



## Discussion DRAFT

### Policy Title: *Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation*

#### Summary

This policy broadly regulates within the State University of New York (SUNY) the award of academic credit by the evaluation of learning that takes place outside of courses that are part of registered credit-bearing academic programs offered by institutions of higher education. As of this writing, this work is also referred to as 'prior learning assessment or PLA,' 'credit for prior learning or CPL,' or 'learning recognition.' It is important to note that though 'prior learning' is a widely used term, the award of academic credit by evaluation can be applied to learning concurrent to one's matriculation.

#### Background and History

SUNY initially issued the *Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation* policy in 1976, one of the first university systems in the country to formally adopt this type of assessment. This proposed policy revision supersedes the original policy and expands the types of verifiable college-level learning to be recognized, including, but not limited to: performance on standardized published exams; military education and training; professional and industry certifications and licenses or other credentials; non-credit and continuing education study; self-study; on-the-job training/education; and work experience. This policy revision is informed by research demonstrating that the award of credit by evaluation can increase access to, and success in, higher education by decreasing time to degree completion that results in cost savings. Credit received for prior learning can also help faculty advisors properly place students in their programs of study and can contribute to institutional goals for student retention and graduation success if learners are aware of its availability and avail themselves of the opportunity. Many students, particularly those who self-identify as low income or under-represented minority, have reported not being aware of opportunities to have their prior learning assessed or of the related benefits such a review can provide; this revision addresses related outreach and communication.<sup>1</sup>

#### Policy

##### I. Core Tenets

- A. The awarding of credit by evaluation is based on the same criteria used to evaluate credit awarded in courses in registered degree and certificate programs:
  1. Shared Governance: Campus-level policies and procedures developed to implement this policy must meet all applicable campus administrative and shared governance procedures for consultation and must undergo a campus

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<sup>1</sup> 2018-2020 studies and reports funded by the Lumina Foundation and the Strada Network and prepared by The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Retrieved online at: <https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/>

governance process equivalent to that for any local academic policy.

2. **Faculty Oversight:** The evaluation of student learning for the award of academic credit must be conducted by faculty, or approved by faculty in the case of evaluation by a subject matter expert or established third-party validation.
  3. **Accreditation and Regulation:** This policy reflects any related standards by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) as of its writing. Campus policies must reflect the same, as well as related standards of programmatic-level accrediting bodies, and be updated accordingly should standards be revised.<sup>2</sup>
  4. **Award Level:** The evaluation of student learning for the award of academic credit can be applied to both undergraduate and graduate programs.
  5. **Transparency and Communication:** Campus policies and procedures for the award of academic credit by evaluation must be clearly delineated and disseminated.
  6. **Accountability:** Campus policies and procedures related to the award of academic credit fall under the purview of the President, Chief Academic Officer, or their designee.
- B. **Campus Responsibility:** Award of academic credit by evaluation is strongly encouraged and is consistent with SUNY's commitment to access and student success. Per I.A.1. above, campuses are responsible to develop local policies and procedures. A given campus may allow credit hours up to the limit specified by the residency requirement as described later in this document.

## **II. Credit by Evaluation in Practice**

Personnel involved in the assessment of prior learning must be adequately trained in assessment procedures and pursue continuing professional development for the functions they perform, e.g., portfolio assessment, military credit evaluation, etc.

Campuses can identify and assess prior learning through a variety of methods to determine if academic credit should be awarded. Common methods include, but are not limited to:

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<sup>2</sup> Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) Policy on Transfer Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation. Retrieved online at: <https://msche.box.com/shared/static/iv7dxzso6x0pgk36yldowhzea2bkl48l.pdf>; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Standards for Accreditation and Requirements for Affiliation, Standard IV.2. Retrieved online at: <https://www.msche.org/standards/>; New York State Education Department Program Registration and Guidance. Retrieved online at: <http://www.nysed.gov/college-university-evaluation/department-expectations-admissions-academic-support-services-credit>.

