

# Public Policy Guidelines on Lower Division Coursework, Lower Division Certificate, and Associate Degree Delivery

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Missouri has a complex, diverse system of postsecondary public, independent and proprietary institutions that offer a rich array of instructional courses and programs in support of undergraduate certificate and degree programs. Undergraduate educational opportunities are provided on campuses throughout the state, off-campus and outside of community college taxing districts, and through distance learning utilizing advanced technologies.

1.2 Institutions across all sectors are committed to providing easy access to high quality undergraduate certificate and degree programs that are responsive to the state's needs for a highly-trained workforce and an educated citizenry. Missouri's public institutions are also committed to an efficient higher education system without unnecessary duplication of programs and courses funded by the state and to ensure that all Missouri citizens have access to affordable undergraduate education and training opportunities.

## 2. Statutory Responsibility

2.1 According to Section 173.020 (2), (3) and (4) RSMo, the CBHE has responsibility for identifying higher education needs in the state; developing arrangements for more effective and economical specialization in types of education programs offered and students served, and for more effective coordination and mutual support among institutions in the utilization of facilities, faculty and other resources; and designing a coordinated plan for higher education in the state. The CBHE performs this responsibility through working with presidents/chancellors and chief academic officers in developing accountable, efficient and fair program delivery policies.

## 3. Program and Degree-level Responsibility

3.1 The three primary postsecondary sectors responsible for undergraduate course and program delivery are the public, independent, and proprietary sectors.

A description of the responsibility of each sector in program delivery follows:

### a. Public Sector Institutions

Two-year public institutions and open-enrollment public four-year institutions with an historic mission of providing career and technical programs have responsibility for delivery of lower-division one-and two-year certificate programs and associate degrees. In addition, all public four-year institutions have responsibility for delivery of baccalaureate-level programs.

### b. Independent Sector Institutions?

Independent institutions contribute significantly to the diversity and choice of educational programs provided to Missouri citizens. Independent two- and four-year colleges and universities deliver an array of undergraduate courses and programs consistent with their missions.

### c. Proprietary Sector Institutions\*

Proprietary institutions contribute significantly to the postsecondary education and training opportunities provided to Missouri citizens. Proprietary schools range from single program schools that offer short-term certificates to accredited degree-granting institutions offering a range of courses and programs at multiple educational levels. These institutions are responsible for delivering educational programs consistent with the standards established by the CBHE.

\*The policy guidelines do not change the current working relationship of the CBHE and the DHE to independent and proprietary institutions.

## 4. Duplication of Effort

4.1 Missouri's colleges and universities are committed to mission focus as a way of promoting programmatic excellence in order to meet targeted demographic and employment needs of the state's employers. Working collaboratively, the CBHE and the state's postsecondary education institutions strive to have a balanced and well-coordinated system composed of separate institutions each with its own governing structure.

4.2 By its very nature, however, Missouri's postsecondary education system (similar to postsecondary systems in other states) involves necessary duplication. An overlapping core of certificate and degree programs is offered on many campuses to provide Missouri citizens with easy access to postsecondary

educational and training opportunities in close proximity to their home and/or work locations. Another desirable aspect of this overlap includes the existence of programs in similar subject areas delivered by alternate means or in different formats in order to meet the needs of students and employers.

4.3 The overlap among institutions in lower-division coursework is extensive because of lower-division course requirements that students must complete to receive undergraduate certificates and degrees. Furthermore, a full complement of lower-division general education coursework is offered by Missouri's public and independent institutions, and some of Missouri's proprietary institutions, thereby complicating the assignment of a particular public sector or set of public institutions as the primary points of access to higher education in the state. Some investments (at both the two- and four-year institutions) have been made to expand access to lower-division coursework and programs, including the offering of lower-division dual credit courses at high schools throughout the state, which creates additional overlap of function across sectors. Developmental courses are also offered by two- and four-year institutions due to the various needs of students and the practicality of delivering such courses.

## 5. **Demand**

5.1 There is an increased demand for education and training at all postsecondary levels, including lower-division one- and two-year certificates and associate degree programs as well as for non-degree workforce development. Increasingly, some amount of postsecondary education is required to be successful in most jobs. Similarly, Missouri's economy is affected by the number of its citizens who complete some postsecondary education. To have an effective, well-articulated certificate and associate degree-delivery system, Missouri's institutions need a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities associated with lower-division coursework, lower-division certificates, and associate degrees.

## 6. **Policy Framework**

6.1 For public institutions, the board's policy framework on lower-division certificates and associate degree programs has relied on a regulatory environment, especially concerning the development of new degree programs and the offering of courses and programs off-campus or outside community college taxing districts. In relation to independent and proprietary institutions, the CBHE has encouraged cooperation and collaboration to evolve a streamlined, efficient, quality higher education system.

