

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Agenda Item Summary Sheet**

**Committee:** Academic and Student Affairs

**Date of Meeting:** January 20, 2009

**Agenda Item:** Proposed Amendment to Policy 3.36 Academic Programs (Second Reading)

Proposed Policy Change       Approvals Required by Policy       Other Approvals       Monitoring

Information

**Scheduled Presenter(s):**

Linda L. Baer, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs

Mike López, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Manuel López, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Quality

**Outline of Key Points/Policy Issues:**

- 2007 session law sets the maximum number of credits for associate degrees (60 credits) and baccalaureate degrees (120 credits) and allows waivers based on industry or professional accreditation standards.
- Reduce program credit lengths and waiver request decisions are expected to be completed by the end of FY 2012.
- Standard policy revision processes were followed. The Academic and Student Affairs Policy Council did not recommend any changes to the proposed policy at its last meeting (December 2, 2008).

**Background Information:**

The Board of Trustees approved Policy 3.36 Academic Programs at their July 2007 meeting. Since then, a task force has made recommendations in response to the 2007 state law that directs the Board of Trustees to adopt policy setting the maximum number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits and the number of credits required for an associate degree at 60 credits. The law allows a process for granting waivers in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of credits.

After approval of the proposed policy by the Board of Trustees, existing procedure 3.36.1 Academic Programs Procedure will be amended and submitted to the chancellor for approval.

**Cite policy requirement, or explain why item is on the Board agenda:**

Second reading to change Policy 3.36 Academic Programs due to 2007 session law that limits the program credit length of associate and baccalaureate degree programs.

Second Reading

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

***ACTION ITEM***

**PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO POLICY 3.36 ACADEMIC PROGRAMS  
(SECOND READING)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Board of Trustees approved policy 3.36 Academic Programs at their July 2007 meeting. Procedures 3.36.1 Academic Programs, which require review and approval by the chancellor, were approved on August 1, 2007. Since then, several recommendations have been made for revision to these procedures. Some of the proposed revisions reflect state law, passed in 2007, that directs the Board of Trustees to adopt policy setting the maximum number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits and the number of credits required for an associate degree at 60 credits. The law allows for a process for granting waivers in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of credits.

Procedures are reviewed and approved by the chancellor. After approval of the proposed policy by the Board of Trustees, existing procedure 3.36.1 Academic Programs Procedure will be amended and submitted to the chancellor for approval.

**BACKGROUND**

State law, which was passed during the 2007 legislative session, directed that:

*By January 1, 2009, the board must adopt a policy setting the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 semester credits or the equivalent and the number of semester credits required for an associate degree at 60 semester credits or the equivalent. The board policy may provide for a process for granting waivers for specific degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of semester credits.*

Higher Education Funding Bill [H.F. 1063 (Chapter 144)]

Article 1 Higher Education Appropriations

Section 4. Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Subdivision 3. Board policies

In response to the legislation, a task force on degree credit caps was established in the fall of 2007 by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Chancellor, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Members included representatives from the following:

- Academic and Student Affairs Leadership Council,
- College and university academic administrators,
- Inter Faculty Organization (IFO),
- Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF),
- Administrative and Service Faculty (MSUAASF)
- Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA),
- Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA), and the
- Office of the Chancellor.

1 The task force charge was to recommend policy and procedure related to statutory requirements for credit  
 2 limitations on associate and baccalaureate degree programs within the system. Deliberation over the  
 3 course of five meetings led to recommendations that have been considered in the development of  
 4 proposed policy and procedure.

5  
 6 Notable Changes. In addition to changes recommended to the policy, several changes have been  
 7 proposed for the procedures. As listed in the table below, the proposed policy and procedure would make  
 8 several changes.

Description of Change	Policy or Procedure	Rationale
1. New language sets degree program credit lengths and gives the chancellor authority to decide program credit length waiver requests.	Policy part 3, subpart C	State law directs that the Board adopt policy.
2. Revised language sets program credit length limits for associate and baccalaureate degree programs compliant with law and defines waiver criteria and processes.	Procedure part 3, Subparts B & C	State law: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directs that associate and baccalaureate degree programs be limited to 60 and 120 credits.</li> <li>• Allows a process for granting waivers.</li> </ul>
3. Minor language changes: a. Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees b. Master of Arts & Master of Science degrees c. Doctorate	Procedure part 3, Subpart B, items 7, 9 & 11	Improve language
4. Revised language that aligns procedure with policy 3.36 Academic Programs regarding program suspension.	Procedure part 5, Subpart B, item 4	Align procedure with policy
5. Revised language that sets additional documentation requirements for new program applications.	Procedure part 5, Subpart A	Additional documentation requirements for curriculum and external program standards
6. New and revised language clarifies scope and criteria for academic program review.	Procedure part 7 & Part 7, Subpart A	Define scope of program review and edit review criteria

