

October 1, 2016

Academic and Student Affairs

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# DEGREE CREDIT CAPS

Report to the Legislature

Minnesota State



MINNESOTA STATE

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

In 2007, the Minnesota State Legislature directed the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees to adopt a policy setting the maximum number of credits for a baccalaureate degree at 120 semester credits and the maximum number of credits for an associate degree at 60 credits. The legislature allowed the board to grant waivers for specific degrees in which industry or professional accreditation standards required a greater number of credits.

In 2008, the legislature further directed the board to submit annually by October 1, a report on the board's current degree credit cap policy for baccalaureate and associate of arts degrees, and to identify the requests for waivers from the policy that had been submitted during the previous academic year, specifying the program and campus for which the request was made, and whether the request was granted.

## Policy and Procedure

The Board of Trustees, on January 21, 2009, amended Board Policy 3.36: Academic Programs to set credit length limits for baccalaureate and associate degrees, but allowed campuses to seek a waiver from the credit limits pursuant to industry or professional accreditation standards.

On January 30, 2009, the chancellor approved an amendment to System Policy 3.36.1 which adopted credit limits for baccalaureate and associate degrees and set out a procedure for processing waiver requests. These policies and procedures remain in effect.

## Waiver Requests 2015-2016

During the 2015-2016 academic year, St. Cloud State University requested a waiver for a 122 credit bachelor's degree in software engineering, and Saint Paul College requested a waiver for a 72 credit associate of applied science degree in nanoscience technology. There were no other waiver requests submitted. Both waiver requests were approved based on professional and industry standards.

## Conclusion

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is in compliance with the legislative directive to reduce associate degree requirements to 60 credits and baccalaureate degree requirements to 120 credits. All current programs that exceed the credit caps have been reviewed and granted a waiver based on industry and professional standards.



# DEGREE CREDIT CAP REPORT

## Background

The Minnesota state legislature, in Laws 2007, chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, directed the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees to create degree credit caps:

*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.*

During the 2008 legislative session, the legislature requested the board to submit an annual report, as codified by Minnesota Statutes 2015, section 136F.301:

*The board must annually by October 1 report to the chairs of the house of representatives and senate committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education policy on the board's current policy setting the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate and an associate of arts degree at 120 and 60 semester credits or their equivalent, respectively, as required by Laws 2007, chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b). The report must specifically identify requests in the previous academic year for waivers from the policy and the requests granted. The specific identification must include, among other things, the program and the campus for which a request was made and for which a waiver was granted.*

## Board Policy and Procedure

In response to the legislative mandate, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees amended Board Policy 3.36 to include a provision setting degree credit caps for baccalaureate and associate degrees. To implement the policy change, the chancellor amended System Procedure 3.36.1, Part 3 to specify the 120 and 60 semester credit requirements for baccalaureate and associate degrees offered by system colleges and universities, and to establish a process for seeking a waiver from those credit limits. The relevant sections of Policy 3.36 and Procedure 3.36.1 are included in Appendix A. These policies and procedures remain current.

## Waiver Requests and Decisions 2015-2016

### Baccalaureate Programs

St. Cloud State University requested a waiver for a Bachelor of Science in Engineering (BSE) program in Software Engineering at 122 credits. The request was reviewed and approved based on professional and industry standards.

### Associate Programs

Saint Paul College requested a waiver for an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) program in Nanoscience Technology at 72 credits. The request was reviewed and approved based on professional and industry standards.





There were no applications for a waiver from the 60 semester-credit cap for associate of art degrees, associate of fine arts degrees, or associate of science degrees.

### Progress in Academic Program Credit Reduction 2007-2016

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offers nearly 4,000 academic programs leading to certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Chart 1, below, illustrates the decrease over time in the number of programs that exceed credit limits. From August 2007 (when 60/120 legislation became effective), through July 1, 2016, the number of associate degree programs (AA, AS and AFA) over 60 credits has been reduced from 272 to 43 (an 84% decrease); associate of applied science degree programs (AAS) over 60 credits have been reduced from 595 to 235 (a 61% decrease), and baccalaureate degree programs over 120 credits have been reduced from 401 to 22 (a 95% decrease).

