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Credit for Prior Learning Policy

Policy

In accordance with the provisions of this policy, presidents of the California State University (CSU) campuses or their designees shall apply toward admission eligibility and/or the degree, academic credit earned from (1) examinations, (2) learning, skills, and knowledge acquired through experience, (3) learning acquired outside formal higher education and/or (4) education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States.

Awarding academic credit for prior learning promotes access for fair and equitable recognition of prior learning, helps support student retention and persistence, reduces time to graduation and assures quality and equity across various academic experiences.

Article 1. Academic Credit for Examinations

A. Campus-Originated Challenge Examinations

1. Students who pass campus-originated challenge examinations (as differentiated from placement examinations) shall earn credit toward the degree and/or toward the determination of admission eligibility.
2. Campuses shall develop procedures governing the awarding of credit for these examinations that are consistent with the conditions set forth in this policy.
3. Information about challenge examinations shall be included in campus catalogs and web sites.
4. Campuses shall make a challenge exam available upon student request (per Title 5, §40408)

B. Standardized Examinations

1. Campuses shall award credit to be applied toward the degree and/or admission

eligibility for students who pass a standardized examination such as Advanced Placement (AP) Tests, International Baccalaureate (IB), and College Level Entrance Program (CLEP).

2. Conditions of Award of Credit for Standardized Examinations

- a. For standardized examinations, the passing score and the minimum amount of credit awarded for the calculation of admission eligibility and toward the degree shall be uniform throughout the system and determined according to procedures set forth in Section 1.B.4 of this policy.
- b. Credit for passage of standardized examinations shall not be awarded if the student has taken that examination within the previous term and received a passing score.
- c. Credit for passage of standardized examinations shall not be awarded if equivalent degree credit has been previously earned for regular coursework, prior learning assessment, or other instructional processes.
- d. Credit for passage of standardized examinations shall not be awarded when credit has been granted at a level more advanced than the content level in the examination.
- e. Care shall be taken not to award duplicate credit because of overlapping tests, college-level courses, or both. Where there is partial overlap, the amount of examination credit shall be reduced accordingly as determined by the CSU campus at which the student matriculates.

3. Application of Credits for Standardized Examinations

- a. Campuses shall establish policies specifying whether the credits earned by passing standardized examinations shall be applicable as general education, major, or elective credits. These policies shall comport with Section 1.B.4 of this policy.
- b. For students who enter with an Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), full or partial certification in CSU General Education (GE) Breadth, campuses shall honor certifications that apply credits earned by passing standardized examinations as authorized by CSU policy and set forth in Section 1.B.4 of this policy.
- c. Campuses shall establish policies that allow the granting of additional credits earned by standardized examination upon matriculation.
- d. Except for International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement Tests, no more than 30 semester (45 quarter) total units of credit shall be applied to the calculation of admission eligibility or to the degree on the basis of passing standardized exams. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate are excluded from this limit. In no case shall the number of credits granted exceed those allowed by WSCUC.
- e. The name of the examination, student 's score, and credit earned shall be identified on the student's academic record.

4. Procedures for Evaluating Appropriateness of Examinations for Systemwide Credit

- a. As requested by the Office of the Chancellor, the Chancellor's General Education Advisory Committee shall evaluate a proposed standardized examination for systemwide general education academic credit and make a recommendation on its appropriateness.
- b. The Office of the Chancellor shall maintain a list of standardized examinations and their appropriateness for systemwide general education credit.
- c. This list shall include passing scores, minimum credits toward admission eligibility, minimum credits toward the degree, and, for transfer students seeking general education certification before matriculation, placement in CSU GE-Breadth area.
- d. The Office of the Chancellor shall be responsible for publicizing and periodically updating the list of examinations appropriate for systemwide credit. The current list can be found at [CSU Systemwide Credit for External Examinations](#).

Article 2. Credit for Demonstrated Learning, Knowledge, or Skills Acquired Through Experience

A. Designation of Authority

Each campus shall establish a process to determine how may earn academic credit toward the degree for learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience. However, academic credit for learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience shall not be used in determining eligibility for admission, unless it was previously transcribed on the student's academic record.

B. Conditions of Award of Academic Credit for Demonstrated Learning, Knowledge, or Skills Acquired Through Experience

Academic credit for documented learning, skills, and knowledge acquired through experience shall be subject to the following conditions:

1. The student seeking credit for experiential learning shall be matriculated at a CSU campus awarding credit.
2. The assessment of experiential learning shall be appropriate to the applicant's degree objectives and/or general education requirements.
3. Academic credit for such experiential learning shall be awarded only when it is academically creditable and verifiable through a prior learning assessment methodology.