9 **CONSULTATION**

10  
 11 Consultation for the policy and procedure amendments has occurred as follows:

- 12
- 13 • Reviewed at Academic & Student Affairs Policy Council – 11/27/07; 2/19/08; 9/22/08; 12/2/08
- 14 • Reviewed at Academic and Student Affairs Leadership Council – 5/6/08; 11/3/08; 1/6/09
- 15 • Mailed out for review and comment – April, 2008; 9/30/08; 10/22/08
- 16 • Reviewed at the IFO Meet and Confer – 9/12/08; 11/14/08
- 17 • Reviewed at Graduate Education Council – 10/10/08
- 18 • Reviewed at MSUAASF Meet and Confer – 10/17/08
- 19 • Reviewed at MSCF Meet and Confer – 12/4/08

1 **DEGREE CREDIT CAPS – AN OVERVIEW**

2  
3 Session law from 2007<sup>1</sup> directs the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees to set the  
4 maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits, and for an  
5 associate degree at 60 credits. The law also permits the Board of Trustees to grant waivers for specific  
6 degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of  
7 credits.

8  
9 In response to this legislation, revised policy and procedure have been drafted. The proposed policy is  
10 being presented to the Board of Trustees for a second reading at its January 2009 meeting. The purpose  
11 of this document is to inform the Board of Trustees about the proposed policy and its implications.

12  
13 The proposed policy decreases the credit length of associate and baccalaureate degrees, identify criteria  
14 under which a credit length waiver may be granted. The proposed policy delegates authority to the  
15 chancellor to set credit length requirements and waiver criteria for other awards.

16  
17 Legislation from 2008<sup>2</sup> requires the Board of Trustees to annually report to the house and senate higher  
18 education committees regarding waivers that have been requested and granted.

19  
20 **DEGREE CREDIT CAPS - BACKGROUND**

21  
22 Current procedure sets credit length limits for academic programs. Associate degrees may range from 60  
23 to 64 credits except for associate in applied science degrees that may be up to 72 credits. Baccalaureate  
24 degrees may range from 120 to 128 credits. Current procedures allow individual academic programs to  
25 exceed these limits when criteria have been met; however, at the present time there is no expectation that  
26 similar programs adopt a common credit length.

27  
28 The motivation to set lower credit length limits for associate and baccalaureate degrees did not emanate  
29 from an academic policy initiative. Rather, the impetus came from student concern about debt load  
30 variations based on the observation that credit lengths of seemingly similar programs varied across  
31 colleges and universities. Students also expressed an interest in minimizing tuition costs.

32  
33 **Task Force**

34  
35 A Task Force on Degree Credit Caps was established in the fall of 2007 by the Senior Vice Chancellor for  
36 Academic and Student Affairs, with representatives from the Academic and Student Affairs Leadership  
37 Council, college and university academic administrators, Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), Minnesota  
38 State College Faculty (MSCF), Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA), Minnesota State  
39 University Student Association (MSUSA), Administrative and Service Faculty (ASF, formerly  
40 MSUAASF), and the Office of the Chancellor.

41  
42 The task force charge was to recommend policy and procedure related to statutory requirements for credit  
43 limitations on associate and baccalaureate degree programs within the system. The final report included  
44 recommendations on (1) applicability to degree program categories, (2) program waiver processes, (3)  
45 program-length waiver criteria for all awards, (4) timelines, and (5) policy language. The full report is  
46 available at <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>.

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2007, Regular Session, Chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b)

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Statute, Chapter 136F, sec. 19 [136F.301]

1 **Examples From Other States**

2  
3 Other states have practices that limit academic program credit lengths.

4  
5 Several states have implemented credit length caps: Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin. The  
6 CUNY system in New York and the California State University System have also implemented policies  
7 addressing credit length limits and comparability.

8  
9 In 1995 the state of Florida undertook a national survey of 75 universities and the common practices in  
10 baccalaureate programs.<sup>3</sup> The study found that programs clustered in three groups: disciplines with low  
11 credit hour requirements, 120-124 credits; disciplines of moderate length, 124-126; and disciplines at 128  
12 credits and a few exceeding 128. Florida subsequently reduced 506 of 614 baccalaureate programs to 120  
13 credit hours.

14  
15 A California State University system report noted that “. . . three-fourths of the programs now require 120  
16 total semester units. About 85% have lowered their total unit requirement.” At the College of DuPage  
17 (the largest community college in Illinois), most AAS programs are 64 credits (consistent with the Illinois  
18 Community College System policy). Florida’s community college system has established a formal list of  
19 approved program credit lengths. Programs may not exceed the approved limits.

20  
21 **Revenues and Expenditures**

22  
23 Reducing the credit length of programs will affect colleges and universities revenues and expenditures.  
24 The impact on revenue is easier to estimate than it is for expenditures.

