

SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

Planning Session

AGENDA ITEM: 4 – H

DATE: July 31 – August 2, 2023

SUBJECT

Credit for Prior Learning Enhancement to Transfer Policy

CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

[BOR Policy 2:5:4](#) – Prior Learning and Validated Transfer of Credit
[SDBOR Strategic Plan](#)

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

In March of 2022, the Board of Regents approved the Strategic Plan. The complete annual report for the 2022-2023 academic year is presented in Board item 4-B as Attachment I. August 2023 Board items 4-G (Admission Policy Enhancements) and 4-H (Credit for Prior Learning Enhancement to Transfer Policy) impacts Goal 2, Access and Affordability, of the Strategic Plan.

Goal 2: Access and Affordability

The Regental system is the largest public postsecondary education system in South Dakota. This system offers both undergraduate and graduate education. *Access* to affordable education is the cornerstone to ensuring South Dakotans attend a public postsecondary institution.

The objectives found in the Strategic Plan identify three (3) major topical strategies to increase enrollments across the system. FAFSA completion of high school students, traditional high school student matriculation, and transfer student policy. As the system continues to identify additional tasks to strive toward enrollment initiatives, a new board policy on prior credit/transfer policy will provide additional success strategies for enrollment.

BOR Policies [2:5](#), [2:5:1](#), [2:5:2](#), and [2:5:3](#) on seamless transfer were enhanced in August 2022 to support internal Regental system transfers, increase partnerships with the South Dakota technical colleges and community colleges, and allow for the transfer of students that have international or other forms of accreditation.

[BOR Policy 2:5:4](#) was not enhanced in August 2022 with the other transfer policies and has since been evaluated by cross-functional, cross-system stakeholders. This system

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INFORMATIONAL ITEM

workgroup discussed policy needs and best practices. Each committee member researched a particular area and reported to the full workgroup. The drafting of the enhancements of this policy will follow the needs analysis phase. A draft policy has been developed and is currently being vetted by the campuses. The Academic Affairs Council (AAC) will meet at their August 2023 Retreat to further discuss the workgroup findings. A policy draft is expected as early as October and December of 2023 to the Board of Regents.

Demographics Higher Education Attainment

As reported in BOR item 4-G (Admission Policy Enhancements), the US Census Bureau¹ released the following national statistics as it relates to educational attainment for students aged twenty-five (25) or older (post-traditional population).

- 6.9% had less than a high school diploma or equivalent.
- 29.3% had high school graduate as their highest level of school completed.
- 20.1% had completed some college but not a degree.
- 12.0% had an associate degree as their highest level of school completed.
- 21.6% had a bachelor's degree as their highest degree completed.
- 10.1% had completed an advanced degree such as a master's degree, professional degree, or doctoral degree.

62.2% of the population for the age group of twenty-five (25) years or older represent those not holding a bachelor's or advanced degree. This equates to approximately 403,431 South Dakotans. There are opportunities to develop policies that are friendly to prior learning opportunities for this population.

Credit for Prior Learning

To define the context of credit for prior learning, this is college-level knowledge, skills, and competencies that have been attained outside of a traditional academic environment in which college credit has not been awarded previously evaluated.

To provide a framework for discussion by the Regents, the credit for prior learning options identified below have been evaluated by the workgroup and can be found in other states and universities. These options are provided to introduce high-level possibilities for policy enhancements.

1. Credit by Examination through a Standardized Test/Exam

This option is already deployed by the Board of Regents institutions. These include standardized tests that are readily available to all students. AAC Guidelines [7.2](#), [7.3](#), [7.4](#), [7.5](#), [7.7](#), and [7.8](#) provides a full list of opportunities for standardized exams. Our faculty discipline councils continually evaluate these standardized exam options.

¹ Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/educational-attainment.html>.

2. Military Experience/Published Guide Experience

This option is generally available to some degree but not to the full extent.

Military: Credit for learning gained in the U.S. Military is generally transferred based on the American Council on Education (ACE) credit recommendations found on a Joint Services Transcript (JST) for current or former Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Navy personnel or on a Community College of the Air Force Transcript (CCAF) for Air Force personnel.

Publish Guided Experience: Business and industry training, which includes industry-recognized certifications and licensure, apprentices, specialized training, etc. This also includes published national guides for prior learning.

3. General Examination Development (GED) Test

This allows for the use of GED scores to be evaluated for admission, possible prior credit, and placement. This is incorporated as part of the admission policy review process as well.

4. Institutional Challenge Exam

Institutionally approved examinations, such as objective tests, essays, and verbal, hands-on or simulated demonstrations may be used to evaluate the student's competencies specific to the course being challenged. Institutional challenge examinations are the equivalent of a comprehensive final examination for the course being challenged.

5. Portfolio Analysis through Prior Learning Assessment

Prior learning assessment is a set of well-established, researched, and validated methods for assessing non-collegiate learning for college credit. It is a process that allows learners to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a particular field, or fields, and have that learning evaluated for college credit.

Research Findings

In working with the workgroup, experts were requested to discuss best practices in prior learning, or the members reached out to experts individually. The team also reviewed CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) for their research and work in prior learning. In a study of 72 higher education institutions (December 2020)², the findings included:

- One (1) in ten (10) adult students entered with prior credit.
- The average amount of credit earned with prior credit was approximately 14.8 credits.

² The PLA Boost. CAEL and WICHE. <https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PLA-Boost-Report-CAEL-WICHE-Revised-Dec-2020.pdf>.