A. Standardized Published Examinations

The award of credit for published examination applies to the following published examinations (the following list is current as of the date of adoption of this policy; updates to this official list will be maintained by the Office of the Provost):

1. Advanced Placement (AP);
2. International Baccalaureate (IB);
3. Advanced International Certificate of Education Program (AICE);
4. A-Levels (Advanced Level Qualifications);
5. DSST - Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support, Defense Subjects (DANTES) Standardized Tests (DSST);
6. College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) Subject Examinations;
7. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency assessments; and
8. UExcel® Credit by Exam (Excelsior College).

B. Military Education and Training

Credit for military training and education as recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE) via the enhanced *Military Guide* and via the Joint Military Services Transcript should be accepted and applied accordingly when they satisfy local program requirements, in the same way as other transfer credits.

Credit from accredited military-affiliated institutions must be accepted and applied accordingly when they satisfy local program degree requirements, in the same way as other transfer credits.<sup>3</sup>

C. Other Forms of Learning

For credits earned through other experiences, such as professional and industry certifications and licenses or other credentials, non-credit and continuing education study, self-study, on-the-job training/education; and, work experience, the methods of evaluation shall be conducted or approved by faculty and may include third-party review by appropriately qualified reviewers:

- Faculty/department developed challenge exams;
- Assessments by a nationally recognized external body such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS); and
- Portfolio review.
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<sup>3</sup> The Community College of the Air Force and West Point are institutionally accredited higher education institutions. Credit from related transcripts should be regarded according to transfer policies, not by *Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation*.

### III. Transfer

The goal of the [SUNY policy \(#2012-089\)](#) on Seamless Transfer Requirements, as described in Memorandum to Presidents Vol. 13, No. 3, is to enable students to complete their intended program of study on time, without unnecessary cost and/or duplication of effort. The principles of this policy serve as the framework for the transfer of credits earned through credit by evaluation.

- A. Save for programmatic restrictions, as referenced herein in III.E. and IV., credit earned through credit by evaluation shall be guaranteed to transfer between SUNY campuses, if the campus that awarded the credit determined the demonstrated learning was equivalent to a course grade of C or above.
- B. To maximize the transferability of credit earned through credit by evaluation, campuses are encouraged to establish the course grade equivalency for all credit awarded through credit by evaluation. Transfer of awarded credit shall be guaranteed only if it has been determined the demonstrated learning was equivalent to a course grade of C or above.
- C. Campuses may award credit through credit by evaluation without establishing a course grade equivalency or in instances for which demonstrated learning is determined to be equivalent to a course grade of C- or below; however, in these cases, credit earned through credit by evaluation is not guaranteed to transfer, students must be informed such credit is not guaranteed to transfer, and the transcript must clearly indicate such credit was awarded without the transfer guarantee.
- D. Credit earned through credit by evaluation can be assigned a grade of Pass/Fail (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory), but such credit is not guaranteed to transfer and instead the receiving campus may exercise discretion in determining transferability in these instances.
- E. Receiving campuses cannot deny credit solely because it was earned through credit by evaluation, but may establish restrictions consistent with programmatic requirements that treat native and transfer students the same.
- F. Transcript entries for credit awarded shall clearly indicate the course and/or program requirement equivalency and identify that credit was awarded via evaluation of a prior learning.
- G. Campuses shall document their standards for course equivalency determinations in accord with the Seamless Transfer requirements and include a list of acceptable forms of verification (e.g., transcripts, official score reports).
- H. Where credit is awarded originally by the sending campus in content areas not offered by the receiving campus, the articulation must be reviewed and

approved by an appropriate academic committee or designee assigned by the receiving campus, consistent with campus governance processes.

#### **IV. Content Restrictions**

Academic credits awarded by evaluation may apply to multiple established requirements, including SUNY General Education, Transfer Path degree, approved applied learning experiences, and microcredentials developed in accordance with SUNY Trustee policy. All disciplines may accept academic credit awarded through evaluation. Any restrictions otherwise compliant with SUNY policies will be determined at the campus level and transparently communicated.