25  
26 Revenue from student tuition, which accounts for nearly half of system revenue, will decline in  
27 proportion to the full year equivalent student enrollment eliminated as a result of course credits being  
28 dropped from an academic program. Some academic programs will be granted a waiver to exceed the 60  
29 or 120 credit length limits, which would lessen revenue losses.

30  
31 Colleges and universities have several options for reducing expenditures. Expenditures may be reduced  
32 when courses or course-sections in the major are no longer offered. Work loads may be adjusted and  
33 reductions in other budget categories may occur. Expenditures on new courses, sections or programs may  
34 lessen the impact of reduced tuition revenue.

35  
36 **Status of Academic Programs**

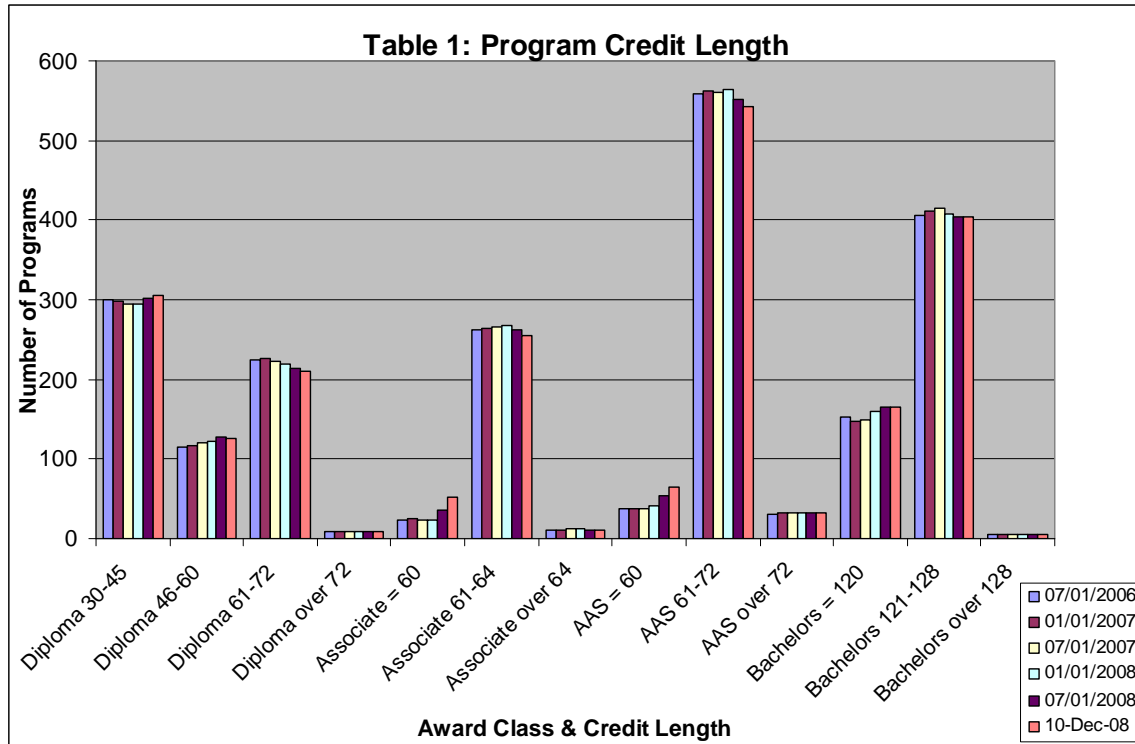
37  
38 As of December 2008, 1,543 academic programs led to an associate or baccalaureate degree. Of these,  
39 291 programs have a length of 60 or 120 credits and 1,252 exceed these limits.

40  
41 For colleges, there are 829 degree programs that have a credit length over 60 credits. Table 1 summarizes  
42 the number of programs by type of award and credit length over time. The data indicate that program  
43 credit lengths already are being reduced. In 2008 the number of associate degree programs over 60  
44 credits has declined by 36.

45  
46 For universities, there are 423 degree programs that have a credit length over 120 credits. As shown in  
47 Table 1, in 2008 the number of baccalaureate degree programs over 120 has decreased by 3.

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<sup>3</sup> Hours to Graduation: A National Survey of Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degrees, 1995.



1 About 70 percent of university programs are above 120 credits in length. Variation exists among  
 2 universities in the percent of baccalaureate degrees that exceed 120 credits. As shown in Table 2, 17  
 3 percent of baccalaureate degrees at Saint Cloud State University exceed 120 credits. Metropolitan State  
 4 University and Minnesota State University Moorhead have 43 percent and 59 percent above 120 credits,  
 5 respectively. Nearly all of the programs at the remaining four universities are above 120 credits. Not  
 6 shown in the table are associate degree programs offered by universities; 14 of 17 exceed 60 credits.

