental or institutional exam used to determine if a student’s subject matter proficiency is equal to or greater than the corresponding proficiency the student would have achieved had they completed the corresponding course.
- C. “College-level learning.” Knowledge, skills, and competencies equivalent to those expected of a student who successfully completes the corresponding institutional course.
- D. “Credit for prior learning (CPL).” Curriculum credit awarded for college-level learning obtained through prior learning experiences other than curriculum coursework.
- E. “Industry or corporate experience.” Evaluation of non-collegiate instructional programs, such as, but not limited to, those for apprenticeships and other workplace trainings that demonstrate competency required for completion of degree or certificate programs.
- F. “Military education and training.” Learning gained through military training and experience including, but not be limited to, recruit training, military occupational specialty (MOS) training and education, Defense Language Institute foreign language coursework and exams, Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) coursework, College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), and the DANTES Standardized Subject Test (DSST).

G. "Licensure." A legal status granted by a government entity that provides permission to practice a profession. Licensure restricts practice of the profession to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, professional experience, and/or have successfully passed an examination.

H. "Portfolio assessment." The evaluation of a portfolio for life and work experiences by subject matter experts designated by the constituent institution in its local policy to determine whether a student is awarded credit for prior learning.

I. "Standardized exams." Any form of examination that requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions following established protocol and that is scored in a standard or consistent manner.

J. "The North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement." A statewide agreement governing the transfer of credits between NC Community Colleges and UNC System Universities, providing certain assurances to a transferring student.

K. "UNC Common Numbering System (CNS)." A common classification system of designated undergraduate lower-division courses offered by UNC System institutions.

L. Definitions for Awarding Credit on the Basis of Advanced Course Examination Scores

1. "Academic Outcomes." Results of a student's performance in the course aligned with the subject content of the Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate, or Cambridge Advanced International Certificate AS Level or A Level examination scores in question or in the Subsequent Course.

2. "Appropriate Credit." A determined number of credit hours granted for a particular course or courses, aligned with the subject content and Academic Outcomes of the AP, IB, or Cambridge AS Level or A Level examination score in question.

a. After achieving a Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score, a student shall be awarded specified credit hours associated with an institution's course(s) that is/are aligned with the subject content of the relevant Advanced Course examination score.

b. In general, equivalents for Appropriate Credit for particular course(s) in a constituent institution's course catalog (and/or other sources of information for students and potential students) shall be listed for Qualified Advanced Course examination scores. The particular course(s) shall be listed as equivalent to a particular number of credit hours. These particular course(s) and credit hours shall contribute to a student's progress toward an undergraduate degree.

3. "Compelling Reasons." Rationales of sufficient evidentiary quality, based on Academic Outcomes, as to why scores higher than the established Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score might be required of an institution's students (if those students are to receive Appropriate Credit), submitted to an institution's board of trustees in support of an institution's petition for an exception to the policy; or rationales of sufficient evidentiary quality as to why a constituent institution might discontinue awarding Appropriate Credit on the basis of a Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score.

4. “Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score.” Unless a constituent institution has been granted an exception whereby a higher score may be required, the following shall constitute the minimum score required to receive college credit:

- a. A score of three or higher on an AP examination;
- b. A score of five or higher on a Standard Level IB examination;
- c. A score of four or higher on a Higher Level IB examination; and/or
- d. A score of E or higher on a Cambridge A Level or AS Level examination

5. “Quantitative Study.” A rigorous analysis based on reliable, numerical data regarding Academic Outcomes.

6. “Subsequent Course.” A course in which a student would be unable to enroll without first obtaining credit in a prerequisite course.

III. Assessment Standards. Constituent institutions may award CPL when the documentation of prior learning is at the college-level and meets or exceeds the learning outcomes and the institutions’ standards for awarding credit for the corresponding course. Faculty representing relevant academic departments should be engaged in institutional decisions for the determination of awarding credit for prior learning. Each institution is responsible for determining how best to implement CPL and should do so within the context of its mission, student needs, and academic programs.

IV. Credit Hour Limits. Credit awarded for prior learning shall not be included in the 25 percent of total credit hours that must be completed at the college granting the degree.ⁱⁱ

V. Fees. Unless a student is enrolled in a course with the purpose of assessing prior learning for credit (i.e., a portfolio assessment course), tuition shall not be charged for credits awarded for prior learning. An optional assessment fee may be charged for credit assessed outside of course enrollment for the administrative cost of the assessment.

VI. Faculty Support (Incentives). Constituent institutions should consider providing support to faculty engaged in the evaluation of credit for prior learning and the establishment of institutional standards and policies for the evaluation of credit for prior learning.

VII. Student Records. Awarded credit will be recorded in institutional student records as “Credit for Prior Learning”. The form of the CPL method will be included in the record. Credit will be recorded as the awarding institution’s course including prefix & number, title, and credits awarded.

