



*CURRICULUM PROCEDURES REFERENCE MANUAL*

# Section 19

## Credit for Prior Learning

Section 19  
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## Section 19 Credit for Prior Learning

### I. General Information

This section of the NC Community College System Curriculum Procedures Reference Manual has been developed to provide colleges with information regarding the standardized process for awarding credit for prior learning. Learning gained from experiences that occur outside postsecondary education often merit consideration for academic credit.

#### A. Definition of Credit for Prior Learning

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) is curriculum credit awarded for college-level learning obtained through prior learning experiences other than curriculum coursework. This definition does not include curriculum credit transferred from another accredited US institution of higher education.

CPL encompasses knowledge, skills, and competencies that students have obtained as a result of their prior learning experiences.

The evaluation of CPL is an academic evaluation process through which students document verifiable college-level learning acquired outside of the traditional learning environment for academic credit. This is an academic process, and the procedures must maintain the same quality, integrity, and equity as any other academic program. This chapter applies to all current and prospective community college students. The following procedures were developed to provide guidance for North Carolina Community Colleges to ensure the fidelity of the CPL process. These procedures and the policy set forth in 1D SBCCC 800 represents a minimum standard for all NC community colleges. However, colleges may have supplemental policies that may lead to awarding additional credit opportunities. Local policies may not supplant state policy.

#### B. Types of Credit for Prior Learning

Colleges may choose which types of CPL to award credit for and may elect not to offer each type; however, each will be described in this policy.

1. Registered Apprenticeships
2. Certifications and Licensures
3. Courses Listed in the High School to Community College Articulation Agreement
4. Military Education and Training
5. Standardized Examinations
6. Challenge Examinations/Proficiency
7. Portfolio Assessment (***forthcoming***)
8. Public Safety Training (PST) Courses
9. CE to CU (***forthcoming***)

## II. System-Wide Credit Articulation Process

### A. General Guidelines

- a. Each individual NC Community College may award credit for prior learning based on this subchapter of the procedure manual and according to policy set forth in 1D SBCCC 800.
- b. Colleges are encouraged to create local policy regarding CPL. Colleges may bring the policy in front of the local Board of Trustees for information or a vote.
- c. CPL procedures will be published in the college's educational catalog.
- d. The maximum credit for prior learning applicable towards graduation is seventy-five (75) percent of the program's credit hours from any combination of all CPL methods.
- e. Per SACSCOC (2018 Principals of Accreditation, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 9.4), at least twenty-five (25) percent of the credit hours required for a credential must be earned through instruction offered by the awarding institution.
- f. CPL crosswalks approved by the CCRC will be established only after a comprehensive review of learning outcomes to ensure that any credit awarded meets established learning outcomes for the curriculum course. All credit equivalencies will be reviewed by Chief Academic Officers and subject area faculty members prior to being presented for approval to the CCRC.
- g. CPL courses shall be transcript as outlined in the Service Now manual.
- h. When a student receives credit for a Combined Course Library curriculum course, the credit shall be transferable to any college in the North Carolina Community College System (1D SBCCC 400.8 Courses for Curriculum Programs). Academic credit will be awarded only for those courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements at the college of enrollment and to the student's declared certificate or degree program as outlined in college publications.
- i. A student may use CPL to fulfill degree/certificate requirements except for mandatory institutional requirements.
- j. There may be instances where accreditation, credentialing, licensure, or other external agency criteria prohibit a college from awarding prior learning course credit for a course within the college or from another community college within the System. In such instances, the institution for which the credit was intended will retain documentation that will be made available upon request verifying conditions that prohibit allowing the credit.
- k. Credit earned via CPL sources may not be transferable to UNC constituent institutions. Furthermore, UNC constituent institutions may request documentation to determine potential course credit. Therefore, students should consult a UNC transfer advisor for guidance on transferring credits earned via CPL.
- l. College Level Credit Articulations are those adopted locally based on the evaluation of prior learning by qualified faculty in the student's declared program of study. Locally approved credit articulations should integrate a periodic review to ensure credit

articulations are both current and relevant. Colleges should maintain a local crosswalk of any credentials their faculty have articulated beyond the System-wide Credit Articulations.

- m. These procedures do not include transfer credit from other national institutions or international transfer credit.