Table 2: Baccalaureate Degrees

University	Equal to 120 credits	Over 120 credits	Percent over 120 credits
Bemidji State University	0	69	100%
Metropolitan State University	29	22	43%
Minnesota State University, Mankato	1	125	99%
Minnesota State University Moorhead	32	46	59%
Saint Cloud State University	109	23	17%
Southwest State University	1	55	98%
Winona State University	0	69	100%
TOTAL	172	409	70%

7 For colleges, Table 3 displays associate in applied science degrees separately from other associate degrees  
 8 – associate in arts, associate in science and associate in fine arts. The percentage of associate in applied  
 9 science degree programs over 60 credits varies from 25 percent to 100 percent. Twenty-two colleges  
 10 have over 85 percent of their associate in applied science degrees above 60 credits. Similarly, 15 colleges  
 11 have over 85 percent of other associate in science degree programs above 60 credits.

Table 3: Associate Degree Program Credit Lengths

College	Associate in Applied Science Degree			Other Associate Degrees (AS, AFA, AA)		
	Equal to 60 credits	Over 60 credits	Percent over 60 credits	Equal to 60 credits	Over 60 credits	Percent over 60 credits
Alexandria	0	27	100%	0	9	100%
Anoka	1	19	95%	0	0	NA
Anoka Ramsey	0	2	100%	2	15	88%
Century	0	31	100%	0	13	100%
Central Lakes	3	18	86%	0	5	100%
Dakota County	6	33	85%	1	4	80%
Fond du Lac	5	2	29%	3	8	73%
Hibbing	1	12	92%	2	3	60%
Hennepin	3	40	93%	0	1	100%
Itasca	0	3	100%	0	8	100%
Inver Hills	4	1	20%	8	10	56%
Lake Superior	5	30	86%	3	8	73%
Minneapolis	5	18	78%	4	20	83%
Mesabi Range	1	7	88%	1	4	80%
Minnesota State College, Southeast Technical	1	24	96%	0	2	100%
Minnesota State Community and Technical College	3	41	93%	4	11	73%
Minnesota West	1	31	97%	0	18	100%
Northland	1	24	96%	1	6	86%
North Hennepin	1	8	89%	3	17	85%
Normandale	3	5	63%	3	11	79%
Northwest – Bemidji	2	17	89%	0	2	100%
Pine	3	6	67%	0	6	100%
Ridgewater	2	43	96%	0	11	100%
Riverland	0	12	100%	0	10	100%
Rochester	5	23	82%	8	25	76%
Rainy River	1	0	0%	3	1	25%
South Central	0	34	100%	2	4	67%
Saint Cloud	4	32	89%	0	2	100%
St. Paul	4	27	87%	3	9	75%
Vermilion	0	4	100%	0	12	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>83%</b>

1 **Program Credit Length Consistency**

2

3 Program credit lengths for similarly named programs vary across colleges and universities because  
 4 current procedure allows program credit lengths to fall within ranges. Associate in applied science  
 5 degrees range from 60 to 72 credits. An associate in science degree, which is designed to transfer, is  
 6 limited to 60 to 64 credits.

1 Tables 4 through 6 illustrate examples of the variation in program credit lengths<sup>4</sup> in three popular program  
 2 areas: accounting, business administration and management, and law enforcement. The variation in credit  
 3 length is readily apparent.

**Program Credit Lengths for Selected Programs**

Table 4: Accounting		
Award	Credits	N of Programs
AAS	60	2
	63	2
	64	4
	67	2
	69	1
	70	2
	71	1
	72	11
AS	60	1
	62	1
	64	6
BS	120	1
	124	1
	128	5
Total		40

Table 5: Business Administration & Management		
Award	Credits	N of Programs
AAS	60	5
	63	2
	64	13
	72	2
	60	3
AS	61	1
	63	1
	64	21
	124	1
BS	128	1
	120	1
	124	2
	128	7
Total		60

Table 6: Law Enforcement		
Award	Credits	N of Programs
AAS	60	1
	65	1
	69	1
	72	4
AS	60	1
	64	10
BS	128	1
	124	1
	128	1
Total		21

4 Five different names are used for the 60 business administration and management programs. Faculty  
 5 review is required to determine if these programs have similar outcomes. If the learning outcomes are  
 6 different, credit lengths may vary within a broad program area. For example, it may be that a program  
 7 called Applied Technology: Management program may be significantly different from a general business  
 8 management program.

**Timeline**

12 Listed below are key dates and activities related to the degree credit cap legislation. Overall,  
 13 development and implementation processes will take about three and one-half years from the time policy  
 14 and procedure are approved. By the fall of 2012, degree programs should be reduced to 60 or 120 credits  
 15 or be granted a waiver for a longer credit length.

Date	Activity
2007	Session law on degree credit caps.
2008 – March	Task force report completed
2008	Statute requires annual reporting
2008 – Nov	Proposed policy and procedure: First reading November 2008

<sup>4</sup> In providing three examples, there is no assumption that these programs will request or will be granted a credit length waiver.