VIII. Transfer Credit

A. Academic credit earned through the assessment of prior learning at another accredited institution may be considered for transfer credit as it applies to a student’s degree program.

B. Institutional procedures for evaluating credit for prior learning in transfer should respect credit awarded by other accredited institutions to the greatest extent possible.

C. Credit for prior learning awarded by a North Carolina Community College for a course included in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) Course List shall be accepted as

transfer credit on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the CAA.

D. Military credit awarded by another University of North Carolina constituent institution shall be evaluated for transfer credit pursuant to the procedures outlined in the UNC Regulation on Awarding Credit for Military Training or Experience, Section 700.7.2[R].

E. Credit for advanced course examinations awarded by another University of North Carolina constituent institution pursuant to Section VI of this regulation shall be accepted as transfer credit on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution.

F. Credit for prior learning awarded by another University of North Carolina constituent institution for a course included in the UNC CNS Course List shall be accepted as transfer credit on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution and in accordance with the UNC Regulation on the University of North Carolina Common Numbering System, Section 400.1.5.1[R].

IX. Awarding Credit for Advanced Course Examination Scores.

A. Affected Students. The requirements of this policy and regulation regarding AP examination scores shall affect first-time (or “freshman”) undergraduate students entering constituent institutions for the fall semester of the 2019-20 academic year and thereafter. Other undergraduate students (including but not limited to transfer students, readmitted students, and upperclassmen) may benefit from the requirements of the policy and this regulation by electing into all standards documented in an institution’s catalog (and/or other sources of information for students and potential students) for the 2019-20 academic year or thereafter.

The requirements of this policy and regulation regarding IB and Cambridge AS Level and A Level examination scores shall affect first-time (or “freshman”) undergraduate students entering constituent institutions for the fall semester of the 2020-21 academic year and thereafter. Other undergraduate students (including but not limited to transfer students, readmitted students, and upperclassmen) may benefit from the requirements of the policy and this regulation by electing into all standards documented in an institution’s catalog (and/or other sources of information for student and potential students) for the 2020-21 academic year or thereafter.

B. Awarding Appropriate Credit. UNC System constituent institutions shall award Appropriate Credit to undergraduates who have earned a Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score. An institution with Compelling Reasons as to why a score higher than three must be required for a student to receive Appropriate Credit may petition to have an exception approved by its board of trustees. Compelling Reasons must be based on analyses of Academic Outcomes.

Constituent institutions should not deny Appropriate Credit to students on the basis of the age of Advanced Course Examination Scores that are ten years old or newer, although constituent institutions may request that a student submit a newer exam score in the event that an older score reflects course content or testing design for an exam that subsequently has been revised in a significant manner.

Constituent institutions are not required to offer Appropriate Credit for every AP, IB, Cambridge A Level, or Cambridge AS Level exam offered; but, if an institution does offer credit for a particular AP Exam, it must offer Appropriate Credit in compliance with the

policy and this regulation. If an institution elects to discontinue the awarding of credit for an AP Exam for which credit is awarded during the 2018- 19 academic year, however, approval must first be provided by the institution's board of trustees.

1. An institution may offer Appropriate Credit that varies by different scores for the same AP Exam. For example, an institution may offer a specified number of credit hours for a course or courses for students who earn an AP Exam score of three, and may offer credit hours for different courses for AP Exam scores higher than three.

2. Constituent institutions may award Appropriate Credit (on the basis of Qualified Advanced Course Examination Scores) for elective courses, credits toward General Education requirements, or the requirements of a potential major. Appropriate Credit awarded for any elective courses should contribute to students' progress toward an undergraduate degree.

3. Constituent Institutions are not required to modify existing standards that apply to scores lower than those defined as Qualified Advanced Course Examination Scores.

C. Policy Exceptions

1. Evidence in support of an institution's Compelling Reasons for an exception to the policy shall be supported by the most recently available and practicable data on Academic Outcomes of that constituent institution's own students, from the undergraduate discipline most analogous or relevant to the content area of the Advanced Course Examination in question, except as outlined below.

2. In general, evidence for a Compelling Reason should address whether or not students who earn a Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score are prepared to succeed in the Subsequent Course within the relevant discipline. For example, constituent institutions may demonstrate that students who earn a Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score would perform significantly better, according to one or more Academic Outcomes, if those students were required to take the equivalent course for the Advanced Course Examination Score at the constituent institution, versus if those students were given credit for said course solely on the basis of the Qualified Advanced Course Examination Score.

To generate this sort of evidence, institutions should endeavor to compare the Academic Outcomes of their enrolled students through Quantitative Study at a conventional level of statistical significance.

