

**Policy 1999-01-A: *The Student Transfer Policy***

**See Also:** [Board of Governors' Policy 1990-06-A: Academic Degrees;](#)  
[Procedure/Standard Number 2016-24: Graduation Residency Requirements](#)

**Adopted:** January 14, 1999

**Amended:** October 6, 2016

**A. Introduction**

The student transfer policy operates on the principle that competencies and learning outcomes developed and documented through prior learning are the basis of recognition of transfer credit, not course matching. The intent of this policy is to maximize the acceptance and application of college-level credits awarded by regionally accredited institutions.

Sound public policy advocates that students who transfer into and among State System universities be able to complete their education without unnecessary repetition of learning successfully completed and documented at another institution.

The State System recognizes the value of learning that students demonstrate upon earning an Associate degree. Undergraduate students who transfer into a State System university with an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree in a parallel program will be awarded junior status and will have the same requirements for admission to a particular academic program as native students.

**The purposes of this policy are:**

1. To facilitate transfer of undergraduate and graduate students and their prior learning to and among State System universities.
2. To ensure that students can complete their education without unnecessary duplication of coursework.
3. To assist non-diploma and non-degree-holding students who have earned college-level credits from a previously attended PA Community college earn an associate degree or other credential by “reverse transferring” their current PA State System University credits back to their PA Community College.

**B. Background**

In 2008, legislation amended the Public School Code of 1949 by adding Article XX-C “Transfer of the Credits between Institutions of Higher Education” and established the Statewide Transfer and Articulation System so that students could transfer Associates of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degrees into parallel bachelor degree programs at State System universities with junior standing.

A Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC) developed a process and timeline for implementing statewide program to program articulation agreements. TAOC created a transfer credit framework for 30 credits of foundational courses in 6 areas as well as the guidelines for program articulation from 2 year to 4 year institutions. Representative community college and 4 year college faculty developed Program to Program (P2P) transfer articulation understandings for academic major programs.

### **C. Definitions**

#### **1. Undergraduate Degrees:**

- **Associate's Degrees:** An Associate degree indicates that the holder has developed proficiencies sufficient to prepare for upper division collegiate work or to enter directly into a specific occupation. Associate degrees are awarded only for completion of a coherent program of study designed for a specific purpose. They reflect satisfactory achievement of a minimum of 60 semester hours of credit, in two parts: a general education component and an area of concentration or major component. Examples of Associate Degrees include Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Associate of Applied Science.
- **Bachelor's Degrees:** A Bachelor's degree is a four year degree that consists of two principal components, general education and study in depth in a major, which, taken together, are designed to prepare the student for a productive career, informed citizenship, and continuous growth.

#### **2. Graduate Degrees:**

- **Master's Degrees:** A Master's degree represents advanced study beyond the baccalaureate degree and signifies mastery in a discipline or professional field. A master's program requires a minimum of 30 semester credit hours and usually includes three basic components: (a) a common core of courses related to the discipline or field of study; (b) a concentration or specialization in a focused area of the discipline; and (c) cognate courses which broaden perspective or mastery, or provide special skills such as statistics or foreign language.
- **Doctorate Degrees:** The doctorate is the highest academic degree awarded in American higher education and is of two types: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Professional Doctorate. Though the primary distinction is that the Ph.D. is a research degree and professional degrees are applied degrees, most doctoral programs include both research and applied studies.

3. **Certificates:** A certificate is a formal credit-based credential designated on the academic record and awarded by an educational institution to indicate completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level that does not culminate in a degree.

4. **Program to Program (P2P):** Refers to a Pennsylvania statewide program to major program articulation agreement that provides a clear transfer pathway into a State System university for community college students who have selected a transferable major program. Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees that are part of the P2P articulation contain a minimum of 30 hours of liberal arts among the following six fields of

study: Composition, Public Speaking, Humanities & Arts, Behavioral/Social Sciences, Sciences, and Mathematics and 21 credits of major program coursework.

5. **Prior Learning:** Refers to student learning that occurred prior to enrollment at a State System university. Prior learning includes college-level credits earned elsewhere as well as the assessment of skills, knowledge and competencies acquired outside the classroom against a set of standards or learning outcomes. Prior learning may include documented learning such as (but not limited to) Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, DANTES, CLEP, military experience, and credit by exam.
6. **Credit:** The recognition of attendance or performance in an instructional activity (course or program) that can be applied by a recipient toward the requirements for a postsecondary degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award, irrespective of the activity's unit of measurement.
7. **Directed General Education (Prescribed General Education):** General education courses that are required for the major are considered "directed general education" or "prescribed general education". Therefore, directed (prescribed) general education courses are counted in the general education requirement/credits, not in the major or cognate requirements.
8. **Reverse Transfer:** A credit review of degree seeking students who transferred from a PA community college to a four-year Pennsylvania State System University without having earned their associate degree. Credits earned while working toward their bachelor degree will be sent to the PA Community College for evaluation for possible credit towards the completion of the associate degree requirements. PA's State System of Higher Education Universities and the 14 Pennsylvania Community Colleges have a signed and executed statewide Reverse Transfer Agreement.

