

Consortium for the Assessment of College Equivalence (CACE) Standards for the Assessment of Non-Collegiate Instruction

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College Credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction: The Beginnings

Ever since the American Council on Education began evaluating military training for college-level equivalence following World War II, the awarding of credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction has been a cornerstone of higher education programs serving adults. “Non-Collegiate Instruction” is defined as organized, structured learning experiences not sponsored for credit by an accredited college or university. With Malcolm Knowles' championing of adult learning theory in the 1970s, colleges were established to meet the specific needs of adult learners, including the Community College of Vermont (formerly the Vermont Regional Community College Commission) in 1970, SUNY Empire State College and Excelsior College (formerly Regents College) in 1971, Thomas Edison State University (formerly (Thomas) Edison State College) and Granite State College (formerly the School for Lifelong Learning) in 1972, and Charter Oak State College (formerly the Board for State Academic Awards) in 1973, among others.

In keeping with the principles of adult learning theory, these burgeoning adult-centered colleges recognized that college-level learning can take place outside of the traditional college classroom and this learning could be assessed for college-level credits. One of the strategies that these colleges put into place was the award of degree credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction, including military and workplace training programs and professional credentials. During this same period two college-credit advisory services were established to review Non-Collegiate Instruction for college equivalence: the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS, formerly the National Program on Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction) in 1973, and the American Council on Education's (ACE) *National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training* in 1974. As the sponsors of these credit advisory services, both the New York Board of Regents and ACE were instrumental in establishing the evaluation of Non-Collegiate Instruction, as well as procedures to ensure validity of the credit recommendations. Concurrent with these developments, the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL, formerly the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning) developed the *Ten Standards for Assessing Learning* for college programs to award credit for experiential learning to adults whose college-level learning was acquired through means other than workplace training or other formal instruction.

College Credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction: A Changing Landscape

Now, forty-some years later, the adult higher education landscape has changed dramatically. Advances in technology and the impact of globalization on the national economy have significantly changed the country's workforce needs and the imperative to increase degree attainment has become a national agenda. At the same time, the cost of a college education has become prohibitively expensive and institutions seek alternative means to decrease costs to students. Moreover, adult learners pursuing a college education bring with them an increased number of workplace training experiences, professional credentials, and non-credit online learning that has the potential for college equivalence.

Forming a Consortium

Given their common mission and experience assessing college-level learning from Non-Collegiate Instructional sources, the following adult-centered colleges established the Consortium for the Assessment of College Equivalence (CACE) in 2015: Charter Oak State College, Community College of Vermont, Excelsior College*, Granite State College, SUNY Empire State College, and Thomas Edison State University. The purpose of this consortium is to make the best use of the member institutions' resources to increase students' access to preapproved credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction, regardless of home institution. In addition to increasing the availability of credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction, the intent of this consortium is to work toward a common set of standards for its assessment. Although each CACE institution aligns its policies and practices with its regional accreditation standards, the CAEL standards, and the practices of ACE and NCCRS, uniform standards for institutions of higher education to assess Non-Collegiate Instruction do not exist. Therefore, the objectives of the consortium are to:

1. Establish a partnership among colleges and universities that serve adult learners to help them better address their students' needs for affordable and timely degree completion.
2. Develop a set of review standards that will guide educational institutions in the evaluation of college-level learning and competencies delivered and/or verified through organized, structured learning experiences not sponsored for credit by an accredited college or university.
3. Create a mechanism for the partner institutions to share information from credit recommendations they have developed for such Non-Collegiate Instruction in order to allow all partners to award the recommended credit directly based on official documentation of successful completion, without the need to transfer the credits from the reviewing institution.

Consortium Standards for Evaluating Non-Collegiate Instruction

The immediate goal for the Consortium is to increase the availability of credit for Non-Collegiate Instruction by agreeing to accept CACE member institutional reviews and credit recommendations in accordance with each institution's own policies. This goal will be accomplished by the member institutions adhering to the following standards for conducting the reviews.

Terminology used in the Standards

- *Evaluator*: The educational institution or organization that conducts the assessment of Non-Collegiate Instruction.
- *Sponsor*: The organization that administers and delivers the organized, structured learning experience or issues the credential being evaluated.
- *Learning Experience*: The specific Non-Collegiate Instruction or related learning that is being evaluated.
- *Non-Collegiate Instruction*: Organized, structured learning experiences not sponsored for credit by an accredited college or university. Non-Collegiate Instruction can take different forms including instructor-led training programs such as workplace learning and/or experiential learning verified through exam or other measurement of competencies such as professional licenses or credentials.

* Excelsior College withdrew from CACE in June 2017.

Evaluator Administrative Standards

1. Written policies and procedures are in place for the evaluation of Non-Collegiate Instruction and award of credit.
2. The Evaluator appoints an institutional representative to provide oversight of the evaluation process and ensure compliance with policies and procedures.
3. Policies and procedures are transparent to all constituents, including the Sponsor and members of this consortium.
4. Policies and procedures are reviewed and adopted by standard institutional practices and they are uniformly applied throughout the institution.
5. The Evaluator ensures the review is conducted by a team that includes academically-qualified subject matter experts drawn from internal and/or external college faculty. Additional team members may include non-academic subject matter experts and facilitating personnel.
6. Credit recommendations and awards align with the institution's accrediting agency/ies and federal and state requirements, as well as the institution's own standards for recommending and awarding academic credit.
7. The Evaluator establishes a time period for the validity of credit recommendations and the periodic re-evaluation of the Learning Experience.
8. The Evaluator maintains records indicating institutional approval of the credit recommendations.

Relationship between the Evaluator and Sponsor

1. The Evaluator has a screening process in place to determine eligibility for the review of the Learning Experience.
2. The Evaluator provides the Sponsor with a summary of expectations for the review process.
3. The Evaluator informs the Sponsor of its rationale for credit award/denial and has an appeal process in place.
4. The Sponsor provides the Evaluator with materials sufficient to conduct its evaluation.
5. The Evaluator's fees are based on the costs of review, not the resulting credit recommendation.
6. The Sponsor informs the Evaluator of any changes made to the curriculum during the credit recommendation validity period.

Learning Experience Oversight

1. The Sponsor, and not a third party, has administrative control over the Learning Experience being evaluated.
2. The Sponsor keeps verifiable records of all individuals who complete the Learning Experience for a minimum of five years.
3. The Sponsor evaluates the student's learning with assessment instruments aligned to the learning outcomes.
4. The Sponsor defines successful completion of the Learning Experience and has methods in place to assess and verify that completion.
5. The Learning Experience is developed, administered, assessed, and/or delivered by individuals with industry appropriate credentials, education and/or experience.
6. The Sponsor conducts regular reviews of instructor performance.
7. The Sponsor conducts periodic reviews of curriculum and assessments.

Components of a Review

1. The review team evaluates the Learning Experience to determine if it is clearly defined and measurable, appropriate to the stated learning outcomes and/or competencies, and delivered and measured in a manner consistent with college-level learning. Learning Experience components reviewed may include instructional methods, lesson plans, instructor qualifications, learning environment, relevant materials, topics covered, learning objectives, and/or assessment tools.
2. The review team evaluates the outcomes and/or competencies of the Learning Experience to determine if they are consistent over time, location, and instruction.
3. The review team determines the depth and breadth of the learning and recommends with justification the level of learning, the subject of learning, and credit amount, as warranted.
4. The review team provides a formal written report documenting its determination and rationale.