**Item: Policy to Normalize Credit Hours for Associate and Baccalaureate Degree Programs**

**Background**

In the past few years, there have been extensive studies on the topic of excess credits and efforts to normalize associate and baccalaureate degree credit hours. The studies include: Complete College America, *Wasting Time: Costs, Consequences, and Causes of Excess Credits and Time to Degree;* Georgetown University report *The High Price of Excess Credits: How New Approaches Could Help* *Students and Schools;* and the State University System of Florida, Office of Academic Programs Review; *Hours to Graduation: A National Survey of Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate* *Degrees.* These studies have documented wide disparities in academic credits for degree completion. All three reports identified the importance for system and institutional leadership to begin a systemic review of degrees’ credit requirements.

Many states including North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia and Arizona have enacted legislation to regulate excess credit hours. Some states including Florida and Louisiana have eliminated state funding for excess credit hours. Georgia is exploring options to limit excess credit hours and encourage timely graduation.

The Lumina Foundation and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) endorse the concept to reduce and eliminate excess credit hours. A Lumina report indicates “….the many reasons why students take excess credits and time to complete degree programs including change of majors, failing or withdrawing from courses, and working and attending school part-time. Other reasons have more to do with system, state or institutional policies, including degree requirements and transfer policies.” A survey commissioned by Complete College America found that the number of credits required to complete a degree in many programs has increased over time. Among four-year degree programs, that trend has already begun to reverse itself, with many states and institutions pushing to return to the 120 credit norm. However, among two-year institutions the standard credit requirements still vary considerably. The Complete College America report goes on to state: “to improve completion and attainment rates, states, systems, and institutions can take action to make 120 credits the norm for a bachelor’s degree and 60 credits the norm for an associate degree. There may be programs for which it makes sense to allow the requirements to exceed 120 or 60 credits, often because of accreditation, but the institutions should be required to make sound justification for those increased credit hours.”

Reducing excess credit hours has the potential to provide multiple benefits to the student and the institution. These include:

* Reducing excess credit hours may encourage timely graduation and allow students to enter the workforce more quickly, therefore increasing lifetime earning potential.
* Reducing excess credit hours may reduce student cost.
* Reducing excess credit hours may support increased collaboration between two and four year sector for the best practice for student transfer and articulation programs.
* Reducing course sections that equate to excess credits may assist the institution to better manage classroom space.

Thus, it is appropriate for the Connecticut State College and University System and campus presidents and chief academic officers to consider the benefits to normalize associate degree programs to 60 credits and baccalaureate degree programs to 120 credits except in cases where accreditation requirements or other extenuating circumstances require additional credits for degree completion.

The recent Board of Regents approved policy for Academic Program Review provides context to assist the campus with the process to review academic programs. It is incumbent upon each campus to develop a strategy to either review each academic program for excess credits within the normal academic program review cycle or independent of the cycle for academic program review.

The campus based review should also take into consideration Board of Regents Transfer and Articulation policy. Where it makes sense the community colleges and the universities should seek agreement on the general education core courses for the majority of degree programs.

The process to review academic credit hours and to consider normalizing the number of credits for an associate and/or baccalaureate degree is campus-based and campus managed. The process should not infringe upon faculty governance or institutional management of the degree program, content, and curriculum. All decisions on curriculum and course content remain within the campus decision-making authority.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Board of Regents consider approving the resolution.

5/14/2014 – Academic Council

10/2/2014 – Academic and Student Affairs Committee

10/16/2014 – Board of Regents