



To: Member colleges and universities

From: American Association of Community Colleges; American Association of State Colleges and Universities; American Council on Education; Association of American Universities; Association of Public and Land-grant Universities; and National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

April 16, 2020

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON ACCEPTANCE OF CREDIT

These are unprecedented times. Across the nation our institutions have responded with decisiveness, speed, creativity, and compassion to the spread of coronavirus. These responses testify to higher education's commitment to protect our students, staff, and communities and to serve the public good. From each of us, thank you. For our part, we are committed to do all we can to support your efforts and to advocate for resources and flexibility for you to continue to demonstrate the kind of innovative leadership our nation needs.

Institutions have taken bold and innovative steps so far, and can't stop now. You have moved instruction online; you have provided for displaced students; you have provided resources for students to travel home to their families, and you are making changes in campus life to succeed at telework and to protect staff whose responsibilities keep them on campus. Institutions are attempting to ensure that all students have access to technology or Wi-Fi, are purchasing laptops, and launching hot spots to deliver online access to students. Many are working with state authorities to expand access to mental health professionals for students. Some of you are making residence halls and other facilities available to state and local agencies for public health purposes and of course, our labs and hospitals continue to provide both long term research advances and front line service.

Even with that, our collective work is just beginning.

While we strive to execute our plans to mitigate the current crisis, anxieties build within our communities about the future. Here, too, those anxieties are being met with innovative and compassionate solutions. Many of you have or are deliberating changes to grading policies for graduate and undergraduate students. Many of you are also providing flexibility to add/drop deadlines and exams. Over a hundred institutions have already decided to add one year to the tenure clock of junior tenure-track faculty. And all of you are planning for a future in which resources are seriously challenged both by decreased revenues and increased demands on those dollars.

We are writing today about one particular issue that we will all face: how to manage and evaluate academic credit and assess student transcripts that have been impacted by the

current crisis and, indeed, by our substantial efforts to provide flexibility to students and faculty. Institutions are already deciding how best to manage credit within their own educational contexts and that is wholly appropriate. One size does not fit all and that is not and should not be our aspiration. Similarly, we do not believe that there is one approach or one system that should apply to how institutions evaluate and accept credits when students seek to transfer between institutions, seek approval for non-traditional coursework, or apply to graduate and professional programs.

However, we do believe that there is a set of common principles that institutions should keep in mind when developing policies regarding credit acceptance. These principles seek to model the integrity, flexibility, understanding, and compassion that represent the very best of our diverse institutions and our commitment to our students and the communities we serve. The principles should also reflect an expectation that all institutions see the current situation as a unique one that may not be well served by policies and practices that seemed appropriate even just weeks ago. We offer those principles below:

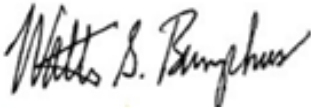
Statement of Principles on the Acceptance of Credit During the Current Emergency

- 1) Institutional policies and the evaluation of grades and credit should recognize the extraordinary burden placed on students during this time. Even in the best of cases, student dislocation and the need to change the very basic patterns of life impose challenges on our students that may have an impact their performance.
- 2) Institutional policies and practices should recognize that traditional inequities are exacerbated in the current crisis and that “equal” treatment of students’ transcripts is unlikely to result in “equitable” outcomes.
- 3) Institutional policies and practices should, therefore, be as holistic as possible, taking into account the range of situational and behavioral circumstances in which our students find themselves.
- 4) Institutional policies should, wherever practicable, provide flexibility in the timely reporting of grades and other markers of achievement, understanding that the dislocations mentioned above are also present for faculty, staff, and others.
- 5) Institutional policies should aim for complete transparency. The circumstances under which credits and or grades are accepted and not accepted should be clear and publicly stated in accessible, specific, and easy to understand terms. The rationale for these policies should be made equally clear and transparent.
- 6) This transparency should extend inside as well as outside the institution. Institutional policies that respond to this unprecedented and unique situation should be broadly communicated and disseminated within institutions. At a time when telework has become the norm, it is in the collective best interest of higher education that each student-facing employee understands new and existing policies.

- 7) Institutional decision-making regarding individual students should be swift and definitive. Students and their families need clear, timely information on which to make decisions.
- 8) Finally, we ask that institutions clarify their policies as soon as possible. Students and families are making decisions now about, for example, whether to take courses pass/fail, whether to enroll in non-traditional coursework to fill gaps in their curricula, and whether to accept partial credit for coursework already underway. Uncertainty can only exacerbate the stress students are experiencing and could, in the end, harm students who make decisions today that might not serve them tomorrow.

We stand ready to help in any way as you work through these important issues.

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