## Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges

Meeting Date**: November 12, 2026**

Agenda Item: **2.1**

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION:**

Committee: **Academic & Personnel Committee**

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Action Item: **Revisions to Policy 4140 – Academic Degrees & Programs**

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To create reduced-credit bachelor's programs, the state colleges have consistently reduced general education and elective coursework. Consequently, certain comprehensive majors may exceed the fifty-seven (57) credit-hour limit in Board Policy 4140. We request that Board Policy 4140 include an academic program exception permitting reduced-credit bachelor's programs to exceed the 57-credit-hour limit by up to 9 credit hours, not to exceed 66 credit hours total.

The System Office recommends approval of the revisions to Board Policy 4140.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Board Policy 4140

# Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges

## Academics

**POLICY NAME:** Academic Degrees and Programs

**POLICY NUMBER:** 4140

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## A. PURPOSE

To establish consistent definitions and descriptions for the academic degrees and programs offered by the Nebraska State College System.

## B. DEFINITIONS

1. **Associate of General Studies Degree**: The academic award bestowed on an undergraduate student who has met the eligibility criteria for a post-facto credential based upon a minimum of seventy (70) credits of coursework completed prior to discontinuing enrollment at a State College.
2. **Baccalaureate Degree**: The academic award bestowed on an undergraduate student who completes a minimum of one hundred twenty (120) unduplicated credit hours and meets other academic requirements, including, but not limited to, sufficient credits in the major, general studies, upper division level courses, and a minimum grade point average overall and in the major. A Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degree is exempt from these requirements and is defined below.
3. **Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) Major:** An undergraduate academic program that ranges from thirty (30) to forty (40) credit hours of coursework that will prepare individuals for management and/or leadership opportunities and leads to a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree.
4. **Certificate:** A cluster of undergraduate courses that develop specific knowledge and/or skills and supports an occupational outcome or industry certification. This credential does not itself lead to a degree. An undergraduate certificate shall range from nine (9) to fifteen (15) credits of predominantly upper division courses.
5. **Certificate of Advanced Studies:** A cluster of graduate courses that concentrate on specific knowledge and/or skills aligned to an area of specialization or industry certification. These courses are available to non-degree seeking graduate students; however, they may also be used toward the completion of a graduate degree. A certificate of advanced studies shall include a minimum of nine (9) credit hours.

6. **Competency-based Credit:** Course credit awarded through a variety of methods to demonstrate a student's mastery of course competencies, as aligned with student learning outcomes. These methods may include, but not be limited to, a portfolio of student-selected evidence, performance assessment, standardized exam, capstone project, presentation, or other evidence-based approach approved by the College.
7. **Comprehensive Examination:** A summative assessment over a program of study, administered in oral or written form that includes questions regarding course work and other materials relevant to a graduate student's field of study.
8. **Comprehensive Major:** An undergraduate academic program that represents an expanded study of a discipline and leads to a Bachelor of Art or Bachelor of Science degree. It may consist of a core and two or more options/concentrations and ranges from a minimum of forty-eight (48) credit hours to no more than fifty-seven (57) credit hours. If a core is established for the comprehensive major, it shall also include a minimum of two options/concentrations.
9. **Core:** A cluster of required courses in a major that comprises the foundation for the major and is aligned with the specific student learning outcomes developed by the faculty. The core includes a minimum of twelve (12) credit hours for undergraduate comprehensive majors and nine (9) credit hours for graduate majors. A core leads to a undergraduate comprehensive major when combined with an option/concentration or leads to a graduate major when combined with a focus area.
10. **Endorsement:** A series of undergraduate or graduate courses which leads to teacher certification in accordance with standards established by the Nebraska State Department of Education (NDE).
11. **Focus Area:** A cluster of graduate courses within a graduate program that concentrates on a specific area of specialization within a larger academic discipline and that, when combined with a core, leads to a graduate degree. A focus area shall include a minimum of twelve (12) credit hours.
12. **General Studies:** A series of undergraduate courses designed to assist the student in acquiring the intellectual foundation that will last for a lifetime of learning. General studies coursework will result in the graduation of students who are intellectually curious, proficient in their own field of study, knowledgeable and informed in the affairs of the world, and able to participate in society in a manner that will emphasize the role of individual contributions in the development of a better world.
13. **Graduate Degree:** The academic award bestowed on a student who completes a minimum of thirty (30) credit hours in an academic discipline and meets other academic requirements, including, but not limited to, completion of a baccalaureate degree, sufficient credits in the graduate core, and a minimum overall grade point average.
14. **Graduate Major:** A graduate academic program that comprises the foundation for a graduate degree and addresses the established accreditation and/or

professional graduate standards for the program. It may include a core and, if so, shall include two or more focus areas.