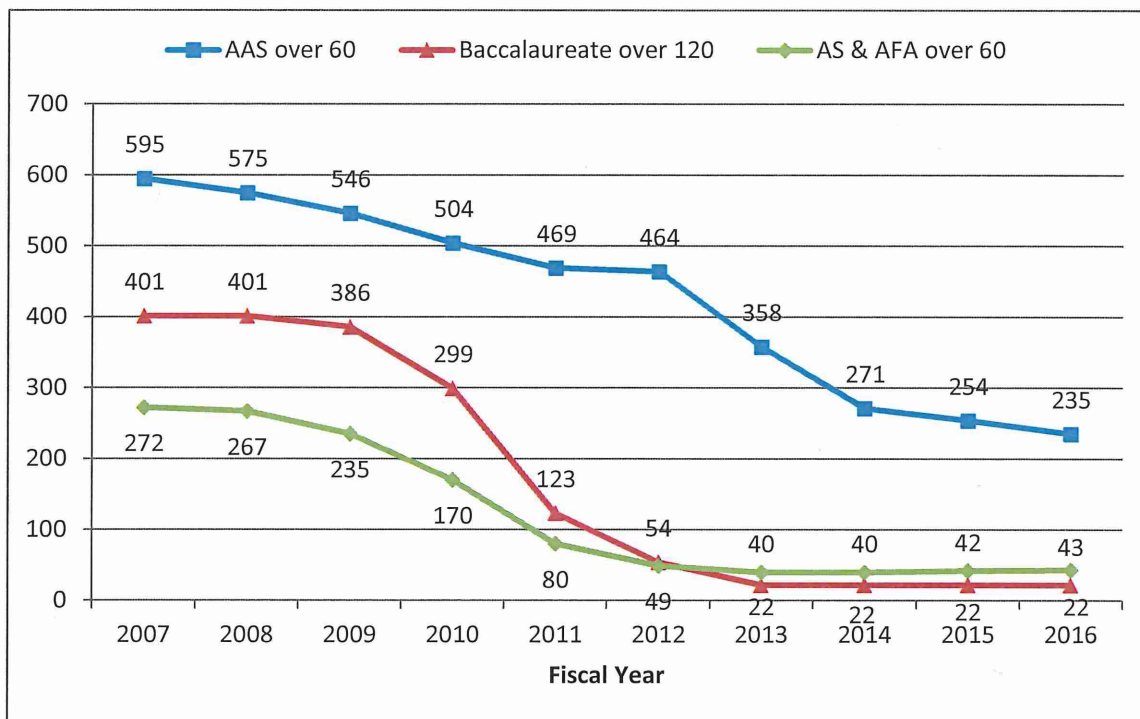


Chart 1: Programs that Exceed Credit Limits, 2007 – 2016

As displayed in Table 1, the great majority of degree programs meet the legislative requirements. For those programs that are granted waivers, the request has been supported by industry and professional standards. Furthermore, the numbers represent many programs in the same discipline that are offered at several colleges or universities. For example, the 22 baccalaureate programs exceeding the credit cap represent only two program disciplines: eight programs are in Teacher Education and 14 are in Engineering. The seven AFA programs represent one field, Music, and of the 36 associate of science programs, only four distinct program disciplines are included: 11 are Law Enforcement programs, 23 are Nursing, two are for EMT training, and one is for Dental Hygiene. The number of disciplines represented by the AAS programs with waivers is longer but all are in career and technical fields responding to statewide or regional industry standards.

Table 1. Number of Degree Programs and Waivers 2016.