#### **D. Policy Statement**

All college-level credits from regionally accredited institutions will be accepted in transfer, regardless of how the prior learning was acquired. The intent of this policy is to maximize the application of college-level credits awarded by regionally accredited institutions. Review of learning from non-regionally accredited institutions will be evaluated locally on a student by student basis. State System Universities shall ensure consistency and equity in the application of credit from non-regionally accredited institutions.

It is up to the receiving State System University as to how the credit is applied towards the intended degree:

#### **Undergraduate**

- In the acceptance and application of undergraduate transfer college-level credits, the receiving institution will first apply as many college-level credits as possible toward the satisfaction of general education requirements, then to requirements in the major and finally to elective credits.

- State System universities will recognize the integrity, design and validity of general education programs at other institutions and will accept general education coursework when comparable (though perhaps not identical to general education at the receiving State System institution). There shall not be a course to course equivalency requirement.
- Students who transfer from one State System institution to another State System institution with their general education program completed will have their general education requirements met. Universities with unique signature general education requirements may expect students to satisfy those requirements if doing so does not extend the student's time to degree.
- Undergraduate students who transfer into the State System of Higher Education with an Associate degree in a parallel academic programs or as part of the P2P Statewide agreements will be awarded junior standing.

### **Graduate**

- Students may transfer one-third of the equivalent graduate-level credits required in a graduate program.

### **E. Guaranteed Admissions**

Admission to a State System university is guaranteed for undergraduate students transferring from a Pennsylvania Community College with an Associate degree and for students transferring from one State System University to another State System University.

- Admission is guaranteed into a State System University but not to a specific major or degree program.
- Criminal Conviction of a Felony Offense or Dismissal from a Previous Institution for Disciplinary Reasons may limit the ability to enroll in the Institution or complete certain academic majors/programs and may affect approval to live in university-owned or university-affiliated housing. These will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

### **F. Effective Date**

The policy will become effective no later than start of Fall 2017.



# PA State System of Higher Education Board of Governors

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**Effective:** January 14, 1999; Section F is effective fall 1999

Page 1 of 7

## **Policy 1999-01: *The Academic Passport and Student Transfer Policy***

**See Also:**

**Adopted:** January 14, 1999

**Amended:**

### **A. Purpose**

1. To create an Academic Passport to facilitate transfer of students and their credits from Pennsylvania community colleges to and among System universities.
2. To set forth general principles and guidelines for the implementation of the Academic Passport and student transfer policy.
3. To provide for periodic assessment of the Academic Passport and reporting of the outcomes to the Board of Governors, the chancellor, the presidents, and other System constituencies to ensure accountability and continuous improvement of the System's transfer programs.

### **B. Background**

Act 188, the enabling legislation for the State System of Higher Education, mandates that the State System provide high quality education at the lowest possible cost to the students. Accessibility, openness, convenience, and availability of a range of programs to interested and eligible Pennsylvanians always has been an objective of State System universities.

In addition to the 95,000 students enrolled in State System universities, more than 170,000 students attend Pennsylvania community colleges in degree credit and non-credit programs. Many of these college and university students, through life circumstances, find it necessary to relocate during their college career or obtain their post-secondary education from two or more institutions. Sound public policy mandates that these students be able to complete their education without unnecessary repetition of course work that already has been successfully completed at another accredited institution. An objective of the

Commonwealth's public colleges and universities, therefore, is the creation of a seamless system of public higher education in which students move freely between and among accredited public institutions of advanced learning. In January 1998, the System's Board of Governors adopted a resolution to affirm the Academic Passport, which was designed to assist the transfer of community college students who earn the Associate of Arts (A.A.) or the Associate of Science (A.S.) degree. Incumbent students of State System universities with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher were also deemed to have an Academic Passport for the transfer of credit to and among System institutions.

Although it is preferable that students transfer with the A.A or A.S. degree, experience shows that the vast majority of students transfer without having completed their studies at the community college. Thus, it is vital that any effective articulation policy addresses both students who transfer with an associate degree and students who transfer prior to completing a degree program.

Underlying this policy is the belief that the competencies developed through general education are more important than individual courses. Recognition of the integrity and validity of the general education program at each sending institution results in acceptance of a general education program, which is comparable, but may not be identical to the general education program at the receiving institution.