**B. Initiating Amendments to the CPL**

The Curriculum Course Review Committee (CCRC) will have jurisdiction over amendments to the CPL procedures and crosswalks as stated below:

- a. College requests are submitted through the office of the Senior Vice President for Programs. System Office Staff has the following responsibilities related to the CCRC meeting:
  - i. Consult with the requesting college to assist in preparation of the request (before and/or after the formal submission of the request).
  - ii. Send the request to applicable colleges for a formal vote.
  - iii. Prepare an analysis of each request requiring CCRC action.
  - iv. Present the requests at the CCRC meeting, answering CCRC members' questions and providing additional information, as needed.
  - v. Notify colleges of the results of the CCRC meeting.
  - vi. Coordinate applicable curriculum standard revisions by the State Board of Community Colleges or the Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Services, as appropriate.
  - vii. Enter courses and curriculum standards information into appropriate electronic databases and post the information to the NCCCS website. System Office staff may submit requests for consideration by the CCRC. These requests may include, but are not limited to, compliance issues and editorial revisions that do not require decision by the colleges offering the course.
  
- b. Colleges wishing to submit a System-Wide **(CPL form forthcoming)** for inclusion of a new statewide articulation, revision of an existing statewide articulation, or the removal of a previously adopted statewide articulation will utilize the following procedures.
  - i. The requesting college completes a System-wide Credit Articulation form and submits it to the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) of the NC Community College System via [CCRC@nccommunitycolleges.edu](mailto:CCRC@nccommunitycolleges.edu). To ensure timely review, Colleges are encouraged to review submission deadlines in Section 2 of the Curriculum Procedures Reference Manual.
  
  - ii. Upon receipt of a completed form, System Office staff will review and process. CCRC will review at its next meeting. Programs staff and WCE staff will consult as appropriate. The System's CAO convenes the appropriate Curriculum Program Administrator and Workforce Continuing Education staff to review the application and provide feedback.

- iii. A two-thirds majority vote of colleges approved to offer the course(s) is required prior to final consideration by the Curriculum Course Review Committee (CCRC). Colleges not responding within the specified period (usually two weeks) are considered in favor of the request.
- iv. The System's staff recommendations are presented to the CCRC for consideration.
- v. Upon CCRC approval, the articulation is recorded on the System Office website and communicated to all colleges. Colleges are then able to award credit via course equivalency to those students following local procedures for requesting credit for prior learning under the adopted System-Wide Credit Articulation.

*Note: The task of evaluating prior learning for potential academic credit, and of awarding this credit, belongs solely to faculty members at each designated community college. These faculty responsibilities cannot be delegated to or performed by any other individual or group. This inviolable directive is underscored by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which is the principal accreditation body for all institutions of higher education in North Carolina. (SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement: 6.2.a, 10.7, 10.8)*

### **C. Process to Award Credit**

This section covers the various processes necessary for awarding credit for prior learning, which includes the following: eligibility, credit evaluation and approval process, coding and documentation.

- a. Eligibility:
  - i. Students must be enrolled in an NCCCS curriculum program certificate, diploma, or degree program that aligns with the requested CPL.
  - ii. A minimum of 25% of the curriculum program must be completed at the awarding college.
- b. Evaluation Process:
  - i. The proposed credit for prior learning documentation must represent similar knowledge and/or technical skill attainment of competencies in the corresponding curriculum courses. The department head in consultation with faculty should award appropriate credit for prior learning for apprenticeships that are equivalent to learning outcomes in postsecondary courses.
  - ii. Upon receipt of a student's request form for Prior Learning Assessment, local student services personnel or the designated college official should first determine if the student is requesting a previously approved credential articulation utilizing either System-wide or College Level Credit Articulation

crosswalks.

- iii. Upon review and recommendation of the appropriate faculty/staff, the curriculum course credit will be reflected in the student's records by the College's Registrar Office. A letter grade is not assigned.
- iv. Students must submit official transcripts, exam scores, or verification of third-party certifications to be eligible to earn CPL credit.
- c. Coding and Documentation:
  - i. Upon the recommendation of the local academic department head or through a currently adopted System-Wide or College Level Articulation, students awarded credit for CPL receive transfer credit recorded in the Student Information System by the college registrar or designated college official. The course credit equivalency is documented on the student record.
  - ii. Specific coding procedures are in the Credit for Prior Learning Manual in Service Now.