Evidence in support of an institution's Compelling Reasons for an exception to the policy may be supported by data on the Academic Outcomes of another institution's (or other institutions') students if the following conditions are met:

- a. Data on Academic Outcomes available are as recent as possible and practicable, from the undergraduate discipline most analogous or relevant to the content area of the Advanced Course Examination in question; and

- b. The other institution(s) for comparison is/are limited to those peer institutions approved by the Board of Governors.

D. Student Choice Regarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Advanced Course Examination Scores. Although an institution is required by the policy to offer Appropriate Credit, a student may decline to accept the offered credit, audit the course aligned with the Advanced Course Examination in question, or enroll in the course aligned with the Advanced Course Examination in question, depending on institutional practice.

1. Whenever possible, institutional academic advisors should inform eligible undergraduates of the above-described options available to them under the policy and this regulation, along with the potential benefits and disadvantages of those options.

2. Institutions may choose to complement advice from academic advisors with a standardized communication to incoming students regarding Advanced Course Examination standards and the potential benefits and disadvantages of the above-mentioned options.

E. Prohibition Against Additional Requirements for Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Scores for an Advanced Course Examination. A constituent institution shall not require a student to fulfill additional requirements in order to receive credit on the basis of Qualified Advanced Course Examination Scores. A placement test or other assessment may be required, however, to determine Subsequent Courses for which a student is prepared.

F. Prohibition Against Discontinuance of Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Scores for an AP Exam. Any institutional policy or practice of awarding credit on the basis of scores for any Advanced Course Examination in place prior to the implementation of the policy (during the 2018-19 academic year) shall not be discontinued thereafter without approval of the institution's board of trustees.

G. Documenting and Communicating Institutional Advanced Course Examination Standards to Undergraduate Students and Potential Undergraduate Students. Institutional Advanced Course Examination standards, devised to comply with this policy and regulation, shall be documented and updated annually in institutional course catalogs, undergraduate student handbooks, and/or online resources for undergraduate students. Institutional Advanced Course Examination standards shall likewise be documented and updated annually in online and/or printed resources for potential undergraduate students. Constituent institutions should likewise publicize their own policies or practices regarding Advanced Course Examination scores that may or may not be accepted on the basis of the age of those scores.

H. Assessment of the Policy and this Regulation's Effectiveness. The effects of the policy and this regulation as they relate to awarding credit for advanced course examination scores, at the level of the UNC System and across its constituent institutions, shall be assessed by the UNC System Office within three years of implementation, and then on a period basis. Recommendations for altering the policy and this regulation shall be made accordingly to the president (for this regulation) or Board of Governors (for the policy), on the basis of appropriate evidence.

X. Responsibilities of Constituent Institutions.

- A. Constituent institutions shall establish their own policies and procedures for awarding credit for prior learning if they chose to award CPL.

- B. All institution CPL policies and procedures shall be published on institution websites, course

catalogs, and/or other appropriate publications or advising materials. The policies and procedures should be easily accessible by prospective students and currently enrolled students.

C. Institutions that charge tuition for courses with the purpose of assessing prior learning for credit or fees for other assessments of prior learning shall clearly publish and communicate all CPL assessment tuition and/or fees to students.

D. The process for assessment shall be transparent and documentation of denial of credits should be explained to students with a clearly stated rationale.

XI. Reporting Requirements. Constituent institutions shall annually report to the President each form of prior learning assessment through which they provide credit, the total amount of CPL credit the institution awarded students, the number of students who have been awarded credit for prior learning, and updates to institutional policies and procedures.

A. Specific Reporting Requirements for Advanced Course Examination Scores. Initial reports regarding exceptions to the policy and/or discontinuances of awarding Appropriate Credit on the basis of Qualified Advanced Course Examination Scores, granted by institutional boards of trustees, shall be reported to the president by July 1, 2019. Subsequent reports of exceptions, discontinuances, and/or other alterations relative to this policy shall be reported to the president annually by July 1. Reports to the president shall include full documentation of Compelling Reasons considered by boards of trustees, along with documentation of the board's approval, for each exception granted.

XII. Other Matters

A. Effective Date. The requirements of the policy and this regulation with regards to AP examinations shall be effective as of the fall semester of the 2019-20 academic year and thereafter; the requirements of the policy and this regulation with regards to IB and Cambridge AS-Level and A-Level examinations shall be effective as of the 2020-21 academic year and thereafter. All other requirements of this regulation shall be effective on the date of adoption of this regulation by the president.

B. Relation to Federal and State Laws. The foregoing regulation as adopted by the president is meant to supplement, and does not purport to supplant or modify, those statutory enactments, regulations, and policies which may govern or related to the subject matter of this regulation.

ⁱ SACSCOC Standards 10.1 and 10.7. SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation:

<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>

SACSCOC Resource Manual: <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018-POA-Resource-Manual.pdf>

ⁱⁱ SACSCOC Standard 9.4.