ACCJC
Outcomes | Innovation | Improvement

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

Policy on Credit for Prior Learning

June 2024

Background

The growing complexity of policies and practices for transfer and award of credit has been brought about, in part, by the changing nature of postsecondary education. With increasing frequency, students are pursuing their education in a variety of institutional and extra-institutional settings. Policies on transfer and award of credit should encompass educational accomplishment attained in extra-institutional settings.

Most programs which provide students with the means to acquire knowledge and skills at an individual pace and then to demonstrate achievement of specific competencies to apply toward a course, certificate or degree, do so by clock hour or credit awards. However, an increasing number of programs provide for award of certificate or degree by direct assessment of student learning.

Transfer and award of credit is a concept that increasingly involves transfer between dissimilar institutions and curricula and recognition of extra-institutional learning, as well as transfer between institutions and curricula with similar characteristics. As their personal circumstances and educational objectives change, students seek to have their learning, wherever and however attained, recognized by institutions where they enroll for further study. It is important for institutions to develop reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for acceptance of such learning experiences, as well as for the transfer of credits earned at another institution. Such policies and procedures should provide consideration for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. It is the receiving institution's responsibility to provide reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for determining a student's knowledge in required subject areas. Institutions also have a responsibility to advise the student that the work reflected on the transcript may or may not be accepted by a receiving institution as bearing the same (or any) credits as those awarded by the provider.

The basic principle is that each institution is responsible for determining its own policies and practices with regard to the transfer, acceptance, and award of credit. Institutions are encouraged to review their policies and practices periodically to assure that they accomplish the institutions' objectives and that they function in a manner that is fair and equitable to all students. The institution's articulation and transfer procedures should evaluate courses, programs and other learning experiences on their learning outcomes, and the existence of valid measures for assessing learning.

Policy

The Commission is committed to excellence and integrity in credits, certificates and degrees awarded by member institutions. Institutional policies and procedures must outline the process and standards by which direct assessment of prior learning is conducted and credits, certificates, and degrees are awarded.

Policy Elements

Assessing Prior Learning

In making the determination whether to award college credits, certificates, and degrees to students for prior learning

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are published.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
9. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed for currency.

Selection of Evaluators for Prior Learning

Faculty members who conduct the evaluation of prior learning experience exercise professional judgment and competency in applying the evaluative criteria and procedures. Faculty who are involved in evaluating prior learning should have the data necessary to determine the skills, competencies, and knowledge held by the candidate for direct assessment of learning, including position descriptions, outlines of training programs completed, and records of examinations taken, if any; and the means to compare the demonstrated learning with the learning outcomes acquired by students who have completed the related course or curriculum.

Adopted June 1980; Revised June 1990, June 2008, January 2009, January 2014, June 2020; Edited June 2024

- - - end - - -