



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# MEMORANDUM

TAB B

August 19, 2022

## Transition to Credit

The Utah Board of Higher Education Strategic Plan includes a tactic to transition technical education from clock hours to semester credits. This initiative is represented in a strategy to facilitate completion through the development of stackable credentials to support student transfer among institutions.

### History

Historically, Utah statute required technical colleges to offer instruction in clock-hours rather than credit hours. Clock-hours represent the estimated time that a student should spend completing all instructional activities for a course. Those hours include reading, completing learning and lab activities, taking knowledge and skill-based tests, and participation in work-based activities.

When the higher education systems were merged in 2022, the language prohibiting technical education from awarding credit was removed from statute, providing the system with an opportunity to study the rules around educational currencies to determine which best met the needs of institutions and students.

### UBHE Credit Task Force

The Board of Higher Education created a task force to study and understand if such a transition would accomplish three objectives:

- Create a common currency among the 16 USHE institutions
- Address outdated attendance requirements imposed by the U.S. Department of Education on clock-hour institutions and students that impact the ability to offer hybrid and distance education
- Protect the ability to provide flexible student scheduling and educational progression through competency-based education

### Clock-Hour Challenges

Through the work of the task force, it was confirmed the Department of Education standards for attendance and online learning are more restrictive for clock-hour institutions than for credit bearing institutions. Students who complete coursework independently to accelerate progress are penalized in financial aid disbursement.

The Department requires that instruction in financial aid eligible clock-hour programs be conducted face-to-face or synchronous (live) online format. The rules hinder the delivery of appropriate instruction in a

hybrid or distance education format. This negatively impacted institutions and students during the pandemic and presents an ongoing barrier to rural, nontraditional, and underrepresented students who often need the most flexibility.

While the rules are limited to financial aid eligible programs, many institutions impose the rules on all students. Faculty generally do not, and should not, know which students receive financial assistance.

### **Credit Benefits**

The task force identified the following benefits to transitioning to semester credit:

- Credit is a currency that is recognized and easily understood by students and partners
- Creates a common currency within the system of higher education
- Allows institutions to offer asynchronous instruction when it is appropriate
- Removes attendance requirements, providing opportunities for flexible scheduling to better meet the needs of rural, nontraditional, and underrepresented students, when it is appropriate
- Improves opportunities for alignment of programs and courses
- Alignment improves the portability of course work and will help to expand transfer opportunities
- Expanded transfer opportunities reduces duplication of coursework and time to completion
- Increasing completion rates improves student employability

### **UBHE Credit Task Force Recommendations**

The task force met with and received guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, the Council on Occupational Education—the body that accredits technical colleges, and the bodies that regulate about half of technical education programs to confirm there would be no drawbacks to transitioning to credit. Ultimately, the task force recommended that clock-hour institutions transition to credit, and the Board unanimously supported the inclusion of this initiative as a part of their strategic plan. The task force clarified the transition is not motivated by an interest in offering academic education or changing the role of technical education, but on removing access and completion barriers.

### **Timeline**

Work is underway on this initiative. A two-year teach-out period from the beginning of implementation of each program at each institution is anticipated. The transition began with Davis, Dixie, and Southwest Technical College on July 1, 2022. Given accreditation reaffirmation moratoriums and institution planning efforts, the remaining institutions should begin the transition by July 1, 2023. The anticipated completion date is July 1, 2025.

### **Progress Report**

An overview of the initiative progress will be presented to the Committee.

### **Commissioner's Recommendation**

This is an information item only; no action required.