15. **Industry-Aligned Experience Credit**: A cluster of courses for which a student can receive credit once the experience is documented and submitted for consideration.
16. **Internship:** A meaningful work experience that allows the student to apply classroom theoretical knowledge and skills in a practical work setting and develop related job skills under the guidance of trained and established professionals.
17. **Minor:** An undergraduate academic program that concentrates on a subject but does not itself lead to an undergraduate degree. A minor shall range from eighteen (18) to twenty-one (21) credit hours.
18. **Option/Concentration:** A series of undergraduate courses within a comprehensive major that, when combined with a core leads to an undergraduate degree. An option or concentration is a sub-specialty of a comprehensive major and shall include a minimum of eighteen (18) credit hours.
19. **Reduced Credit Baccalaureate Degree:** A baccalaureate degree, specifically referenced as a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science in Applied "_", which is bestowed on an undergraduate student who completes a minimum of ninety (90) unduplicated credit hours and meets other academic requirements established by the College for the specific program offered.
20. **Scholarly/Creative/Action Research Project:** A scholarly or creative work that does not necessarily conform to the format of a thesis. The project should relate to a graduate student's area of interest and professional practice.
21. **Subject Major**: An undergraduate academic program that concentrates on an academic discipline and ranges from thirty (30) to thirty-six (36) credit hours. A subject major does not establish a core or options/concentrations, as the major requires one set of courses focused upon a single academic subject. A subject major shall be combined with a minor or second major to lead to a Bachelor of Art or Bachelor of Science degree.
22. **Thesis**: A document that presents a graduate student's formal research and findings on a topic related to the graduate student's field of interest. The format should conform to the most current professional standard of the discipline.

## C. POLICY

### 1. General Degree Requirements

- All academic degrees and programs in the Nebraska State College System shall conform to the following descriptions and definitions when prescribing degree, program and graduation requirements.

- Degrees and programs are based upon a unit of educational measurement referred to as a credit hour, which is defined in Board Policy 4141.
- Supportable and articulated requests for exemptions to the established definitions and descriptions for academic degree and programs must be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval and will be documented in Section 4 below.

**2. Associate of General Studies Degree Requirements**

2.1. Eligibility Requirements

- Attended a Nebraska State College but is not currently attending.
- Earned a minimum of 70 undergraduate credit hours.
- Has not attended the College for at least one year.
- Has not earned an associate degree prior to attending the State College.
- Is not eligible for an associate degree from a Nebraska Community or Tribal College, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, or the University of Nebraska, through a reverse transfer process (e.g. earned 15 credits or more at the 2-year college level prior to transferring to a State College).
- Has not earned a bachelor's degree from the State College.
- Has not earned an associate or bachelor's degree from another institution after attending the State College (as identified through National Student Clearinghouse).

2.2. Degree Requirements

- Completed a minimum of 70 undergraduate credit hours with a C- or above grade.
- Completed a range (15 to 42 credit hours) of courses and experiences aligned to the areas of:
  - Quantitative/Logical Reasoning
  - Effective Communication
  - Critical Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving
  - Cultural, Aesthetic, and Creative Arts
  - Human Behavior and Society
- Completed a minimum of 15 credits at the State College,
- Holds a minimum of a 2.0 Cumulative GPA.

**3. Baccalaureate Degree Requirements**

3.1. Upper Division Coursework

- The Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BS) degrees shall include a minimum of thirty-six (36) credit hours of upper division coursework.

3.2. The Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree is designed to accommodate transfer students who have completed a technical associate degree from an accredited community or technical college or the equivalent in prior course work and life experience and shall include a minimum of twenty (20) credit hours of upper division coursework.