6.2 Despite steps to deregulate Missouri's public policy environment concerning lower-division coursework and delivery of lower-division certificate and associate degree programs, Missouri's framework has resulted in multiple providers, which creates the potential for reduced efficiency through an unnecessary duplication of effort.

6.3 In some geographic areas, postsecondary institutions are located in close proximity, while in others, communities and their residents are far from the taxing district boundaries of a community college, the home site of another two-year institution, or a four-year campus. The complexity of Missouri's educational system suggests that one approach to meeting state needs for cost-effective, high quality, lower-division certificates and associate degree programs will not fit all situations. Improving access and improved educational attainment for Missouri citizens will require multiple approaches, built upon mutual trust and a spirit of collaboration.

## 7. **Guiding Principles**

7.1 The state's postsecondary education system should be responsive to the needs of Missouri citizens for increased access to lower-division coursework, lower-division certificates, and associate degree programs.

7.2 Regional planning involving business and community leaders, educational providers across all postsecondary sectors, and policymakers should be utilized to ensure responsiveness to state needs and a minimum of unnecessary duplication in course and program offerings.

7.3 Community colleges involved in regional planning should continue to utilize community college service regions as a useful tool.

7.4 Institutional aspirations should be designed within the context of statewide needs and priorities for a thriving economy supported by high quality, affordable education and training programs.

7.5 The best delivery models, including ones that involve collaborative ventures and effective utilization of instructional technology, should be identified to promote increased access to and success in lower-division coursework, and certificate and associate degree programs.

7.6 Eligibility for developing new lower-division certificate and associate degree program proposals at public institutions should be described clearly and concisely as should the process for resolving differences about lower-division course delivery at locations other than the main campus of the institution.

7.7 To the extent possible, local decision-making should be utilized to resolve differences among institutions rather than superimposing solutions developed by external groups.

7.8 Institutional differences should be addressed quickly based on an agreed-upon process to resolve conflicts between and among institutions.

7.9 Institutions should engage in regular and systematic review of all lower-division certificate and associate degree programs to ensure faculty engagement in department-based structured conversations about educational quality processes that focus on good practice and spur improvement including consolidation, expansion, or deletion of courses and/or programs.

## **8. Certificate and Associate Degrees**

8.1 Public two-year institutions should be the primary providers of lower-division certificates and associate degrees offered by public colleges and universities throughout the state, including those involving web-based delivery.

8.2 Public, open-admissions institutions that have an historic mission of providing career and technical education at the lower-division certificate and associate degree level may continue to offer previously approved lower-division certificates and associate degrees, unless otherwise limited or restricted by statute.

8.3 Previously approved lower-division certificates and associate degrees offered by public institutions that are not open-admissions institutions should be continued only if student demand and employer needs warrant continuation, unless otherwise restricted by statute.

8.4 Public institutions that are not open-admission institutions are encouraged to phase out associate degrees over a five-year period, with the assumption that two-year institutions or open-admissions four-year institutions will assume responsibility for existing programs that continue to have demand and/or meet state needs.

8.5 New lower-division certificates and associate degree program proposals for delivery by public institutions must undergo review and approval by the Commissioner of Higher Education prior to implementation following the guidelines established by the CBHE for academic program review and clarifying comments.

8.6 Development and delivery of web-based lower-division coursework, lower-division certificates, and associate degree programs should be aligned with the CBHE Principles of Good Practice for Distance Learning/Web-Based Courses.

8.7 As outlined in the CBHE policy for New Program Approval, new proposals for lower-division certificates and associate degrees for delivery by public institutions must demonstrate: alignment with mission; demonstrable need (including evidence of, and a rationale for, the importance of the proposed program to Missouri's economy and educational opportunities for more Missourians); efficient use of resources; and a rationale for collaborating or for moving forward alone.

8.8 Proposals for new lower-division certificates and associate degrees from public colleges and universities should be developed in consultation and collaboration with educational providers and business leaders in a particular service region.

8.9 Public two-year institutions should be the lower-division certificate or degree-granting institution for any new lower-division certificates or associate degrees to be offered by public institutions with the following stipulations:

- a. Public two-year institutions proposing to provide lower-division certificates or associate degrees outside a taxing district are expected to work collaboratively with public four-year institutions by building on currently available general education and occupation-related coursework, and by utilizing the human resources and facilities of public four-year institutions. Public four-year institutions, as well as other education providers, are expected to collaborate in good faith with the proposing public two-year institution.
- b. If a public two-year institution is unable to meet the demands for new lower-division certificates or associate degrees, public four-year institutions may be approved to offer new lower-division certificates or associate degrees.