### C. Definitions

**The Academic Passport** - The Academic Passport, described in detail in Section E.1 and E.2 of this policy, is a transfer program designed to promote and facilitate the transfer of students of Pennsylvania community colleges to State System of Higher Education universities, and to support the transfer of undergraduate credits earned by State System students to other System universities.

**Associate Degrees** - Pursuant to Board Policy 1990-06, *Academic Degrees*, associate degrees indicate that the holder has developed proficiencies sufficient to prepare for upper division collegiate work or to enter directly into a specific occupation. Associate degrees are awarded only for completion of a coherent program of study designed for a specific purpose. They reflect satisfactory achievement of a minimum of 60 semester hours of credit, in two parts: a general education component and an area of concentration or major component.

1. Associate of Arts (A.A.) - An Associate of Arts degree program is designed specifically for transfer into baccalaureate degree programs in the arts, humanities, social, or behavioral sciences fields, or in professional fields based upon these disciplines. Recipients of the A.A. degree normally complete a minimum of 60 credit hours.

2. Associate of Science (A.S.) - An Associate of Science degree program is designed primarily for transfer into baccalaureate programs in one of the mathematical, biological, or physical sciences, or into one of the professional fields with these fields as its base. The A.S. degree also normally requires the successful completion of 60 semester hours of study.

**D. Policy Statement**

The policy of the Board of Governors of the State System of Higher Education encourages the seamless transfer of students between accredited Pennsylvania community colleges and System universities and between and among System universities. To that end, community college and System students who meet the established eligibility criteria shall be granted an Academic Passport, which shall provide entry to a System university and, pursuant to the guidelines below, ensure the transfer and acceptance of course credits.

**E. Procedures and Criteria for the Academic Passport**

The following sections outline the eligibility criteria for the Academic Passport and the procedures under which credits earned at one institution may be accepted by and applied to a degree program at the receiving institution.

1. Students Transferring With an Associate Degree

Students are encouraged to complete an Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.) degree program prior to transfer. Students who earn the A.A. or A.S. degree in a transfer or college parallel program from an accredited public Pennsylvania community college and who apply in accordance with the established university time frame shall have an Academic Passport that provides entry into any university in the State System of Higher Education.

System universities will recognize and honor the Academic Passport by admitting such students and shall, consistent with G.5 (Guiding Principles) apply credit towards graduation for all college parallel course work completed for the associate degree.

Up to a maximum of 45 general education credits and liberal arts course credits earned at the two-year college shall be used to meet lower division university general education requirements, even if the receiving university does not offer the specific course being transferred or has not designated that course as general education. A course by course match shall not be required.

Capacity limits and/or higher admissions standards may apply to certain high demand academic programs.

Students transferring with an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree to a System university must have a 2.0 minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) in all course work presented for transfer from each institution attended.

Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees recognized for the Academic Passport must contain, as a minimum, 30 hours of liberal arts among the following fields of study: Composition/Communications, Humanities/Fine Art, Behavioral/Social Sciences, Biological/Physical Sciences, and Mathematics and Computer Science. Vocational, technical, and career courses shall not be used to satisfy general education requirements.

## 2. Intra-System Transfer

Incumbent System university students who have attained a GPA of 2.0 or higher in a minimum of 12 credit hours of college level course work shall hold an Academic Passport enabling transfer to any other System university.

System universities shall recognize and honor the Passport held by incumbent students who apply within the established university time frame by providing admission upon transfer and shall, consistent with G.5 (Guiding Principles), apply credit towards graduation for all college course work completed at the sending university.

Up to a maximum of 45 general education credits and/or liberal arts course credits earned at the sending university shall be used to meet lower division university general education requirements, even if the receiving university does not offer the specific course being transferred or has not designated that course as general education. A course by course match shall not be required.

Capacity limits and/or higher admissions standards may apply to certain high demand academic programs.

Instruction Through Distance Learning: With the prior approval of the student's home institution, System students holding the Academic Passport shall be entitled to take any course offered through distance learning and listed in the catalogue at any other System university and have those credits and the grade earned accepted by their home institution. The home institution retains the right to determine the application of such credits towards the satisfaction of specific degree or major requirements.

## F. Procedures and Criteria for Transferring Without the Academic Passport

Pennsylvania community college students who have not completed the A.S. or A.A. degree may also apply to and be accepted for admission to a System university. To facilitate the transfer of students with a minimum of 12 credit hours of college level course work, up to a maximum of 45 credits in courses which

have been designated and credited as general education by an accredited Pennsylvania community college shall be used to meet lower division university general education requirements, even if the receiving university does not offer the specific course being transferred or has not designated that course as general education.

Students seeking to transfer course credits without the completed A.S. or A.A. degree must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 or greater in all course work presented for transfer for each institution attended.