~~3.2.~~3.3. ~~–~~Teacher Education Endorsements

- The number of credit hours required to complete a teaching endorsement shall not exceed the minimum credit hours required by NDE by more than ten percent (10%) for field endorsements with fifty (50) or more minimum credit hours established.
- The number of credit hours required to complete a teaching endorsement shall not exceed the minimum credit hours required by NDE by more than twenty percent (20%) for field endorsements with fewer than fifty (50) minimum credit hours established and all subject endorsements.

~~3.3.~~3.4. General Studies

- The general studies program shall be clearly aligned to the College's established student learning outcomes and range from thirty (30) to thirty-seven (37) credit hours.
- The general studies program requirements for the Bachelor of Applied Science degree shall not exceed thirty (30) credit hours.
- The number of general studies program credit hours may be extended up to forty (40) if an upper division (300 or above) capstone course is included in the requirements and provides students with a culminating general studies experience.
- Upper division coursework may be included as options for students to select to meet general studies requirements, but only the general studies capstone course shall be mandated as an upper-level course requirement.

## 4. Graduate Degree Requirements

- Graduate programs may include a culminating experience, such as a thesis, internship, comprehensive examination, a scholarly/ creative/action research project, nationally normed instruments, simulations, practicums or other valid experiences appropriate to a student's degree program as determined by the discipline and/or a student's graduate committee.

- A maximum of 50% of the credit hours used to fulfill the requirements for a graduate degree may be met through credit hours included in the conferral of a prior graduate degree from the Nebraska State Colleges.
- Graduate program courses will be offered as either a 500, 600, or 700 level course, with no minimum percentage of either level required for a given program.
- 500-level courses may be cross-listed as undergraduate courses; 600-level courses shall not be cross-listed as undergraduate courses.
- A maximum of 50% of the credit hours required for a graduate program can be transferred from another accredited institution to meet the credit hour requirements for the program, regardless of whether the credit hours were used to meet a previous degree.
- A maximum of 50% of the established graduate program coursework must be completed in courses designed for graduate work in which only graduate students are enrolled. Cross-listed undergraduate/graduate courses taken at the graduate level may be used to fulfill the requirements for an undergraduate degree program and then subsequently also be used to fulfill graduate requirements in a related graduate program.

**5. Alternative Methods for Awarding Undergraduate Credit**

5.1. Competency-based Credit

- Students may demonstrate their competency of the established student learning outcomes for one or more courses, up to the maximum allowances set in 5.3. The evidence provided for each course will be evaluated in relation to the course requirements, and if approved, a grade of Credit (CR) will be awarded and the courses will not be included in GPA computations.
- Each College may offer a one-credit course that establishes the vehicle through which students can enroll and receive support in developing and submitting portfolios for evaluation.

5.2. Industry-Aligned Experience Credit

- An established cluster of courses offered by the College may be awarded to a student who can provide documentation or evidence of the industry-aligned experience. This may include job-related training programs, years of experience in a specific role, and/or industry-related certifications. Once documented, a grade of Credit (CR) will be awarded for the cluster of courses aligned to the experience, but they will not be included in GPA computations.
- Each College will maintain a website that identifies the approved industry-aligned experiences and the coursework that can be met through documentation of the experience.

5.3. Maximum Allowances

- A maximum of 40% of a credential may be met through alternative methods for awarding credit.
- For educator preparation programs, a maximum of 50% of the core requirements and a maximum of 50% of the endorsement requirements may be met through alternative methods for awarding credit.

**6. Approved Academic Program Exemptions**

- Teacher education field endorsement programs may require more than one hundred twenty (120) credit hours for degree completion.
- The Certified Public Accountant (CPA) program may require more than one hundred twenty (120) credit hours for degree completion.
- The WSC Industrial Technology comprehensive major may require more than the current limit of fifty-seven (57) credit hours; approved for sixty-three (63) credit hours – April 2022.
- The PSC Business Administration - Certified Management Accountant (CMA) option may require more than the current limit of fifty-seven (57) credit hours; approved for sixty-three (63) credit hours – June 2022.
- The reduced credit bachelor's programs may require more than the current limit of fifty-seven (57) credit hours; approved for no more than sixty-six (66) credit hours – November 2026.

## FORMS/APPENDICES:

None

**SOURCE:**

**Policy Adopted:** February 1995

**Policy Revised:** June 2011, March 2015, January 2016, September 2016, June 2017, January 2020, January 2021, January 2022, March 2022, April 2022, July 2022, March 2023, June 2025, January 2026, November 2026