Date	Activity
2009 – Jan	Proposed policy and procedure: Second reading January 2009
2009 – Jun	Deadline for notice of intent to file a waiver application
2009 – Oct	First report to the legislature
2009 to 2011	Development and submission of waiver applications
2011 – Dec	Waiver submission deadline
2012 – July	Implementation

1 **PROGRAM APPROVAL**

2  
3 All new programs and some changes to existing programs must be reviewed and formally approved by  
4 the Office of the Chancellor. Program changes include the addition or deletion of emphases; changes to a  
5 program’s name, online delivery status, or classification code; and program suspension or closure.

6  
7 New program applications are reviewed according to the following criteria: (1) appropriateness of the  
8 proposed program to the college or university mission, (2) student interest, (3) labor market demand, (4)  
9 unnecessary program duplication, (5) adequacy of resources, and (6) compliance with policy and  
10 procedure.

11  
12 Role of Institutions The process of initiating new programs or redesigning existing programs begins with  
13 the faculty at each institution. In some cases external review boards or advisory committees also  
14 contribute to curriculum development and change. Generally, a formal institution-wide committee of the  
15 faculty then reviews and makes recommendations concerning the proposals. The faculty’s  
16 recommendation is then forwarded to the institution’s administration where it receives its final review  
17 and, if approved, is submitted to the office of the chancellor for review

18  
19 Role of the Office of the Chancellor Staff The Office of the Chancellor, Academic Programs staff, is  
20 responsible for the approval and implementation of academic program policy and procedures. The Office  
21 of the Chancellor is authorized to consider and approve new programs and program modifications.  
22 Academic program staff members review every proposal for compliance with existing academic program  
23 policy, and make a final decision.

24  
25 Role of the Board of Trustees Board of Trustees approval is required only when colleges or universities  
26 must undergo a mission change to offer a new type of award.

27  
28 **Program approval process**

29  
30 Program planning Upon request, Academic Programs staff assist with academic program planning,  
31 including identifying occupational/professional supply and demand information, designing student  
32 interest surveys, and providing information on the location of similar programs offered at both public and  
33 private institutions to address the question of unnecessary program duplication. Staff also conduct  
34 preliminary reviews of proposals.

35  
36 College or university approval Prior to submission of a program application to the office of the  
37 chancellor, all college and university approval processes should be completed.

38  
39 Comment period Proposals may be presented at any time during the year. Some program applications, for  
40 example an application for a new program, require that an announcement be posted to a listserv of chief

1 academic officers and presidents for 21 days. Members are given an opportunity to comment on the  
 2 program.

3  
 4 Review and approval The proposal review process is not linear, and can involve numerous questions,  
 5 discussions, and negotiations. Proposals are subject to critical editing, and suggestions may be provided  
 6 before final approval. In some cases, proposals may be modified significantly, they may be delayed,  
 7 contingencies may be assigned, or the staff and the college or university may not reach consensus that the  
 8 proposal should go forward.

9  
 10 Office of the Chancellor reviews and approves the program proposal, as appropriate. The program is  
 11 added to the official program inventory.

12  
 13 Program approval timelines The amount of time needed to prepare and process a program application  
 14 varies depending upon the type of application and extent of any issues that may arise. Applications for  
 15 new programs generally take the most amount of time to develop and review. Table 7 below provides a  
 16 summary of the tasks and timelines for preparing and processing a new program application. Changes to  
 17 existing program can be completed within 1-4 weeks.

**Table 7: Program Application Tasks and Timelines – New Programs**

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Campus</b>	<b>Office of the Chancellor</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Any time</b>	Identify new program initiatives.	Provide information.	Complete cooperative arrangements  Consult steering or advisory group as appropriate
	Department/unit prepares proposal	Assist with proposal development	
	Complete internal faculty/administration approval process		
<b>21 days</b>	Submit a Notice of Intent	Using a listserv, notify all colleges and universities of the proposed program	
<b>2-6 weeks</b>	<i>Submit proposal to Office of the Chancellor</i>	Staff reviews program proposal.	
	<i>Institution reviews the staff's summary report.</i>	Consult informally with college or university about any concerns.	
	Makes adjustments to proposal, if any.	Prepare summary report/recommendations	

18 **IMPACT OF POLICY CHANGE – CREDIT LENGTH**

19  
 20 Changes in policy and procedure present challenges as well as advantages and disadvantages.

21 **Challenges**

22  
 23  
 24 Perspectives Curriculum decisions including program credit length have traditionally been made at the  
 25 local college and university level. This decentralized locus of responsibility has led to systemwide  
 26 variations among program credit lengths for similar programs. In contrast, other stakeholders, such as  
 27 students and legislators, are likely to expect similar programs to have the same credit length throughout  
 28 the system.

