



# PA State System of Higher Education Board of Governors

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**Effective:** January 14, 1999; Section F is effective fall 1999

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## **Policy 1999-01-A: *The Student Transfer Policy***

**See Also:** [Board of Governors Policy 1990-06-A](#)

**Adopted:** January 14, 1999  
**Amended:** October 6, 2016,  
July 14, 2021, and July 11, 2024

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### **A. Introduction**

The student transfer policy operates on the principle that competencies and learning outcomes developed and documented through prior learning are the basis of recognition of transfer credit, not course matching. The intent of this policy is to maximize the acceptance and application of college-level credits awarded by postsecondary institutions with United States Department of Education (Department of Education)-recognized accreditation.

Sound public policy advocates that students who transfer into and among State System universities be able to complete their education without unnecessary repetition of learning successfully completed and documented at another institution.

The State System recognizes the value of learning that students demonstrate upon earning an associate degree. Undergraduate students who transfer into a State System university with an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree in a parallel program will be awarded junior status and shall not be required to satisfactorily complete more than 60 credits to earn a 120-credit baccalaureate degree in a Program to Program (P2P) or other parallel program, regardless of the courses they took to earn the associate degree; they will have the same requirements for admission to a particular academic program and for retention as students who began their education at a State System University.

#### **The purposes of this policy are:**

1. To facilitate transfer of undergraduate and graduate students and their prior learning to and among State System universities.
2. To ensure that students can complete their education without unnecessary duplication of coursework.
3. To assist non-diploma and non-degree-holding students who have earned college-level credits from a previously attended PA Community College earn an associate degree or other credential by "reverse transferring" their current PA State System University credits back to their PA Community College.

## B. Background

In 2008, legislation amended the Public School Code of 1949 by adding Article XX-C “Transfer of the Credits between Institutions of Higher Education” and established the Statewide Transfer and Articulation System so that students could transfer Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degrees into parallel bachelor degree programs at State System universities with junior standing.

A Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC) developed a process and timeline for implementing statewide Program to Program (P2P) articulation agreements. TAOC created a transfer credit framework for 30 credits of foundational courses in 6 areas as well as the guidelines for program articulation from 2-year to 4-year institutions. Representative community college and 4-year college faculty developed Program to Program transfer articulation understandings for academic major programs.

## C. Definitions

### 1. Undergraduate Degrees:

- **Associate’s Degrees:** An associate degree indicates that the holder has developed proficiencies sufficient to prepare for upper division collegiate work or to enter directly into a specific occupation. Associate degrees are awarded only for completion of a coherent program of study designed for a specific purpose. They reflect satisfactory achievement of a minimum of 60 semester hours of credit, in two parts: a general education component and an area of concentration or major component. Examples of associate degrees include Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Associate of Applied Science.
- **Bachelor’s Degrees:** A Bachelor’s degree is a four-year degree that consists of two principal components, general education and in-depth study in a major, which, taken together, are designed to prepare the student for a productive career, informed citizenship, and continuous growth.

### 2. Graduate Degrees:

**Master’s Degrees:** A master’s degree represents advanced study beyond the baccalaureate degree and signifies mastery in a discipline or professional field. A master’s program requires a minimum of 30 semester credit hours and usually includes three basic components: (a) a common core of courses related to the discipline or field of study; (b) a concentration or specialization in a focused area of the discipline; and (c) cognate courses which broaden perspective or mastery, or provide special skills.

**Doctorate Degrees:** The doctorate is the highest academic degree awarded in American higher education and is of two types: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Professional Doctorate. Though the primary distinction is that the Ph.D. is a research degree and professional degrees are applied degrees, most doctoral programs include both research and applied studies.

3. **Certificates:** A certificate is a formal credit-based credential designated on the academic record and awarded by an educational institution to indicate completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level that does not culminate in a degree.