#### **V. Residency Requirement**

Individual campuses may allow as many credits awarded to apply toward degree requirements as deemed appropriate and consistent with their local residency requirements. Consistent with seamless transfer requirements, campuses are encouraged to exercise flexibility to support student success and timely degree completion.

#### **VI. Student Participation**

All matriculated students will be allowed to apply for the use of credits earned by evaluation, as appropriate to the academic program. Individual campuses will also be allowed to extend such opportunities to non-matriculated students where the student intends to matriculate at the campus.

Although an individual may request evaluation of their verifiable, college-level learning at any time, the awarding of academic credit should be considered early enough to ensure maximizing its benefits toward a desired degree.

#### **VII. Campus Coordination**

The President, Chief Academic Officer (or, for some areas, a designee) oversees the academic program of the institution, including effective campus policies and practices regarding the award of credit by evaluation. This individual or designee shall:

- A. Communicate clearly and accurately the campus practices concerning options, policies and procedures (including appeal) to students, faculty, and staff (see item VIII below for additional detail);
- B. Ensure processes and evaluation activities are expeditious and conducted with integrity;
- C. Provide professional development for faculty and professional staff who would perform the evaluation and other campus stakeholder groups responsible for implementing this and related policies and procedures (e.g., admissions, enrollment management, communications, continuing education, registrar, business office);
- D. Serve as an information channel between the campus and other units and agencies (e.g., System Administration, ACE); and
- E. Maintain accurate records of credit evaluation activities, including

documentation on the student transcript.

Campuses must monitor, review, evaluate, and revise as needed their awarding of academic credit by evaluation policies and procedures.

### **VIII. Communication**

The President, Chief Academic Officer (or, for some areas, a designee) will assure that campus-level policies and procedures related to the implementation of this policy are fully disclosed and prominently available to prospective and enrolled students, as well as faculty and staff. The award of academic credit as described herein should be regarded as an essential tool for promoting and supporting access to higher education. Information about award of credit of prior learning should be provided in relevant publications and media such as:

- Campus catalogs;
- Webpages (transfer students, prospective students, admissions, workforce development, continuing education, etc.); and
- Enrollment materials.

In addition, if the award of credit by evaluation is restricted in any way, communication methods must also include a statement regarding any credits that are:

- A. not accepted for degree credit;
- B. not appropriate for specialized requirements; or
- C. not appropriate for prerequisites for advanced level courses.

### **IX. Fiscal Procedures**

The award of academic credit by evaluation incurs an operational cost for the institution. Support for these costs – in the form of student fees<sup>4</sup> - should reflect, as closely as possible, the costs incurred.

- A. Assessment Fees charged for evaluation shall be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded;
- B. In regard to the charge for this evaluation and assessment, only the Assessment Fee will be charged to the student;
- C. Campuses will determine the appropriate proposed Assessment Fee (based on the direct and indirect costs) necessary to provide evaluation services. Such costs would include, but not be limited to, supervision of the evaluation activities, assessment preparation or purchase, administration of the assessments, including correction, evaluation, recording, notification of participants, and associated employee benefits / pooled offset contribution / other costs incurred in providing support services;
- D. Assessment Fees may be re-examined and adjusted each academic year;

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter "Assessment Fee(s)"

- E. Based on the financial circumstances of the participant, waiver of Assessment Fees may be authorized by the campus president or designee.
- F. Overall Assessment Fee levels should be established in such a way as to accommodate any loss in revenue as a result of waivers, operating within the principle that overall the evaluation program must reflect, as closely as possible, the costs incurred by the institution; and
- G. Proposed Assessment Fees for evaluation and assessment activities will be developed by each campus and forwarded to the SUNY System Administration Office of the SUNY Chief Financial Officer for approval.

**X. Reporting**

System Administration will request information from campuses concerning the award of credit by evaluation to assess the effectiveness of this policy.

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