8.10 New lower-division certificates and associate degree program proposals for delivery by independent institutions should undergo review by the Commissioner of Higher Education with an opportunity for comment prior to implementation.

8.11 New lower-division certificates and associate degree programs proposals for delivery by proprietary schools must meet statutory and Department of Higher Education minimum standards for programs offered at these institutions.

## 9. Lower-Division Coursework

9.1 Public institutions agree to communicate openly with other public institutions about plans to deliver lower-division coursework at a location other than the main campus.

9.2 Generally, for courses offered by a public institution at a location other than the main campus, public two-year institutions will be the primary providers of lower-division coursework with the following stipulations:

- a. Within the taxing district of a community college, the community college will be the primary provider of lower-division coursework offered by a public institution at a location other than the main campus.
- b. Within the county in which a public four-year institution is located, the public four-year institution will be the primary provider of lower-division coursework offered by a public institution at a location other than the main campus.
- c. In cases where the public four-year institution cannot or chooses not to meet the needs of the county in which it is located for accessible lower-division coursework, public two-year institutions, where appropriate, may offer such coursework.
- d. Within the county in which the state's public technical college is located, the state's public technical college will be the primary provider of lower-division coursework offered by a public institution at a location other than the main campus.
- e. Within the county in which a public two-year branch campus of a public four-year institution is located, the public two-year branch campus will be the primary provider of lower-division coursework offered by a public institution at a location other than the main campus.
- f. In situations when there is overlap between the taxing district of a community college and the county in which a public four-year college or university, the state's technical college, or a two-year branch campus of a public institution is located, the affected institutions agree to collaborate in determining the institution best suited to deliver lower-division coursework offered by a public institution.
- g. For new coursework delivered in geographic areas outside both community college taxing districts and the counties in which public four-year institutions, the state's technical college, or the branch campus of a public four-year institution are located, the primary provider of lower-division coursework offered by a public institution should be the institution best suited by mission, proximity, cost effectiveness, and/or expertise to meet the needs of the service area and to demonstrate value-added student learning.
- h. In situations in which there is a perceived unmet need for accessible lower-division coursework not met by the public institution(s) delegated primary responsibility for lower-division coursework, other public institutions may deliver coursework in such locations, with the understanding that they notify the local institution(s) and agree to work collaboratively in determining the best ways for public higher education to respond to unmet needs.

9.3 Training and workforce development offered for lower-division credit at off-campus locations will be subject to the conditions set forth in Section 9.2 (a-f).

9.4 All dual credit courses offered in high schools by colleges and universities are considered lower-division coursework. Public sector providers of dual credit courses at all locations and those independent/proprietary

institutions choosing to abide by statewide guidelines associated with dual credit course delivery will be those institutions best suited by proximity to ensure that the CBHE guidelines for oversight of quality delivery are followed, including that college or university faculty provide oversight for course comparability; that college or university faculty mentor, observe, and evaluate high school teachers; that high school teachers participate in college orientation and professional development activities; and that college or university faculty review student work and provide oversight for assessment of student outcomes.

#### **10. Existing Program Review**

(It should be noted that the CBHE policy concerning existing program review is currently being revised to include all programs at public institutions and to be aligned with quality principles and institutional authority for local decision-making.)

10.1 Institutions should move towards using/adopting quality principles as a management tool and systematically evaluate the appropriateness of all lower-division certificates and associate degrees on a regular schedule.

10.2 The review of existing lower-division certificates and associate degrees should be aligned with the revision of campus-based reviews that will emphasize quality processes and academic audits and will deemphasize regulation.

10.3 Institutions should establish standards and processes to use in evaluating lower-division certificates and associate degrees, including the extent to which these programs help meet the state's workforce development needs.

10.4 State data collection obligations on existing programs should be kept to a minimum. Duplicative data collection efforts should be integrated into a single process serving multiple functions.

10.5 Oversight for existing program review provided by the CBHE will emphasize audits of quality processes, will serve to demonstrate accountability to external constituents, and should also be used by institutions as a catalyst for continuous improvement.

#### **11. Existing Commitments**

11.1 Existing off-campus sites that have CBHE approval or substantial investment in facilities may continue to operate.

11.2 Existing relationships between colleges and universities and high schools that have been effective in providing quality dual credit courses to high school students may be maintained.

11.3 All lower-division certificate and associate degree programs, regardless of prior approval or commitments, should engage in regular and systematic review.

#### **12. Conflict Resolution**

12.1 Presidents/chancellors of public institutions agree to communicate in a direct, concise, and timely manner about any disagreements associated with the implementation of these policy guidelines.

12.2 Any disagreements between and among public institutions will be resolved quickly at a local level whenever possible.

