

Guidelines on Award of Academic Credit for Military Education, Training and Experience by Virginia Public Higher Education Institutions

Approved by Council: July 16, 2013

The Commonwealth of Virginia is committed to fostering an educated and skilled workforce, which is essential for economic prosperity and meaningful work for its citizens. Increased enrollment in – and successful completion of – postsecondary education programs is critical to achieving that goal. The Commonwealth of Virginia is also committed to serving the needs of its military and veteran population. Virginia’s public institutions of higher education are subject to an Executive Order from the Governor to expand services to meet the educational needs of veterans. In addition, Virginia Code §23.1-904, established by the 2012 General Assembly, states:

The governing boards of each public institution of higher education shall, in accordance with guidelines developed by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, implement policies for the purpose of awarding academic credit to students for educational experience gained from service in the armed forces of the United States.

This guideline document was developed in fulfillment of the General Assembly’s charge to SCHEV and the public institutions of higher education. It is intended to promote the goal of having a military-friendly system of higher education while preserving the unique missions and autonomy of the institutions.

Statement of Principles

The following principles form the foundation of these guidelines:

1. The Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011 or Top Jobs 21 (Virginia Code, Title 23.1, Chapter 3) established a goal for statewide college completion, providing that Virginia’s public institutions are committed to “conferring approximately 100,000 cumulative additional undergraduate degrees on Virginians” by 2025. (Virginia Code § 23.1-301). An important strategy in

meeting this goal is to increase completion by non-traditional students, a category that includes military-related students.

2. Executive Order No. 29, "Serving Virginia's Veterans," issued by Governor McDonnell in 2010, articulated a goal of "making Virginia our nation's most veteran-friendly state." EO 29 directed all state agencies "to identify new, expanded, or customized services that meet the educational, health care, and social services needs of Virginia's veterans." As state agencies, Virginia's public two- and four-year institutions of higher education should ensure that academic policies help Virginia's veterans to achieve their educational goals.
3. In December 2011, the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment endorsed the Virginia Higher Education Military-Friendly Policy, calling for the public institutions of higher education to incorporate certain practices into their operating plans to ensure that they are providing a high-level of service to military-related students.
4. The implementation of policies that provide flexibility and clarity to students in regard to the award of credit for military education and training will help to increase degree and certification completion among this population.
5. Students who have served in the armed forces, or who continue to serve while enrolled in a higher education program, are particularly reliant upon the flexible transfer of credits, because many of those completing a degree or certificate do not do so at the institution at which they first enrolled. Such students are entitled to transparency, consistency, and clarity with regard to institutions' program requirements and the availability of credit for prior learning and experience.
6. Virginia's system of public higher education has a duty to ensure that military-related students are able to access the full range of federal and state educational benefits to which they are entitled according to their military status. Institutions should preserve their overall eligibility for participation in federal programs. Institutional credit transfer policies should not cause students to repeat coursework unnecessarily and thus jeopardize their ability to complete a program prior to the expiration of their individual eligibility for military education benefits.

Guidelines for Institutional Policies

A. Elements of Guidelines:

Each two- and four-year public institution of higher education shall develop and implement processes for awarding credit to students for military education and training through prior learning assessment (the award of credit for learning that occurs outside of the academic setting).

1. Each institution shall exercise care in evaluating and determining its acceptance or rejection of each of the following methods as elements of these processes:
 - a. Awarding credit for appropriate learning acquired in military service at levels consistent with the American Council on Education (ACE) Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services and/or those transcribed by the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF).
 - b. Awarding credit for successful performance on national for-credit examination programs such as The College Board College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DSST exams, or the Excelsior College examination.
 - c. Awarding credit based upon individualized portfolio evaluation, which may be conducted by faculty at the individual colleges or by using the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) guidelines or CAEL's LearningCounts.org, a national online prior learning assessment service.

Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to require institutions to award credit for coursework that is not offered, or is not reasonably comparable to coursework offered, by the institution. Neither should these guidelines be construed to limit awarding of credit solely to the three methods referenced above.

2. Institutional policies shall provide for disclosure to students of any academic residency requirements pertaining to the student's program of study, including total and any final year or final semester residency requirement, at or before the time the student enrolls in the program. The policies of an institution with a residency requirement that exceeds the minimum required by SACS-COC should establish a process for waiver, on a case-by-case basis - e.g., when that policy compels a student to continue enrollment past the expiration of his or her military education benefits.
3. Awarding of credit is ultimately the purview of each individual institution. Institutional policies should (i) respect credit awarded by other accredited

institutions to the greatest extent possible; (ii) describe the process by which the institution evaluates such credit; and (iii) provide that any denials of credit will include documentation of an educationally grounded rationale.

B. Implementation:

1. Following adoption of policies addressing the guidelines listed above, each institution shall provide a transparent method of disclosing its policies to current and prospective students, including posting on its website whether methods of prior learning assessment listed in Guideline 1 are or are not utilized by the institution.
2. Each institution shall designate a staff member or office who will serve as the responsible party in matters regarding transfer credit for military education and training. The contact information for this function shall be made available to students, preferably through posting on an appropriate page on the institution's website.
3. Following adoption by its governing board, each institution shall submit its policies to SCHEV, using a form developed by SCHEV staff, by June 30, 2014.
4. In the future, institutions shall notify SCHEV of any amendments to policies enacted pursuant to these guidelines. SCHEV staff will perform a periodic review of these guidelines and of institutional compliance with the assistance of the Military Education Advisory Committee.