1 **Collaboration** For programs requesting a credit length waiver, under proposed policy and procedure,  
2 faculty from multiple colleges and universities will need to collaborate regarding program credit length.  
3 This shift requires new working relationships among faculty across colleges and universities. This will  
4 require revised processes and redirected resources.

5  
6 **Interpretation of waiver criteria** Proposed waiver criteria will require interpretation. Some credit length  
7 waiver applications will be easy to justify. For example, ABET, the recognized accreditor for college and  
8 university programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and engineering technology, requires  
9 engineering technology programs to be a minimum of 64 or 124 credits. Under the proposed waiver  
10 criteria, this explicit standard requires no additional justification for the program to exceed program credit  
11 limits. Few programs have such explicit accreditation standards.

12  
13 More typically, accredited programs are held accountable to learning outcomes rather than a specific  
14 number of credits. Justifying a program's credit length based on a curriculum designed around learning  
15 outcomes requires documentation of the program's design relative to the learning outcomes.

16  
17 Program design, including credit length, for non-accredited occupational programs may rely on national  
18 skills standards, state regulation, or employer standards to identify learning outcomes.

19  
20 In some cases, similar programs around the nation may be used for comparison.

## 21 **Advantages and Disadvantages**

22  
23  
24 The policy shift towards shorter degree programs offers advantages and disadvantages. Identified below,  
25 these perceived advantages and disadvantages that, to some extent, may be realized over time.

### 26 **Advantages**

- 27  
28
- 29 1. Students may
    - 30 a. pay less tuition to complete a program
    - 31 b. accrue less debt
    - 32 c. find programs with similar titles to be the same credit length systemwide
    - 33 d. graduate and enter the job market sooner
  - 34 2. Program curriculum review undertaken as part of degree credit cap requirements may
    - 35 a. result in program improvement
    - 36 b. reflect updated articulation agreements
    - 37 c. result in consistent program credit lengths
  - 38 3. Minnesota State Colleges and Universities may
    - 39 a. Become more competitive relative to non-system colleges and universities due to lower price
    - 40 b. Increase student persistence and completion rates
    - 41 c. Establish long term faculty working relationships across campuses
  - 42 4. State of Minnesota may
    - 43 a. Reduce need for as much state financial aid per student
    - 44 b. See more students attending higher education programs
- 45

### 46 **Disadvantages**

- 47
- 48 1. Students may be given less content in some programs. (For some programs it may be appropriate  
49 to add certificates to deliver advanced curriculum.)
  - 50 2. Faculty positions may be reduced.

1 **IMPACT OF POLICY CHANGE – COMPARABILITY**

2  
3 The policy change that requires program credit lengths to be reduced will also introduce an expectation  
4 that similar programs across the system will have a common credit length. This change will also have  
5 advantages and disadvantages that may be realized over time.  
6

7 **Advantages**

- 8  
9 1. Transfer possibilities within the system may be enhanced  
10 2. Students and prospective students will have greater clarity regarding program comparability  
11 3. Communication of faculty across colleges and universities may increase to enrich curriculum  
12

13 **Disadvantages**

- 14  
15 1. It may be more difficult for institutions to address regional or local differences.  
16 2. Unique aspects of programs may be difficult to maintain.  
17

18 **WAIVER PROCESS**

19  
20 Program lengths may exceed limits set in procedure only with approval of the Office of Chancellor.  
21 Revised Policy 3.36 and Procedures 3.36.1 are expected to be implemented in January of 2009.  
22

23 Applications for program credit length waivers are initiated on college and university campuses using  
24 agreed upon curriculum review processes. After systemwide review, waiver applications are confirmed  
25 by colleges and universities and then submitted to the office of the chancellor.  
26

27 Guidelines have been developed to assist with the preparation of a waiver request.  
28

29 **Waiver Criteria**

30  
31 Credit length waivers may be granted when determined necessary to ensure that the degree provided  
32 meets industry or professional standards. Program advisory committee recommendations that support the  
33 standards may be submitted with the waiver request. Proposed waiver criteria include:  
34

- 35 1. Industry standards  
36 a. National or international program certification  
37 b. National or international standards, including skill standards  
38 c. Standards recommended by a primary employer or from multiple employers within a  
39 program service area  
40 2. Professional standards  
41 a. National specialized program accreditation  
42 b. State licensure requirements  
43 c. National practices or standards  
44

45 **Waiver Rationale and Evidence**

46  
47 Colleges and universities provide supportive documentation which demonstrates that the proposed  
48 program credit length is justified by externally established standards or guidelines. Documentation may  
49 include specific credit length requirements established by accrediting or certification bodies, evidence of  
50 state licensure requirements, research literature which supports industry skill standards or national

1 practices, letters of support from employers attesting to the need for specific skills requiring longer  
2 programs.

### 3 4 **Program Analysis Guidelines**

5  
6 An in-depth program analysis is required for all programs seeking a waiver request, except when industry  
7 or professional standards set a specific minimum program credit length above 60/120 and the program  
8 meets those standards or is designed to be consistent with those standards.