Before academic credit earned for experiential learning becomes a part of the student's academic record, the student shall complete 15 units at the degree granting institution, or a sufficient number of units to establish evidence of a satisfactory learning pattern. Graduate students shall complete three units in residence at the degree granting institution.

C. Verification and Evaluation of Learning, Knowledge, or Skills Acquired through Experience

Campus policy shall be established to award such credit, which shall be verified through a variety of assessment methodologies including written examinations, portfolios, personal interviews, demonstrations, and/or other appropriate means of documentation. Assessments shall be created and evaluated in accordance with academic standards by faculty and/or subject matter experts. Supporting information may be supplied by a field supervisor and/or employer.

D. Application of Credit for Demonstrated Learning, Knowledge, or Skills Acquired Through Experience

Credit shall be awarded for a specific university course or a specific category of university degree credit. Each campus shall determine the extent to which credits earned for **demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience** shall be applied as major, general education, or elective credit according to established campus procedures.

For students who enter with an Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), full or partial certification in CSU General Education Breadth, and consistent with CSU [policy on transfer](#), transcribed credit awarded for **demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience** shall be accepted for articulation and transfer, including credits for CSU-GE breadth and CSU-IGETC based on current system-wide articulation guidance.

Students shall be allowed to appeal decisions regarding credit for demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience through existing campus grade appeal procedures.

E. Documentation

1. The student's academic record shall identify the specific course or category of degree requirement for which the student has received credit for demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience.
2. The objectives, policies, procedures, and bases for the awarding of credit for demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience shall be fully described in the campus catalog and web site.

Article 3. Credit for prior learning acquired outside of traditional higher education

Students can also earn academic credit based on recommendations provided by, for example, the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) and the American Council on Education (ACE) that conduct evaluations of training that is offered by employers or the military. Academic credit may also be earned through other prior learning assessment methods such as portfolio assessment. Examples of industry-recognized credentials that are listed in [the ACE National Guide](#) include SHRM (Society of Human Resource Management), IBM Corporation, Google IT and Fire and Rescue Training.

- A. Types of Instruction Approved for the Awarding of Credit for Workforce and Industry Learning
Students shall be granted credit toward the degree for the following types of learning acquired

outside of traditional higher education:

1. Completion of learning acquired outside traditional higher education, such as recommended by American Council on Education's National Guide.
2. Successful completion of other learning outside of traditional higher education that utilizes prior learning assessment methods such as portfolio assessment, attempted independently or as part of a course.

B. Application of Credit for Learning Acquired outside traditional higher education:

1. Campuses shall accept and award course credit as recommended by ACE National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training, as appropriate for a student's academic objectives.
2. Credit shall be awarded for a specific university course or a specific category of university degree credit. Each campus shall determine the extent to which units earned for learning acquired outside of traditional higher education shall be applied as major, general education, or elective credit according to established campus procedures. For students who enter with an ADT, full or partial certification in CSU General Education Breadth, and consistent with CSU [policy on transfer](#), transcribed credit awarded for **learning acquired outside of traditional higher education** shall be accepted for articulation and transfer, including credits for CSU-GE breadth and CSU-IGETC based on current system-wide articulation guidance. Students shall be allowed to appeal decisions regarding credit for demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience through existing campus grade appeal procedures.

Article 4. Credit for education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States

To be eligible to enroll students participating in the G.I. Bill, campuses are required by federal law ([38 CFR § 21.4253 \(d\)\(3\)](#)) to evaluate prior learning, provide credit where appropriate, and shorten the time to academic objective accordingly. Accurate records that such credit has been awarded must be maintained for review by state and federal veterans' education compliance officials. NOTE: This section pertains to education, training and service completed during military service but not at one of the many U.S. Armed Forces institutions that are regionally accredited to offer associate, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. Education completed at one of those institutions should be evaluated in the same manner as other regionally accredited colleges and/or universities.

- A. Students shall be granted undergraduate or graduate credit for learning acquired through education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States as recommended by the [American Council on Education \(ACE\) Military Guide](#). Such credit shall be

applied as appropriate towards the completion of students' academic programs.