### III. Processes by CPL Type

The following section will provide guidance specific to each type of CPL:

#### A. Registered Apprenticeships

- a. Description

For apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs that utilized NCCCS curriculum or CE course work for the required related instruction, successfully completed course work was directly entered onto the student's transcript as it occurred as credit earned. In such instances, there is no need to crosswalk credit.
- b. Evaluation Process

For apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs that did not utilize NCCCS curriculum or CE course work for the required related instruction, successfully completed course work can be submitted for credit evaluation through a college's portfolio review services area for credit consideration.

#### B. State or Industry Credentials

- a. Description

Industry recognized certifications, and licenses as documented in the NCWorkforce Credentials include certifications and professional state-regulated licensures. These credentials are often aligned to non-collegiate instructional programs, such as those that lead to certifications and licensures and frequently demonstrate competency attainments required for credit bearing certificate, diploma, and degree programs. Credit for prior learning may be awarded by a college based upon evaluation by qualified faculty in the student's declared program of study or via approved System-Wide Credit Articulations as outlined in this section.

  - i. Certification – Certification (usually by a third-party industry group) is a designation that is obtained once the student is qualified to perform a task or

job function. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is an employment qualification and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.

- ii. *Licensure* – Licensure is a legal status granted by a government entity that provides permission to practice. Licensure restricts practice of the profession to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, professional experience, and/or have successfully passed an examination.

b. Documentation

- i. Refer to Section I.C. for general guidelines relating to CPL documentation.
- ii. Students are responsible for providing evidence of their valid (non-expired) certification(s) which must have been issued within five (5) years prior to their request for articulated credit.
- iii. Faculty may request a hands-on demonstration of skills to validate competency for a certification that was earned by means of a written or other form of assessment that lacked a demonstration component.

**C. Courses Listed in High School to Community College Articulation Agreement**

a. Description

The North Carolina High School to Community College Articulation Agreement is an agreement between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the North Carolina Community College System. The statewide articulation agreement comprises specific high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses that match the knowledge and skills taught in similar community college courses. The articulation agreement ensures that if a student is proficient in his/her high school course, the student can receive college credit for that course at any North Carolina community college. This streamlines the student's educational pathway by eliminating the need to take multiple courses with the same learning outcomes. In addition to the statewide articulation agreement, local articulation agreements can be developed to build strong partnerships between high schools and individual community colleges.

b. Eligibility

NCDPI high school courses that appear in the High School to Community College Articulation Agreement are eligible for Combined Course Library curriculum course credit. College and high school partnerships that result in local articulation agreements similarly apply at the local college level. Students meeting the following eligibility requirements should present their high school transcripts along with the additional required items to the College's assigned Student Services staff member.

- i. Students who have completed a high school course that is listed in the High School to Community College Articulation Agreement will receive credit for the associated community college if they meet the following criteria:



1. Grade of “B” or higher in the high school course.
  2. A score of 93 or higher on the standardized CTE post-assessment.
  3. Students must enroll within two years of high school graduation date.
  4. Students must provide official high school transcript and CTE post-assessment scores.
- ii. Local articulation agreements may have different criteria to award credit.

d. Resources

- i. NC Perkins – <http://www.ncperkins.org/course/view.php?id=4>
- ii. NC State Board of Community Colleges - [https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/sites/default/files/state-board/program/prog\\_16 updating the nc hs to cc articulation agreement .pdf](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/sites/default/files/state-board/program/prog_16 Updating the NC HS to CC Articulation Agreement.pdf)

**D. Military Educational and Training Credit**

a. Description

Military credit for prior learning is college credit provided to students for documented military training. The NCCCS and University of North Carolina System Office (UNCISO) have worked jointly to evaluate and award credit for military occupations and courses. Academic panels have reviewed numerous occupations and developed a crosswalk for awarding curriculum course credit.

b. Operating Procedures

Students interested in applying to receive military credit for prior learning must complete all admissions requirements as outlined by the college. Colleges will then review the current military credit crosswalk to determine the appropriate credit to be awarded. Occupations and/or courses not on the current military credit crosswalk may be submitted for consideration to the appropriate Military Prior Learning Academic Panel as identified by the NC Community College System Office.

c. Evaluation Process

- i. Air Force: Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcripts are evaluated by the college registrar or designated college official as a traditional college transcript. Students can request a CCAF transcript using the following link: [Air University \(AU\) > Registrar \(af.edu\)](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Registrar) [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Registrar \(af.edu\)](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Registrar) and have it submitted to the Registrar’s Office.
- ii. Army, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard: For occupations and courses not listed on the military credit crosswalk and Air Force, colleges should refer to recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE). ACE evaluates and recommends college credit for military training courses and occupations as it relates to Army, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard. Individuals from these segments of the military must request an official Joint Services