9  
10 A detailed program analysis must discuss how the program meets industry or professional standards and  
11 how it compares in credit length to similar programs within the system.

12  
13 Programs determined to be similar will have the same program credit length. Program similarity is based  
14 on similar learning outcomes. Curriculum design and course requirements can be different.

### 15 16 **Articulation Agreements**

17  
18 Where applicable, articulation agreements must be revised and submitted as part of the waiver request.  
19 Colleges and universities complete an [Articulation Agreement Table](#). Articulation agreements will be  
20 reviewed to confirm that all courses in the associate degree program transfer and count toward completion  
21 of a specific baccalaureate degree program.

### 22 23 **Waiver Process**

24  
25 The process for requesting a waiver to exceed approved credit lengths is described in Table 8, below. The  
26 process, which begins on college and university campuses and follows the institution's academic  
27 curriculum approval process, has five phases.

**Table 8: Waiver Process and Timeline**

Phase	Date	Description
<b>1. Propose</b> Reduce credit length to 60/120 (no waiver requested)  <u>OR</u> Submit Notice of Intent to seek a credit waiver	Anytime before 12/31/2011  <u>OR</u> File Notice of Intent by 6/30/2009	If a college or university decides the program credit length should be 60 credits for associate degrees or 120 credits for baccalaureate degrees, the <a href="#">REDESIGN: Change Program and/or Emphasis Credit Length</a> form should be submitted to the Office of the Chancellor.  <u>OR</u> If a college or university decides to seek a waiver to exceed 60/120 credits, an individual college or university should complete a <a href="#">Notice of Intent for Credit Waiver</a> form and submit it electronically (subject: NOI Waiver) to <a href="mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu">Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu</a> <b>by June 30, 2009</b> . The Notice of Intent will be posted to the Waiver Listserv as an information item.
<b>2. Single Application</b> Complete single application	Date to be determined	A college or university completes the <a href="#">SINGLE: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER</a> form. Submit applications electronically (subject: SINGLE WAIVER) to <a href="mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu">Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu</a> (Note: Colleges or universities may choose to complete a <i>GROUP WAIVER APPLICATION</i> during this time.)
<b>3. Group Application</b>	Complete on or before	The Office of the Chancellor will review the waiver request and determine whether the waiver application will be accepted as a single

**Table 8: Waiver Process and Timeline**

Phase	Date	Description
Assess for similarity and complete group application	12/31/2011	<p>application, or whether a group application must be completed for similar programs in the system.</p> <p>If the Office of the Chancellor determines that a group waiver should be considered, all colleges or universities with similar programs must (a) review programs to determine which are or are not similar and (b) complete the <a href="#">GROUP: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER</a> form for programs determined to be similar. Submit applications electronically (subject: GROUP WAIVER) to <a href="mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu">Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu</a>.</p>
<b>4. Review, comment and decide</b>	1/1/2012 to 6/30/2012	<p>When the Office of the Chancellor determines that the single or group application is complete, the application will be posted to the Waiver Listserv for 30 business days. Members of the listserv (Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Student and Faculty Associations) will have an opportunity to review the application and submit comments to the listserv. Comments posted to the listserv will be considered by the Office of the Chancellor when reviewing the application.</p> <p>Application decisions will be posted to the listserv.</p>
<b>5. Appeal</b>		<p>Waiver requests that are not approved may be appealed to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. Submit the request in writing within 30 business days to <a href="mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu">Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu</a>.</p>

1 **Additional Assistance**

2  
3 Two Web sites provide additional information. Several supporting documents and an overview of the  
4 waiver process are available at [www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu](http://www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu). Forms and instructions are  
5 available at <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>. This later site  
6 includes [Staff Contacts](#).

7  
8 **RECOMMENDED COMMITTEE ACTION**

9  
10 The Academic and Student Affairs Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees adopt the  
11 following motion:

12  
13 **RECOMMENDED MOTION**

14  
15 The Board of Trustees approves the amendment to Policy 3.36 Academic Programs.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

*Second Reading*

<b>BOARD POLICY</b>
Chapter 3. EDUCATIONAL POLICIES
Section 36. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

1    **3.36 Academic Programs**  
2

3    **Part 1. Purpose and Applicability.** The purpose of the Academic Programs policy is to direct  
4 system decision-making regarding the development, approval and management of academic  
5 programs to meet Minnesota’s educational needs. This policy applies to credit-based academic  
6 programs of system colleges and universities.  
7

8    **Part 2. Definitions.** The following definitions have the meanings indicated for all Board  
9 policies unless the text clearly indicates otherwise.  
10

11       **Subpart A. Academic award.** Academic award means a certificate, diploma or degree.  
12

