



MEMORANDUM

February 7, 2023

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Dr. John B. King, Jr., Chancellor

**SUBJECT: State University of New York Award of Academic Credit by
Evaluation Policy**

Action Requested

The proposed resolution regulates the award of academic credit by evaluation within the State University of New York, superseding existing policy and guidance. This revised policy assists campuses in amending or developing local policy and practice.

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Whereas the State University of New York was an early adopter of the concept that learning outside of the traditional classroom could be evaluated for the award of academic credit; and

Whereas SUNY's 1976 policy, Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation, communicated via Memorandum to Presidents Vol. 76, No. 11, focused largely on the award of credit by examination and addressed related operational and administrative issues including transfer and fees; and

Whereas since the implementation of SUNY's 1976 policy, SUNY campuses have, to varying degrees, instituted local award of academic credit policies to address standardized exams, faculty developed exams, and to a lesser extent other types of evaluation; and

Whereas over time, this evaluation process has become a frequent practice among public and private institutions of higher education nationally, more commonly known as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Credit for Prior Learning (CPL); and the methods of evaluation commonly recognized have grown to include the following general categories: nationally recognized or faculty developed examinations; military education, training and service as recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE) via the enhanced Military Guide and via the Joint Military Services Transcript and with appropriate student advising; faculty, national organization or content expert review; and portfolio review; and

Whereas research by leading organizations such as CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education), have consistently shown the benefits of awarding credit by evaluation to include improved persistence, higher rates of completion, shorter time-to-degree, and cost savings, and further, that such benefits, when there is a high level of awareness of the program, are shown across individuals of all races and income levels; and

Whereas Recommendation A3. of SUNY's 2021 SUNY Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan calls for a robust policy to expand college credit for life and work experience; and

Whereas ongoing efforts to update SUNY's award of credit by evaluation policy concluding most recently with a work-group convened by the Office of the Provost to review the latest recommendations in collaboration with the respective Presidents of the University Faculty Senate and Faculty Council of Community College, representatives of the SUNY Registrars, SUNY Veterans Coordinators, and others, including feedback from two System-wide calls for comment which served to strengthen the proposed policy revision; and

Whereas the proposed policy revision further expands the types of verifiable college-level learning that may be evaluated in the general categories identified above, including, but not limited to: military education, training and experience, performance on standardized published exams, professional and industry certifications and

licenses or other credentials, non-credit and continuing education study, on-the-job training/education and work experience (portfolio review); and

Whereas the proposed policy revision adds flexibility around fee structure with appropriate approvals, emphasizes the importance of marketing and communication efforts to raise awareness of the availability of such evaluation, continues to recognize faculty oversight as a core tenet, and supports an implementation plan that will include training and education; and

Whereas the SUNY Trustees support increased use of the award of academic credit by evaluation in support of SUNY's commitments to access and student success; now, therefore be it

Resolved that the Chancellor or designee be, and hereby is, directed to implement the revised policy on Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation as detailed in Attachment A and provide related guidance; and, be it further

Resolved that Provost or designee will work with campuses to ensure that faculty and staff have the training necessary to support effective implementation of the award of academic credit by evaluation that go beyond performance on standardized published exams and that prioritize opportunities for collaboration and consistency; and, be it further

Resolved that this policy on the Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation will be regularly assessed and that periodic reports of such activity are provided to the SUNY Trustees; and be it further.

Resolved that campuses are strongly encouraged to maximize opportunities for the Award of Academic Credit by Evaluation under this policy in order to further completion, economic mobility, and other measures of student success, and SUNY will promote outreach, communication, and data collection and transparency aligned to achieving this objective.

Background

SUNY first 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; 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.





Summary

This policy broadly regulates within the State University of New York (SUNY) the award of academic credit by evaluation of demonstrable 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 program of study.

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 policy revision supersedes the original 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; 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.¹

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 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.

¹ 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/>

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.²
 4. Award Level: The evaluation of student learning for the award of academic credit can be applied to both undergraduate and graduate programs as well as microcredentials.
 5. Transparency and Communication: Campus policies and procedures, and the availability generally, of 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 as described below.
- 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 the award of 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, use of the ACE Military Guide, assessment of industry certifications, etc.

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

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 SUNY System Provost's Office):

1. Advanced Placement (AP);
2. International Baccalaureate (IB);
3. Advanced International Certificate of Education Program (AICE);

² 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>.

4. A-Levels (Advanced Level Qualifications);
5. DSST exams - 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 according to student need and as appropriate to local 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.³

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, non-credit microcredentials,⁴ 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:

1. Faculty/department developed challenge exams;
2. 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/or
3. Portfolio review.

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.B. and IV., credit earned

³ The Community College of the Air Force, US Naval Academy, US Coast Guard Academy, US Air Force Academy, and US Military Academy 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*.

⁴ Credit-bearing microcredentials should be reviewed by the receiving campus according to transfer policies, not by award of Academic Credit by Evaluation.

through credit by evaluation shall be guaranteed to transfer between SUNY campuses.

- B. 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.
- C. Transcript entries for credit awarded shall clearly indicate credit was awarded via evaluation of prior learning.
- D. 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).
- E. 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. Application of Awarded Credits

Academic credits awarded by evaluation may apply to multiple established requirements, including courses in the major, SUNY General Education, Transfer Path courses, approved applied learning experiences, and credit-bearing 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 students will be allowed to apply for the use of credits earned by evaluation, as appropriate to the academic program.

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 Chief Academic Officer is responsible for the academic programs of the institution, including effective campus policies and practices to assure alignment with SUNY Board of Trustees' policies including 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 to include consideration for the student's best interest and compliance with state and federal regulations.
- 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, advisors, 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 award 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:

- A. Campus catalogs;
- B. Webpages (transfer students, prospective students, admissions, workforce development, continuing education, etc.); and
- C. 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 fees⁵ - should reflect, as closely as possible, the costs incurred.

- A. Assessment Fees charged for evaluation shall be based on the services performed in the

⁵ Hereafter "Assessment Fee(s)"

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;
- 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.