Transcript from <https://jst.doded.mil>. These transcripts should be sent to the designated college office or Office of Military Services along with any appropriate or additional documentation such as the Military Evaluation Request form. Transcripts will be reviewed and processed within the timeline designated by the college. Colleges can look up evaluated military training and credit recommendations online using the following link:  
<https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx>

- iii. Army Military Occupational Specialties (MOS): Occupations and/or courses not on the spreadsheet may be submitted for consideration to the appropriate Military Prior Learning Academic Panel as identified by NC Community College System Office.
- iv. Marine Corps Correspondence Courses (MCI): Transcripts listing completed correspondence courses may be obtained from the Marine Corps Institute, 912 Charles Poor Street, SE, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC 20391-5680 or call toll free 1-800-MCI-USMC.
- v. Military credit for prior learning is evaluated and recommended for credit by designated community college personnel. Additionally, ACE is used by some colleges to determine Military credit. However, ACE is a recommendation only; a college is not required to adhere to the ACE recommendations.

#### **E. Standardized Exams**

##### **a. Description**

- i. A standardized examination is any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a “standard” or consistent manner.
- ii. North Carolina Community Colleges are currently using the following standardized exams to provide students with credit for prior learning: Advanced Placement (AP), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), Credit for International Baccalaureate (IB), Defense Activity for Nontraditional Educational Support (DANTES), and Cambridge International Examinations (covered in Sections G-I).

##### **b. Operating Procedures (AP)**

Students interested in earning curriculum course credit for AP exams must provide an official score report from the College Board to the designated office. Upon review and evaluation by the college designee, students may earn credits based on the exam(s) taken and score(s) earned.

##### **c. Eligibility**

CPL SBCC Code approved 02/19/21; CPL Procedures CCRC approved 10/27/21.

Students may earn college credit if a score of at least 3 on a scale of 1 to 5 is earned on the AP exam. Students and college personnel should refer to the AP Crosswalk as approved by the CCRC for the minimum courses and credits to be awarded.

- d. Evaluation Process  
**AP Credit Crosswalk Coming Soon**

#### F. College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)

- a. Description (CLEP)  
CLEP allows students from a wide range of ages and backgrounds to demonstrate mastery of introductory college-level material and earn college credit. Students can earn credit for what they already know by earning qualifying scores on any of the examinations. Each institution will award credit based upon the CLEP policy used at the time of the review.
- b. Resources
  - i. CLEP Test Preparation – <https://clep.collegeboard.org/earn-college-credit/practice>
  - ii. CLEP Overview – <https://clep.collegeboard.org/exams>
  - iii. CLEP Registration – <https://clep.collegeboard.org/register>

#### G. International Baccalaureate (IB)

- a. Description  
The IB curriculum is available at a select number of high schools in North Carolina. The IB program seeks to develop students' knowledge in both breadth and depth of subject matter. Exam scores range from 0-7 with colleges awarding credit for scores of 5 and higher. Additionally, IB courses are offered at the Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL).
- b. Resources
  - i. International education - International Baccalaureate® ([ibo.org](http://ibo.org))
- c. Evaluation Process  
**IB Credit Crosswalk Coming Soon**

#### H. Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)

- a. Description  
DANTES is a prior-learning assessment program that allows students to earn credit for prior learning by taking an exam. Beginning in 2008, DSST exam scoring moved to a criterion-referenced methodology for scoring. Scores range from 200 to 500 with 400 being the cut score for all exams.
- b. Resources
  - i. [DSST-exam-scoring-101-ACE-AUG2018-PRESS \(getcollegetest.com\)](https://www.getcollegetest.com/DSST-exam-scoring-101-ACE-AUG2018-PRESS)

CPL SBCC Code approved 02/19/21; CPL Procedures CCRC approved 10/27/21.

- ii. Technical Data Sheet: [DSST Technical Data Sheet. 2017.pdf \(getcollegecredit.com\)](#)

**I. Cambridge International**

a. Description

Cambridge International Examinations are a series of internationally recognized examinations that originated in the United Kingdom. The Cambridge International curriculum promotes critical thinking, in-depth analysis, and strong writing skills in a wide variety of academic subjects.

b. Approval Process

Students will earn college credit if a grade of e/E or better (which is the equivalent to a grade of C in the United States) is earned on the Cambridge International Examination.