13       **Subpart B. Academic program.** Academic program means a cohesive arrangement of  
14 college-level credit courses and experiences designed to accomplish predetermined  
15 objectives leading to the awarding of a degree, diploma, or certificate. ~~Most academic~~  
16 Undergraduate degree programs shall include a general education component. The  
17 purpose of an academic program is to:

- 18           1. increase students' knowledge and understanding in a field of study or discipline,  
19           2. qualify students for employment in an occupation or range of occupations,  
20           and/or  
21           3. prepare students for advanced study.  
22

23       **Subpart C. Academic program inventory.** Academic program inventory means the  
24 official list of academic programs offered by system colleges and universities.  
25

26       **Subpart D. Credit.** Credit means a quantitative measure of instructional time assigned  
27 to a course or an equivalent learning experience such as class time per week over an  
28 academic term.  
29

30       **Subpart E. General education.** General education means a cohesive curriculum  
31 defined by faculty through system college or university procedures to develop reasoning  
32 ability and breadth of knowledge through an integration of learning experiences in the  
33 liberal arts and sciences.

1 **Part 3. Authorized Academic Awards.**

2  
3 **Subpart A. System college and university award authority.** System colleges and  
4 universities have authority to confer academic awards only as specified below.

- 5  
6 1. **Community colleges.** Community colleges have the authority to confer  
7 undergraduate certificates, diplomas, associate in arts, associate in fine arts, associate  
8 in science, and associate in applied science degrees.  
9  
10 2. **Consolidated colleges.** Consolidated colleges have the authority to confer  
11 undergraduate certificates, diplomas, associate in arts, associate in fine arts, associate  
12 in science, and associate in applied science degrees.  
13  
14 3. **Technical colleges.** Technical colleges have the authority to confer undergraduate  
15 certificates, diplomas, associate in science, and associate in applied science degrees.  
16  
17 4. **Universities.** Universities have the authority to confer undergraduate and graduate  
18 certificates and associate in arts, associate in fine arts, associate in science,  
19 baccalaureate, and graduate degrees.  
20

21 Approval by the Board of Trustees is required for a system college or university to confer  
22 an academic award type for which specific authority is not granted in this policy.  
23

24 **Subpart B. Academic award characteristics.** The chancellor shall specify the  
25 characteristics of academic awards.  
26

27 **Subpart C. Academic program credit length limits.** Academic programs that lead to  
28 an associate degree shall be limited to 60 credits and academic programs that lead to a  
29 baccalaureate degree shall be limited to 120 credits unless the chancellor grants a waiver  
30 based on industry or professional accreditation standards that require a greater number of  
31 credits.  
32

33 The chancellor shall set program credit length requirements and waiver criteria for  
34 undergraduate certificates, diplomas and graduate level awards.  
35

36 **Part 4. Authority to Establish Academic Program Locations.** Approval of the chancellor is  
37 required for establishment of a location at which an academic program may be offered.  
38

39 **Part 5. Academic Program Approval.** Approval of the chancellor is required for new  
40 academic programs, changes to existing academic programs, suspension of academic programs,  
41 and closure of academic programs at system colleges and universities.  
42

43 An approved academic program shall include curricular requirements for earning an academic  
44 award, such as credits in general education, a major and/or minor, and all prerequisite courses.

1 The chancellor shall maintain the academic program inventory. Only academic programs  
2 approved by the chancellor as recorded in the academic program inventory may be offered by  
3 system colleges and universities.

4  
5 **Part 6. Student Options when Academic Programs are Suspended, Closed, or Changed.** A  
6 system college or university shall provide a student admitted to an academic program an  
7 opportunity, consistent with system college or university policy, to complete the academic  
8 program when it is suspended or closed or when the requirements have changed.

9  
10 **Part 7. Academic Review.** Each system college and university shall regularly review its  
11 academic programs for the purpose of academic planning and improvement.

12  
13 Each system college and university shall submit an annual summary of its academic program  
14 review activity to the chancellor.

15  
16 The chancellor, as appropriate, may conduct statewide or regional reviews of academic programs  
17 or program clusters, report findings to the Board of Trustees and, when necessary, impose  
18 conditions on academic programs.

*Related Documents: Procedure 3.36.1 - Academic Programs*

*Date of Implementation: 8/01/07,*

*Date of Adoption: 6/20/07,*

*Date & Subject of Revisions:*

*6/20/07 - Repealed the following policies:*

*3.2 - Academic Program Inventory*

*3.10 - Academic Program Review*

*3.12 - Academic Program Suspension and Reinstatement and Closure*

*3.14 - Academic Program Approval*

*Procedure 3.14.1 - Addressing Transfer in Approval of New Programs*

*3.17 - Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates*

*Procedure 3.17.1 - Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates*

*3.19 - Academic Program Redesign.*

*3.20 - Academic Program Replication or Relocation.*

*3.25 - Degree Granting Authority.*

*Click here for additional 3.36 [HISTORY](#)*