B. Application of Credit for education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States

1. Campuses shall allow the number of units recommended by ACE in The Military Guide.
2. Credit shall be awarded for a specific university course or a specific category of university degree credit. Each campus shall determine the extent to which units earned for **education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States** shall be applied as major, general education, or elective credit according to established campus procedures.

For students who enter with an ADT, full or partial certification in CSU General Education Breadth, and consistent with CSU [policy on transfer](#), transcribed credit awarded for **education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States** shall be accepted for articulation and transfer, including credits for CSU-GE breadth and CSU-IGETC based on current system-wide articulation guidance

Students shall be allowed to appeal decisions regarding credit for demonstrated learning, knowledge, or skills acquired through experience through existing campus grade appeal procedures.

C. Completion of basic military training (boot camp) may be used to satisfy Area E in the university's general education requirements, [Title 5, Section 40405.1\(A\)\(5\)](#). Satisfaction of Area E in this manner does not exempt students from completing health courses required to earn a teacher credential.

D. Documentation of education, training and service provided by the Armed Forces of the United States shall address:

1. Both the completed military courses and the schools at which the work was completed must be documented on Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcripts or Joint Services Transcripts (JST).
2. The objectives, policies, procedures, and bases for the awarding of credit for documented prior learning shall be fully described in the campus catalog and web site.
3. Credit earned for education, training and service in the U.S. Armed Forces shall be clearly identified in the student's academic record.

E. Guidance for assigning academic credit for the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT):

1. Utilizing the ACE recommendations, three lower division semester hours for language shall equate to three semester units (or their quarter equivalent) in CSU GE Breadth Subarea C2.
2. When assigning academic credit using the DLPT, campuses should refer to [the ACE National Guide](#). Acceptable documentation for awarding DLPT GE or Course Credit includes:

- a. Official Defense Language Institute Foreign Language (DLIFLC) Transcripts

- b. Official join Services Transcripts (JST)
- c. Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) DLPT Examinee Results
- d. DA Form 330 Language Proficiency Questionnaire

Related resources:

[WSCUC](#): Campuses may award up to 25% of total program units (30 units for a 120-unit undergraduate degree) through prior learning assessment, according to WSCUC institutional accreditor.

CAEL Toolkit: Forthcoming

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Credit for Prior Learning - Academic credit granted for demonstrated college-level equivalencies gained through learning experiences outside of the college classroom, using one of the well-established methods for assessing extra-institutional learning, including third-party validation of formal training or individualized assessment, such as portfolios (ACE).

Credit for prior learning is a practice used by institutions, typically at or near the time of a student's enrollment, to recognize or award credit for demonstrated college-level learning gained in settings outside of higher education.

Prior learning assessment is one type of credit for prior learning practice: "the evaluation and assessment of an individual's life learning for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training. Prior learning assessment is often applied to military and work experience, as well as community service, informal online learning, and other [college-level] learning acquired outside traditional academic institutions" (CAEL).

Prior learning and prior learning assessment are often used interchangeably with credit for prior learning.

Experiential Learning - A teaching philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities (Association of Experiential Education).

Competency-based Education – Transitioning away from seat time, in favor of a structure that creates flexibility, allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning. Competency-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned or awarded and provide students with personalized learning opportunities. These strategies include online and blended learning, dual enrollment and early college high schools, project-based and community-based learning, and credit recovery, among others. This type of learning leads to better student engagement because the content is relevant to each student and tailored to their unique needs. It also leads to better student outcomes because the pace of learning is customized to each student (US Department of Education).

By enabling students to master skills at their own pace, competency-based learning systems help to save both time and money. Depending on the strategy pursued, competency-based systems also create

multiple pathways to graduation, make better use of technology, support new staffing patterns that utilize teacher skills and interests differently, take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school hours and walls, and help identify opportunities to target interventions to meet the specific learning needs of students. Each of these presents an opportunity to achieve greater efficiency and increase productivity.

SOURCES

[American Council on Education\(ACE\) National Guide](#)

[American Council on Education \(ACE\) Military Guide](#)

[Association for Experiential Education \(AEE\)](#)

[Council of Adult and Experiential Learning \(CAEL\)](#)

[National College Credit Recommendation Service \(NCCRS\)](#)

[U.S. Department of Education](#)

[Western Institute Commission for Higher Education \(WICHE\)](#)

Authority

This policy is issued pursuant to [Section II of the Standing Orders of the Board of Trustees of the California State University](#), and as further delegated by the [Standing Delegations of Administrative Authority](#).

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Approval Signatures

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