**J. Challenge Exams/Proficiency**

a. Description

A challenge exam is a departmental or institutional examination for a community college course which demonstrates that a student's subject matter proficiency is equal to or greater than the corresponding proficiency the student would have achieved had he or she completed the actual course. The examination may be handwritten, computer-based, oral, practical, or a combination of these administration methods.

- i. Challenge exam information must be published, readily available and accessible to students, and should include a list of exams offered. Proficiency examinations are written to the collegiate level, and all pre-requisite requirements must be met before a student may enroll in the course and sit for the challenge examination. Specific exam information (e.g. type, length, and rigor) shall be provided upon request. Certain courses require faculty consent (e.g., for performance assessments). Each college is responsible for ensuring the validity and reliability of institutional challenge exams.
- ii. If the college requires the student to enroll in the course to be challenged, for practical purposes the test should be administered and graded by the first week the course is offered but no later than course census. Individuals who are unsuccessful may choose to stay enrolled in the course to earn course credit.
- iii. There is no additional charge for full-time students who are taking at least 16 credit hours of non-self-supporting coursework (tuition is capped at 16 SHC).
- iv. If the college challenge examination occurs outside of regular course enrollment, then a standard minimum administrative fee will apply. See the Fee Schedule in Appendix. Students should contact their college for fee charges.
- v. For students enrolled in the course, successful challenge examination completion may result in the student falling below full-time student status (typically 12 SHC) which could negatively impact their financial aid status;

therefore, students should consult with their advisors beforehand to discuss various options.

- vi. Successful examination completion should be coded per the Service Now document on the student transcript; an unsuccessful attempt does not earn a grade but should be noted as a challenge exam attempt.
- vii. Challenge Exams are not calculated into a student's cumulative grade point average (GPA). A letter grade lower than a C on the challenge exam (e.g. D or F) is considered unsuccessful and results in no earned credit. Students earning a letter grade lower than a "C" must enroll in the course to earn course credit.
- viii. Challenge exams may only be attempted once and may not be used to overwrite an already earned course grade.

b. Eligibility

- i. Challenge Examinations that are administered for courses contained in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement may be provided when the exam is vetted, administered, and graded by a qualified instructor in the discipline. The student should be advised that transfer of credit from challenge examinations is not guaranteed.
- ii. Developmental/Supplemental courses as defined in 1D SBCCC 400.3(b) and 1D SBCCC 400.8(b)(1), and courses with a clinical practice as defined in 1D SBCCC 400.1(c)(2) are not eligible for challenge exams.
- iii. Individuals qualified to receive Veteran's Administration (VA) benefits should be advised to consider the implications of participating in a challenge exam since the VA deducts the hours a student is not attending class, thereby potentially reducing or eliminating benefits.
- iv. Federal Pell grant funds cannot be used to pay for challenge exams.
- v. Career and College Promise (CCP) students may participate in Challenge Examinations to earn college credit but may not earn dual credit (high school credit not permitted). To earn dual credit students must sit for the college course.
- vi. Student hours shall not be reported for budget/FTE which result from: Proficiency or challenge exams except that the actual time required to take the exam may be counted in membership; students shall be registered in the class consistent with 1E SBCCC subchapter 300 or 1E SBCCC Subchapter 400 (1G SBCCC 200.95).

**K. Portfolio Assessment – Coming Soon**

**L. Public Safety Training Courses**

a. Description

Public Safety Training (PST) courses are one option for awarding credit for public safety related training and/or credentials, but they are not necessarily the only option. The availability of the PST option does not remove a college's ability to award credit for the same public safety training and/or credentials through other appropriate CPL methods as defined in 1D SBCCC 800.2 or through local college policy; however, no student may receive CPL credit for the same training and/or credentials more than once, regardless of the method used.

- i. PST courses are designed to provide a means for colleges to award credit towards degree completion to public safety personnel who have documented professional training and/or certifications that are relevant to their declared program(s) of study. PST credit is limited to NCCCS curriculum programs that include the PST prefix in the "Other Major Hours" section of the official System-wide curriculum standard.

b. Eligibility

- i. Students must show evidence of successful completion of certification(s) and/or training that aligns with one or more PST courses in the CCL. Evidence should include description and length of training.
- ii. Be enrolled in an associated certificate, diploma, or degree program to which credit will be awarded.

**M. Continuing Education to Curriculum Credit (CE to CU) – *Coming Soon***