## **G. Guiding Principles**

1. Students seeking to transfer to a State System university and who are admissible shall receive an evaluation of credits prior to enrollment and payment of tuition and fees. (Application fees may still be required.)
2. Current or future mutually agreed upon institutional articulation agreements may provide for the transfer of credits in excess of the numbers contained in this policy. Transfer students who meet the conditions of published articulation agreements (i.e., 2+2) between the sending and receiving institutions shall not be required to take a higher number of credits for the baccalaureate degree than indigenous students of the receiving institution.
3. For students holding an Academic Passport, admission to a specific curriculum and acceptance of transfer credits in that curriculum at a participating university shall be determined by the university based upon the same established criteria required for indigenous students.
4. Students transferring from a Pennsylvania community college with an Academic Passport shall be entitled to the same rights and privileges accorded System students with junior status.
5. In the acceptance and application of credits for students holding an Academic Passport, the receiving university shall look first to apply as many credits as possible towards the satisfaction of lower division general education requirements. Next the receiving university shall look towards applying the credits remaining to satisfy requirements in the major. Lastly, credits may be applied to satisfy elective requirements. It is the intent of this policy that credits earned by a community college student as part of a qualifying degree program should be accepted and applied towards completion of the baccalaureate degree. It is recognized that in certain circumstances, such as a change in major or intended program of study, it may not be possible to apply all credits earned at the community college to the four-year degree; however, absent legitimate academic reasons, the intent of this policy is to make full and complete use of credits earned in a qualified A.A. or A.S. degree program.

6. When a student transfers from one State System university to another, the record of all successfully completed undergraduate credits taken by the student at a System university shall be placed on the transcript of the receiving institution. The credits shall be evaluated by the receiving institution to determine which shall apply to general education requirements, the major requirements of the program in which the student is enrolled, or electives. State System universities shall honor and accept credits earned at other State System institutions. It is recognized that given the specific requirements of some majors for certification or licensure and the fact that students often do change majors, it may not always be possible to apply all credits earned to the receiving institution's degree program. The intent of this policy, however, is to maximize the acceptance and application of credits earned by a student at another System university.
7. Consistent with G.3 above, transfer students shall not be required to repeat or retake courses which they have already successfully completed at another accredited institution, as defined in this policy.

#### **H. Implementation**

1. The intent of this policy is to ensure that students transferring to System universities have the skills and competencies to succeed in upper level college work. Competency may also be demonstrated through examination, and each university should provide transfer students with the same opportunities as non-transfer students to demonstrate their competence.
2. System universities shall publish and promote all of their transfer programs, including the Academic Passport and other articulation agreements. They also shall offer transfer advisement and counseling to community college and university students interested in seeking admission to their institution.

An office or person shall be designated at each System university to manage the articulation and transfer process internally and to provide the contact point for external communication. A student appeals process for transfer issues shall be developed at each System university and published in the university catalog and other relevant documents.

3. Coordination of curriculum matters shall be the responsibility of the Articulation Coordinating Council with representatives of the participating colleges and universities meeting on a regular basis to work cooperatively to continuously improve and enhance the articulation between State System universities and Pennsylvania community colleges.
4. The Articulation Coordinating Council shall convene a meeting of System university faculty representatives and community college faculty representatives for the purpose of enhancing and advancing the development of program to program articulation agreements, exploring

agreement on a common core for general education, and to define more fully the distinctions between upper and lower division courses, and the assignment of course numbers. The discipline-based faculty groups also may consider programmatic implications associated with implementation of this policy.

5. It is recognized that much work remains to be done before Pennsylvania has an effective statewide articulation program. To that end, the Board of Governors directs the System universities to join with other publicly funded higher education institutions to (1) develop a statewide articulation program which would consider establishment of core to core general education and program to program agreements and (2) determine the applicability of Associate of Applied Science degree credits to baccalaureate degree programs as well as the feasibility of common course numbering, indexing, or other innovations designed to provide students with a more effective and efficient pathway through higher education.

**I. Periodic Review**

Each State System university shall prepare an outcomes assessment report on the effectiveness of the Academic Passport to be used as a basis for any necessary revisions and improvements. Such reports shall be compiled by the Office of the Chancellor and presented to the Board of Governors one year following the adoption of this policy and biannually thereafter. Included in the assessment shall be an institutional review of transfer decisions, a survey of students who have transferred, and other relevant data (e.g., retention rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates).

**J. Effective Date**

The Academic Passport (Sections E.1 and E.2 of this policy) shall become effective immediately.

Section F pertains to students transferring without a completed degree program, and shall become effective beginning with the fall semester 1999. This policy supersedes and replaces Board of Governors Policy 1983-05: Relationship with Two-Year Institutions.

