

Approved July 17, 2009

TITLE: PROPOSED REVISION TO VCCS POLICY MANUAL SECTION 5.1.1 - DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS (SB) (Academic, Student Affairs, and Workforce Development Committee, Action Item III.A.2.a)

BACKGROUND:

Credit limits for Career Studies Certificates are defined by policy as 9-29 credits. Credit limits for degree programs are defined by policy as 65-69 or 60-63 credits. Currently, there are no credit guidelines for diploma and certificate programs.

The length of some diploma programs may equate to six semesters of full-time study. Ten of our colleges offer a total of 24 diploma programs. Credit hour totals for these programs range from a low of 59 to a high of 97, with 10 individual programs exceeding the A.A.S. Degree maximum of 72 credit hours. Only 7 of the diploma programs meet or exceed VCCS program viability standards for certificate and diploma program graduates – yet 5 of the 7 “viable” programs exceed the 72 credit hour maximum for AAS Degrees.

Based on questions raised by ASAC in November 2008, academic officers were contacted at the colleges with “long” programs and asked to describe (1) potential consequences of limiting the number of credits permitted in diploma programs, and (2) compelling reasons for not imposing a credit limit. Responses indicated that limiting the number of credits:

- narrows the range of skills that can be developed, making students less marketable
- makes it difficult for students to keep up with rapidly changing content
- limits the amount of “time on task” needed to be competent in technical skill areas

The proposed changes align the credit ranges of *diploma* and *certificate* programs with current policy, which defines diploma programs as two years and certificate programs as less than two years in length. Existing diploma programs that exceed the 72 semester hour maximum are grandfathered in as part of this policy revision.

CURRENT POLICY:

5.1.1 Diploma and Certificate Programs (SB)

Virginia community colleges may offer diploma, certificate and career studies certificate programs. The diploma and certificate curricula shall differ from associate degree curricula in that they may be presented at a different educational level.

5.1.1.0 Diploma

A diploma program is defined as a two-year curriculum with an emphasis in a career/technical area. Diploma curricula may include any appropriate courses numbered 10-299. A minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of a diploma’s credit hour requirement shall be in

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general education. The general education requirements must include one (1) three (3) credit hour English class.

5.1.1.1 Certificate

A certificate program is defined as a curriculum that consists of a minimum of 30 semester credit hours. Certificate curricula may include any appropriate courses numbered 10-299. A minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of a certificate's credit hour requirement shall be in general education. The general education requirements must include one (1) three (3) credit hour English class.

PROPOSED POLICY REVISIONS:

5.1.1 Diploma and Certificate Programs (SB)

Virginia community colleges may offer diploma, certificate and career studies certificate programs. The diploma and certificate curricula shall differ from associate degree curricula in that they may be presented at a different educational level.

5.1.1.0 Diploma

A diploma program is defined as a two-year curriculum *of study that consists of a minimum of 60 and a maximum of 72 semester hours* with an emphasis in a career/technical area. *Exceptions to credit hour limits must be justified on the basis of documented business and industry requirements or standards.* Diploma curricula may include any appropriate courses numbered 10-299. A minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of a diploma's credit hour requirement shall be in general education. The general education requirements must include one (1) three (3) credit hour English class. *Existing programs (as of 2009) that exceed the 72 semester hour maximum are grandfathered in at their current length.*

5.1.1.1 Certificate

A certificate program is defined as a curriculum *of study less than two years in length* that consists of a minimum of 30 *and a maximum of 59* semester credit hours. Certificate curricula may include any appropriate courses numbered 10-299. A minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of a certificate's credit hour requirement shall be in general education. The general education requirements must include one (1) three (3) credit hour English class.

PROPOSED POLICY:

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5.1.1.1 Certificate

A certificate program is defined as a curriculum of study less than two years in length that consists of a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 59 semester credit hours. Certificate curricula may include any appropriate courses numbered 10-299. A minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of a certificate's credit hour requirement shall be in general education. The general education requirements must include one (1) three (3) credit hour English class.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the State Board for Community Colleges approve the proposed revisions to *VCCS Policy Manual* Section 5.1.1.

RESOURCE PERSONS:

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