12.3 Presidents/chancellors of public institutions agree to engage educators from non-involved institutions to facilitate resolution for any conflicts that remain unresolved after two months of good faith efforts at resolution on the local level. The educators identified will be part of a facilitation team that works with the affected parties in an attempt to resolve any conflicts.

12.4 The facilitation team will gather information about the unresolved conflict(s) and hold a meeting with the presidents/chancellors and chief academic officers of the institutions involved in a disagreement(s) in an attempt to facilitate resolution of the conflict.

12.5 Each of the affected public institutions in an unresolved conflict also has the option to request formal mediation. If formal mediation is pursued, all affected institutions agree to share in the expenses associated with retaining a mediator.

12.6 If the conflict remains unresolved two weeks after the facilitation team meeting and/or the use of a formal mediator, each public institution agrees to submit in writing a summary of the unresolved conflict to the Commissioner of Higher Education.

12.7 The Commissioner of Higher Education will determine a resolution and communicate it to all of the involved parties within one month after receiving written notification of an unresolved conflict.

12.8 Affected parties have one month after receipt of the Commission of Higher Education's resolution to send a written appeal of the Commissioner's decision to the CBHE.

12.9 The CBHE will hold a public hearing on all appeals no later than its next regularly scheduled board meeting. Decisions of the CBHE shall be communicated in writing to all affected parties. Decisions of the CBHE shall be binding on all affected parties.

### 13. Glossary

**Associate Degree:**

An earned academic degree with the term "associate" in the title and normally requiring at least 60 semester credit hours or equivalent at the lower-division level.

**CBHE:**

The Coordinating Board for Higher Education, established by Section 173.005.2, RSMo 1986.

**Commissioner of Higher Education:**

Head of the Department of Higher Education and appointed by the CBHE.

**Community College Taxing District:**

A community taxing district is a local district in which the community calls for a local election at which the registered voters decide the question of taxing themselves to establish a community college in their area of the state. Community college taxing districts are local political subdivisions with local control and governance over the services being provided.

**Community College Service Regions:**

Agreed-upon regional boundaries throughout Missouri in which one community college is assigned per region.

**Degree:**

An award conferred upon an individual by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution as official recognition for the successful completion of a postsecondary educational program or course of study.

**Developmental Courses:**

A set of instructional activities designed to ensure adequate preparation for access to collegiate-level work for students with deficiencies. These courses generally do not satisfy requirements for a formal certificate or degree.

**Dual Credit:**

Collegiate-level courses taught in high schools to high school students who receive, simultaneously, both high school and college-level course credit.

**General Education Coursework:**

A prescribed course of study, as defined by institutional faculty and validated by the institution's administration or governing board, distinct from a program major, required of all graduates, and intended to ensure that all graduates possess a common core of collegiate-level skills and knowledge.

**Independent Sector Institution:**

A postsecondary educational institution controlled by a private individual(s) or by a nongovernmental agency, usually supported primarily by other than public funds, and operated by other than publicly elected or appointed officials.

**Lower-Division Certificate:**

A formal award conferred upon an individual by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution as official recognition for the successful completion of a postsecondary educational program or course of study. The program or course of study consists of non-remedial courses at a level of comprehension usually associated with freshman or sophomore students and is offered primarily by two-year institutions.

**Lower-Division Coursework:**

Courses at a level of comprehension usually associated with freshman and sophomore students and offered by both two- and four-year institutions.

**Off-Campus Site:**

All locations other than the main campus. For public community colleges, off-campus sites include all locations outside a community college's taxing district and all dual credit courses offered in high schools regardless of location. For public four-year colleges, the state's two-year technical college, and any branch campuses of four-year institutions, off-campus sites include all locations other than the main campus.

**Primary Provider:**

A public postsecondary institution with the principal responsibility for addressing the instructional/programmatic needs of citizens in a community or region.

**Program Review:**

The process by which the academic department (or program) evaluates its strengths and weaknesses through a self study and presents results, a plan for improvement, and writes a report for its own future use and/or use by external stakeholders monitoring the process.

**Proprietary Sector Institution:**

A privately controlled education institution certified to operate by the CBHE pursuant to Sections 173.600 through 173.619, RSMo, and accredited by an accrediting commission recognized by the United States Department of Education that provides a postsecondary course of instruction leading to a certificate or degree.

**Public Sector Institution:**

A postsecondary educational institution established by statute or the Missouri Constitution whose programs and activities are operated by publicly elected or appointed school officials, and which is partially supported by public funds.

**Training and Workforce Development Programs:**

Instructional programs designed to improve specific skills, knowledge, and competencies of individuals who are already in the workforce and/or those preparing to enter the workforce.