Standards for Academic Associate Degree Programs

A community college, technical school or state college ("institution") shall adhere to the following standards and Coordinating Board rules, Section 9.184, "Criteria for New Academic Associate Degree Programs and Steps for Implementation," in developing new academic associate degree programs. An institution is expected to incorporate these standards into its new and existing programs unless it provides information that justifies deviation from the standards. (For criteria applicable to Applied Associate Degree programs, see the *Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education*.)

I. Need

Academic Need

The institution has identified specific baccalaureate degree programs that the associate degree would lead into. Institutions should rely on data from four year schools showing demand for particular programs and/or information demonstrating the emergence of a new discipline to support the transfer of programs.

Potential Student Demand

The institution has researched and documented recent and reliable data reflecting short- and long-term evidence of student interest. (Types of data to be used are: 1) Increased enrollments in related programs at the institution; 2) high enrollment in similar programs at other institutions; and 3) student surveys.)

Enrollment Projections

The institution has calculated enrollment projections that reflect student demand estimates to ensure financial stability of the program by the end of the program's fifth year. In calculating yearly FTSE, 30 SCH equals 1 FTSE for associate degree programs. New programs will be developed in accordance with the institution's Uniform Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

II. Quality

Types of Degrees

An academic associate degree is an Associate of Arts (AA) degree; an Associate of Science (AS) degree; or an Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree. The academic associate degree forms the foundation and prerequisites for transfer into a baccalaureate program and, to the extent possible, is aligned with the upper-division requirements of the baccalaureate program at specific four-year institutions to facilitate a seamless transition with minimal loss of credit earned.

General Descriptions

An academic associate degree may be called an Associate of Arts (AA), an Associate of Science (AS), or an Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree.

1. The Associate of Arts (AA) is the default title for an academic associate degree program if the college offers only one type of academic degree program.
2. If a college offers both Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degrees, the degree programs may be differentiated in one of two ways, including:

a. The AA program may have additional requirements in the liberal arts and/or the AS program may have additional requirements in disciplines such as science, mathematics, or computer science; or

b. The AA program may serve as a foundation for the BA degree and the AS program for the BS degree.

3. The Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) is a specialized academic associate degree program designed to transfer in its entirety to a baccalaureate program that leads to initial Texas teacher certification. This title should only be used for an associate degree program that consists of a Board-approved AAT curriculum.

4. Academic associate degree programs must incorporate the institution's approved core curriculum unless they are exempted as provided in Items 5 and 6 of this section.

5. A college may offer a specialized academic associate degree that incorporates a Board-approved statewide articulated transfer curriculum or a Board-approved field of study curriculum and a portion of the college's approved core curriculum if the coursework for both would total more than 66 SCH.

6. A college that has a signed articulation agreement with a General Academic Teaching Institution to transfer a specified curriculum may offer a specialized AA or AS (but not AAT) degree program that incorporates that curriculum.

Number of Semester Credit Hours in a Degree Program

The number of semester credit hours (SCHs) for the degree shall be comparable to the number the SCHs required for similar degrees in the state.

The institution shall take into account Texas Education Code § 61.0515 regarding limitations on the number of semester credit hours required for a baccalaureate degree, and shall not require an excessive number of lower-division SCH for the completion of an associate's degree. Currently the limit for baccalaureate degrees is a maximum of 120 SCH unless the institution of higher education approved to offer the degree program has determined that there is a compelling academic need to require a larger number of SCH for completion of the degree requirements.

The number of SCH to complete an academic associate degree program should be no less than 60 SCH and no more than 66 SCH.

Curriculum

Required Courses

Required courses are taken by all students in the program. These courses shall reflect the lower-division prerequisite courses required for a student to enroll in upper-division courses upon transfer to a baccalaureate program, if the student has completed the appropriate associate degree. Required prerequisite courses should provide the framework for an academic associate degree, and should align precisely with lower-division requirements within a specific bachelor's degree program. Required courses should meet all lower-division requirements for accreditation, licensure, or certification and shall be consistent with similar programs in the state and nation.

Core curriculum

Academic associate degrees should include a completed core curriculum as a graduation requirement, except that the core curriculum does not need to be completed if an associate degree

includes a Board-approved field of study curriculum (FOSC) that excuses students who complete the FOSC from the requirement, a Board-approved statewide articulated transfer curriculum, or an institution-to-institution articulation agreement.

Prescribed and/or Free Electives

Electives, if available at all, are consistent with similar programs and are selected by the student, subject to advisor approval.

Faculty

Faculty Credentials

When evaluating faculty resources for proposed associate degree programs, the institution and its Board shall consider only postsecondary degrees held by faculty that were issued by:

1. United States institutions accredited by accrediting agencies recognized by the Board or,
2. Institutions located outside the United States that have demonstrated that their degrees are equivalent to degrees issued from an institution in the United States accredited by accrediting agencies recognized by the Board. The procedures for establishing that equivalency shall be consistent with the guidelines of the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Education Credentials, or its successor.

Qualifications of Faculty

Faculty should meet the qualitative and quantitative criteria of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC), and the appropriate professional accrediting body, if the faculty member teaches in a professional program (a) for which accreditation is available, or (b) that feeds into a baccalaureate program for which professional accreditation is available. There should be sufficient numbers of qualified faculty dedicated to a new program. This number shall vary depending on the discipline, the nature of the program, and the anticipated student enrollment.

The percentage of faculty with terminal degrees shall compare favorably to the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees at similar programs in the state and nation. All faculty teaching lower-division courses intended to transfer into bachelor's degree programs must meet SACS-COC Standards for faculty credentials, including the *Guidelines for Faculty Credentials.*

Any course that is taught by a faculty member with faculty credentials as outlined in the SACS-COC *Guidelines for Faculty Credentials* under the section addressing faculty teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree should NOT be expected to transfer or apply to any bachelor's degree.

Library Resources

Resources shall meet the standards of the appropriate accrediting body or other professional association and be adequate to support the program. Faculty and library staff shall collaborate on writing a collection development policy for the program and on purchasing core collection materials.

Facilities and Equipment

Facilities and equipment shall be equivalent to those provided at similar programs in the state and nation.

Accreditation

If applicable, the institution shall identify plans to seek accreditation from appropriate accrediting agencies or organizations. If accreditation is not available for associate degree programs, the institution should be prepared to provide that information upon request.

III. Costs and Funding

Determine projected *new* costs to the institution for the first five years of the program and document sources of funds to cover the costs. Identifiable new and reallocated revenues shall cover the incremental costs of operating the program. New formula funding shall not be considered as a funding source for the first two years of the program and shall not exceed 50 percent of all funding for the program for years three through five. By year six, the identified sustainable incremental revenue shall be equal to or above the incremental costs. Incremental or new costs to the institution shall be below $2,000,000 for the first five years of the program. Costs shall include personnel, facilities and equipment, library resources, supplies and materials, administration, and any other new costs directly related to the program. Identified funding sources should include tuition and fees, local funding, state funding, and external support.