

BOARD OF REGENTS
BRIEFING PAPER

quality of learning experience,” and associate of arts or science or applied associate of science is “a lower division undergraduate degree normally representing about two years (60 semester units) of college studies or its equivalent in depth and quality of learning experience.” In defining the credit requirements for a bachelor’s or associate’s degree in this manner, Northwest acknowledges that there may be some circumstances for which a degree would require more than 120 or 60 credits to address licensure or other professional accreditation requirements.

POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

Based on conversations with the faculty and institutional administrators, the following points were noted in opposition to the proposal:

- x Potential reduction in the quality of the degree;
- x Infringement upon the faculty’s responsibility to decide degree requirements; and
- x Unlikely to reduce time to degree since student choices mean more courses, e.g. part-time status due to full-time employment, etc.

ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

Maintain the current policy where by the minimum number of credits for a bachelor’s degree is 120 credits and the minimum for an associate’s degree is 60 credits, thus allowing current degree requirements to continue.

COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____

X Amends Current Board Policy: Title 4, Chapter 16, Sections 16 and 24 and New Sections 39 and 40
Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____

Other: _____

X Fiscal Impact: Yes No

Explain: Over time, as students take fewer credits thus less instructional cost is incurred, there will be a savings; however, it is not possible to estimate that savings with any accuracy. Additionally, the cost of a degree to students and families will be less if they declare a major early and take only required courses.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH: 120 Credits-to-Bachelor's Degree Policies in other States

The survey of land-grant institutions reveals that most have policies setting 120 credit hours as the minimum number of credits required for the bachelor's degree and leaves it to the academic units of the institution to establish the specific number. Degrees that deviate significantly from the 120 credit hour standard are, in general, those requiring professional certification, e.g. education or architecture, or those which have specifically been developed as 5-year programs.

The following table lists cases where the 120-credit has been established as a maximum for attaining the bachelor's degree in specific circumstances.

State Statutes Some states have mandated through their legislature that a bachelor's degree program may be no more than 120 credit hours with noted exceptions:

State	State Statute	Source
Minnesota	In response to the passage of a bill in the 2007 legislature, the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities Board of Trustees adopted a policy which set the maximum number of credit hours required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits and the number of credit hours required for an associate degree at 60 credits. The board policy allows the Chancellor to establish a process for granting waivers for specific degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of semester credits.	Minnesota Session Laws 2007, Ch. 144 MNSCU Board Policy, Chapter 36, Part 3, Subpart C
Texas	State law provides that for any student entering from Fall 2008 on, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation agency	

	Policy	Source
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Regents. Exceptions will be approved only on the basis of the criteria listed below:

- x Accreditation standards of the appropriate specialized accrediting agency mandate a baccalaureate program of over

POLICY PROPOSAL - HANDBOOK
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 16,

POLICY PROPOSAL - HANDBOOK
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 16, newSECTION 39
Bachelor's Degree Requirements

Additions appear in boldface italic, deletions are ~~stricken~~ and bracketed]

POLICY PROPOSAL - HANDBOOK
TITLE 4, CHAPTER 16, new SECTION 40
Associate Degree Requirements

Additions appear in boldface italics, deletions are ~~stricken~~ and bracketed]

INSERT THE FOLLOWING NEW SECTION 40:

Section 40. NSHE Associate Degree Requirements

1. The standard number of credits required for ~~repe~~ of an associate degree from an NSHE institution shall be 60. Credit requirements for ~~ea~~ degree, including a ~~to~~-year plan of study, shall be published in the institution's catalog.
2. Institutions with a compelling reason for exceeding the 60-credit standard in a particular field of study may request an exception to the ~~provisio~~ of this section from the Chancellor.
3. Exceptions to the 60-credit degree standard ~~may~~ be approved if evidence submitted to the Chancellor supports the necessity of ~~more~~ **credits** under at least one of the following circumstances:
 - a. The program is appropriately ~~defi~~ed as a three-year program;
 - b. Professional accreditation ~~reque~~irements stipulate a ~~high~~ number of credits or require coursework that cannot be realistically ~~by~~ completed within 60 credits; or
 - c. A program is governed by certification or licensure ~~requireme~~nts that result in the necessity for credits in excess of 60 over two years.
4. Institutions will report periodically to the Board of Regents the number of credits required by their academic programs and the ~~ratio~~ for continuing exceptions to the 60-credit standard.

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This policy is effective Fall 2012.