4. **Program to Program (P2P):** Refers to a Pennsylvania statewide program to major program articulation agreement that provides a clear transfer pathway into a State System university for community college students who have selected a transferable major program. Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees that are part of the P2P articulation contain a minimum of 30 hours of liberal arts among the following six fields of study: Composition, Public Speaking, Humanities & Arts, Behavioral/Social Sciences, Sciences, and Mathematics, and 21 credits of major program coursework. Universities may designate additional programs as precursor or parallel programs by reason of articulation agreement or similarity in disciplinary content or student outcomes, as indicated by 4-digit CIP code.
5. **Prior Learning:** Refers to student learning that occurred prior to enrollment at a State System university. Prior learning includes college-level credits earned elsewhere as well as the assessment of skills, knowledge and competencies acquired outside the classroom against a set of standards or learning outcomes. Prior learning may include documented learning such as but not limited to Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, DANTES, CLEP, military experience, and credit by exam.
6. **Credit:** The recognition of attendance or performance in an instructional activity (course or program) that can be applied by a recipient toward the requirements for a postsecondary degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award, irrespective of the activity's unit of measurement.
7. **Directed General Education (Prescribed General Education):** General education courses that are required for the major are considered "directed general education" or "prescribed general education". Therefore, directed (prescribed) general education courses are counted in the general education requirement/credits, not in the major or cognate requirements.
8. **Reverse Transfer:** A credit review of degree seeking students who transferred from a PA community college to a four-year Pennsylvania State System University without having earned their associate degree. Credits earned while working toward their bachelor degree will be sent to the PA Community College for evaluation for possible credit towards the completion of the associate degree requirements. PA's State System of Higher Education Universities and the 14 Pennsylvania Community Colleges have a signed and executed statewide Reverse Transfer Agreement.

#### D. Policy Statement

All college-level credits from postsecondary institutions with Department of Education-recognized accreditation will be accepted in transfer, regardless of how the prior learning was acquired. The intent of this policy is to maximize the application to degree requirements of college-level credits awarded by such accredited institutions. Review of learning from non-accredited institutions will be evaluated locally on a student by student basis. State System Universities shall ensure consistency and equity in the application of credit from non-accredited institutions.

It is up to the receiving State System University how the credit is applied towards the intended degree, within the provisions of this policy:

## **Undergraduate**

- In the acceptance and application of undergraduate transfer college-level credits, the receiving institution will first apply as many college-level credits as possible toward the satisfaction of general education requirements, then to requirements in the major, and finally to elective credits.
- State System universities will recognize the integrity, design and validity of general education programs at other institutions with Department of Education-recognized accreditation and will accept general education coursework when comparable. General education credits aligned with the PA Statewide Transfer Credit Framework will transfer toward the general education requirements at the receiving institution.
- Students who transfer to a State System institution from a postsecondary institution with Department of Education-recognized accreditation with an Associate of Science or an Associate of Arts degree, or having completed general education requirements for a bachelor's degree, an Associate of Science or an Associate of Arts degree, shall have satisfied the general education requirements at the receiving university. Exceptions may be made for the following, provided that these exceptions do not extend the student's time to the degree:
  - (a) One signature general education course (up to 3 credits), if applicable;
  - (b) Any prescribed general education course required for the major, if not satisfactorily completed;
  - (c) General education overlays satisfied in advanced courses in the major.
- Undergraduate students who transfer into the State System of Higher Education with an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science degree from a postsecondary institution with Department of Education-recognized accreditation in a parallel academic program or as part of the P2P Statewide agreements will be awarded full junior standing and shall not be required to satisfactorily complete more than 60 credits to earn a 120-credit baccalaureate degree in a P2P or other parallel program, regardless of the courses they took to earn the Associate degree; they will have the same requirements for admission to a particular academic program and for retention as students who began their education at a State System University. Students transferring into a program with accreditation or licensing/certification standards may be required to take limited additional credits to meet those standards.

## **Graduate**

- Students may transfer one-third of the equivalent graduate-level credits required in a graduate program.

## **E. Guaranteed Admissions**

Admission to a State System university is guaranteed for undergraduate students transferring from a Pennsylvania Community College with an associate degree and for students transferring from one State System University to another State System University, subject to the following:

- Students with an Associate of Science or Associate of Arts in a parallel academic program or as part of the P2P Statewide agreements are guaranteed admission to the P2P or parallel academic program, subject to capacity, as long as they meet criteria for admission required of students who began their education at a State System university.

Universities may designate majors or programs of study that are limited access by reason of accreditation-, clinical-, or resource-based capacity.

- Dismissal from a Previous Institution for Disciplinary Reasons may limit the ability to enroll in the Institution. Criminal Conviction of a Felony Offense or Dismissal from a Previous Institution for Disciplinary Reasons may limit the ability to complete certain academic majors/programs and may affect approval to live in university-owned or university-affiliated housing. These will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

**F. Effective Date**

The policy will become effective July 2024.