- Students entering with prior credit had better student success outcomes, higher completion, and reduced costs and time to complete.
- Prior credit students were more likely to complete than non-prior credit learners [49% completion to that of 27%].
- Prior credit students persisted at a greater percentage as compared to the non-prior credit learners.
- Prior credit students earned more college credit due to the completion of the program of study.

State Findings

A question to consider by the Regents and by the Regental system may be ‘what states participate in credit for prior learning?’ Attachment I, from 2016, provides a summary overview of states that have adopted credit for prior learning. At that time, South Dakota had no policy or a limited policy, as referenced by CAEL. The Education Commission of the States updated its state information on credit for prior learning in 2017³. In addition to CAEL and the Education Commission of the States, the workgroup evaluated policies on credit for prior learning to include Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Wyoming, Illinois, Iowa, and Colorado.

The following states are required by statute to accept credit for prior learning⁴:

1. Colorado
2. Illinois

The following states require credit for prior learning acceptance by the Board of Regents⁵:

1. Minnesota
2. Montana
3. North Dakota
4. Wisconsin

While South Dakota has a limited policy today (2023), it is not comprehensive when compared and evaluated to the other states. Enhancing the Board of Regents policy on credit for prior learning has a large impact on post-traditional students and enrollment initiatives. Being competitive with surrounding states and especially those states that are part of the SD Advantage is essential.

³ Education Commission of the States. Prior Learning Assessment Policies 2017. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/prior-learning-assessment-policies-2017>

⁴ Education Commission of the States. Prior Learning Assessment Policies 2017. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/prior-learning-assessment-policies-2017>

⁵ Education Commission of the States. Prior Learning Assessment Policies 2017. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/prior-learning-assessment-policies-2017>

IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION

As these policy enhancements continue to be discussed and vetted at the institutional level either through the workgroup or through the Academic Affairs Council (AAC), the Regents may want to consider the following:

1. Post-Traditional Student Demographics
2. Competitiveness of Prior Learning Policies
3. Military Experience and Workforce/Industry Experience
4. Certifications (nationally supported and industry supported)
5. Mission of the University – Comprehensive Regional, Special Focus, and Research

Dr. Minder will provide additional information on credit for prior learning at the meeting. Attachment II provides sample recommendations from CAEL as the system embarks on policy enhancements.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment I – CAEL State Policies

Attachment II – CAEL Recommendations to Policy Sections

TABLE 1. SUMMARY TABLE OF PLA POLICY CATEGORIES BY STATE. (SHADED STATES HAVE NO PLA POLICIES TO DATE.) ATTACHMENT I 6

States	Establishment of PLA policy	Establishment of PLA committee or task force	Transparent institutional policies	Assessment process/ methods	Fees	Transfer and articulation	Transcription of PLA credit	Veterans	Raising awareness among students	Building capacity	Work force systems
Alabama	X		X	X	X						
Alaska	X							X			
Arizona				X							
Arkansas	X										
California								X			
Colorado	X		X		X		X	X			
Connecticut								X			
Delaware											
Florida			X	X				X			
Georgia	X										
Hawaii	X					X		X			
Idaho	X							X			
Illinois								X			
Indiana								X			X
Iowa											
Kansas	X							X			
Kentucky				X				X			
Louisiana								X			
Maine	X					X		X			
Maryland	X			X				X			
Massachusetts								X			
Michigan											
Minnesota	X		X	X	X		X	X			
Mississippi								X			
Missouri		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Montana								X			
Nebraska								X			
Nevada	X							X			
New Hampshire								X			
New Jersey											
New Mexico											
New York											
North Carolina											
North Dakota	X			X				X			
Ohio	X			X				X			
Oklahoma	X				X	X		X			
Oregon	X		X			X		X	X	X	
Pennsylvania											
Rhode Island								X			
South Carolina				X				X			
South Dakota											
Tennessee	X					X		X			
Texas								X			
Utah				X				X			
Vermont											
Virginia				X				X			
Washington	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	
West Virginia				X							
Wisconsin	X			X		X		X			
Wyoming											
Total states with this policy category	20	2	7	15	5	7	3	33	2	3	1

A comprehensive approach to state or system PLA policy might provide framing information along with guidance on the full range of policy topics discussed in the Resource Guide. Specific policy language might include:

- **Purpose.** A policy document might provide context and framing by discussing the reasons why the state or system values PLA. Context may cover economic and social drivers. A purpose statement might also define PLA's value proposition for the student, for institutions, for the system and for the state.
- **Goals.** The policy could provide common goals for a PLA initiative. These goals might include specific targets for adult degree completion, reducing the time to degree and reducing the cost of a degree. Additional goals may concern issues around social justice or diversity/equality.
- **Guiding principles.** States and systems may want to articulate the importance of specific principles such as academic rigor in evaluation and assessment, cost-efficiency, student support or institutional autonomy.
- **Policies and procedures.** A state- or systemwide policy could provide guidance or recommendations on:
 - Target student populations and enrollment requirements for PLA applicants;
 - Limits on the number of PLA credits that can count toward a degree (this may be defined by regional or other accrediting bodies);
 - How PLA credits can be applied within a student's degree plan (e.g., electives, general education, major requirements);
 - Transfer of PLA credits between institutions;
 - How specific PLA methods are administered (especially those developed by the individual institutions);
 - Fees charged for PLA courses, assessments, course evaluations and transcript review;
 - How PLA credits are shown on the transcript;
 - How information about PLA policies and procedures is shared with various constituencies, particularly students; and
 - How often the policies and procedures are to be reviewed and re-evaluated.
- **Data and tracking.** States and systems might specify what kind of PLA data to track and what kind of standard analysis and reporting will be required.
- **Compliance.** A policy document might articulate the extent to which PLA policies are to be standardized across all institutions.