Academic Degree	Number of Programs	Number of Programs Granted Waivers	Programs Receiving Waivers	Percentage of Programs Within Degree Credit Cap Limits
Baccalaureate	578	22	Education, Engineering	96.2%
Associate of Arts	32	0	0	100%
Associate of Fine Arts	32	7	Music	78.1%
Associate of Science	299	36	Law Enforcement, EMT, Nursing, Dental Hygiene,	88.0%
Associate of Applied Science	669	235		64.9%

## Conclusion

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is in compliance with the legislative directive to reduce associate degree requirements to 60 credits and baccalaureate degree requirements to 120 credits unless a waiver is granted for the program based on industry or professional standards. Substantial progress has been made since 2007 to bring all academic degree programs within the semester-credit requirements advocated by the state legislature. All programs currently exceeding the credit caps have been reviewed and granted a waiver based on industry and professional standards.



## APPENDIX A

### Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board Policies Chapter 3 – Educational Policies

#### 3.36 Academic Programs

##### Part 3. Authorized Academic Awards.

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

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

### Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System Procedure Chapter 3 – Educational Policies

#### Procedure 3.36.1 Academic Programs

##### Part 3. Authorized Academic Awards.

##### Subpart C. Program Credit Length Waivers for Associate and Baccalaureate Degrees.

1. Authority. The system office determines the approval or disapproval of all requests for waivers to exceed program credit length limitations.
2. Criteria for Granting Waivers. Credit length waivers may be granted when determined necessary to ensure that the degree provided meets industry or professional standards. Waivers shall be granted only when a need for a longer program credit length is demonstrated by one or more of the following:
  - a. Industry Standards
    - (1) National or international program certification,
    - (2) National or international standards, including skill standards,
    - (3) Standards recommended by a primary employer or multiple employers within a program service area.
  - b. Professional Standards
    - (1) National specialized program accreditation,
    - (2) State licensure requirements,
    - (3) National practices or standards.
3. Waiver Process for Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Fine Arts, and Baccalaureate degrees. The following process shall be followed to request a waiver:
  - a. Preparation of a waiver application for submission to the system office shall be consistent with accepted system college or university curriculum approval processes. Waiver requests for similar academic programs may be pursued on a Page 13 Procedure 3.36.1 multi-college/university basis when recommended by faculty consistent with accepted processes at each participating system college or university.
  - b. Academic program advisory committees may provide recommendations on learning requirements. Program advisory committee recommendations that support the standards may be submitted with the waiver request. For student representation on college or university academic program advisory committees, see Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1 Student Involvement in Decision-Making.
  - c. Waiver applications will be distributed for review and comment to state student associations, faculty union leadership, and system college and university administrators.





- d. The system office will act on the waiver application and notify the applicant.
  - e. Appeals related to waiver decisions will be processed through the vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
  - f. Public information regarding the waiver process, review criteria, rationale for decisions, and decisions reached will be available on the system office website
4. Waiver Process for Associate of Applied Science degrees. The following process shall be followed to request a waiver:
- a. Preparation of a waiver application for submission to the system office shall be consistent with accepted system college or university curriculum approval processes.
  - b. An associate of applied science waiver application shall compare and contrast credit lengths of comparable programs and provide a program analysis describing learning outcomes not found in shorter programs.
  - c. Academic program advisory committees shall provide recommendations on learning requirements. For student representation on college or university academic program advisory committees, see Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1.
  - d. Waiver applications shall document the approval of the system college or university curriculum committee, the program advisory committee, and the system college or university student representative on the program advisory committee. If there was no student representative on the program advisory committee, the system college or university student association shall review and comment on the waiver application.
  - e. Waiver applications will be distributed for review and comment to state student associations, faculty union leadership, and system college and university administrators.
  - f. The system office will act on the waiver application and notify the applicant.
  - g. Appeals related to waiver decisions will be processed through the senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
  - h. Public information regarding the waiver process, review criteria, rationale for decisions, and decisions reached will be available on the system office website.
  - i. Associate of applied science programs approved to exceed 60 credits shall include an explanation of why the program is longer than similar programs in the catalog description.

