Federal Requirement 4.9 – Definition of Credit Hours

*The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to Commission policy.* (SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement, 2012, Federal Requirement 4.9)

Findings of the Off-Site Committee:

To appear in the inventory of the THECB, courses must include 45 to 48 contact hours for a traditionally delivered three semester-credit-hour (SCH) course that contains 15 weeks of instruction and a week of final examinations. Semester credit hour and contact hour equivalents as described in the TTU Undergraduate/Graduate Catalog are consistent with THECB policy, requiring 45 hours of contact for a 3 SCH course. It is stated in 3.4.6 that sometimes courses not meeting these minimums are nonetheless awarded credit hours, and referenced 4.9 for more information. However, none was provided. Further, there is no evidence that distance learning courses, or courses transferred in from international institutions, are monitored for appropriate calibration of documented student learning to the amount of academically engaged time.

Texas Tech University’s Response:

Texas Tech University (TTU or Texas Tech) is in compliance with Federal Requirement (FR) 4.9. Texas Tech follows clearly established policies for the determination of appropriate credit values for any course proposed to be taught in a shortened format, and assigns credit for distance courses in exactly the same manner as credit assigned for face-to-face courses, because the course requirements must be identical in terms of student learning outcomes and other indicators of student achievement. Texas Tech also monitors the assignment of credit and course equivalence closely and systematically for any courses transferred from institutions of
higher education outside the US, as well as from U.S. institutions outside the Texas public college and university community.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has established a policy in its rules (TAC §4.6) regarding the minimum length of courses and the limitation on the amount of credit that a student may earn in a given time period [1]. This link was inadvertently omitted in the FR 4.9 response in the Compliance Certification Report (CCR). These state-level requirements guide the Texas Tech University Operating Policies (OPs) that govern course credit matters, including distance education courses -- OP 36.01 (Adding, Changing, and Deleting Courses and Changing Method of Delivery), OP 36.04 (New Academic Programs, Course Approval for New Programs, Program Termination, and Changes in Delivery Format), and OP 36.05 (Shortened Course Formats) [2] [3] [4].

The Off-Site Committee also felt that additional information was needed regarding evidence related to transfer of credit evaluation for courses from international institutions and “monitoring calibration of documented student learning to the amount of academically engaged time.” Texas Tech University (TTU or Texas Tech) does in fact follow policies and practices for assigning credit hour values that are based on policies of the State of Texas and best practices of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (TACRAO), as described below. THECB Rules (TAC §4.25) provide the statutory basis for transfer of academic credit among Texas public higher education institutions at the lower-division level [5]. Other credit transfer is not addressed in Texas statutes. Texas Tech policies and practices for transfer of credit, including the transfer of credit from institutions that fall outside the credit transfer mandates in Texas law, align with the best practices of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) [6] and SACSCOC [7]. With these policies governing transfer credit, Texas Tech monitors the assignment of credit and course equivalence
closely and systematically for any courses transferred from institutions of higher education
outside the U.S., as well as from U.S. institutions outside the Texas public university and
community college systems

**Assignment of Appropriate Credit for Shortened Format Courses**

TTU OP 36.05 (Shortened Course Formats) requires that approval be secured for such
courses at the departmental, college, and provost levels [4]. TTU complies with THECB
requirements that any course offered in a non-traditional way must be reviewed and approved
through a formal, institutional faculty review process that evaluates the course and its learning
outcomes and determines that the course does, in fact, have equivalent learning outcomes to
an equivalent, traditionally delivered course. The Office of Academic Support and Facilities
Planning (ASFR) oversees the monitoring process for any shortened format courses, and very
few are approved for TTU. Through the scheduling process or error report checking (described
immediately below), ASFR becomes aware of sections that are not scheduled for the standard
term dates or that are requesting to offer the sections in shortened formats.

TTU’s approval process for evaluating requests for shortened course formats begins
with the department providing justification to ASFR as to why the course/section would benefit
from this format. ASFR then works with the department to ensure that the section is not
receiving more than one credit hour per week of instruction, as well as meeting all required
contact hours in the shortened format. TTU seldom approves courses that do not meet these
rules.

Once this part of the process is completed, further approval requests are sent from
AFSR to the Senior Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, the Managing Director of Institutional
Research, the Managing Director of Student Business Services, the Registrar, and the
Managing Director of Student Financial Aid. Comments and questions about how these offices
would be affected are discussed and approvals/denials finalized. If approved, ASFR notifies the
department and posts the information in the ASFR SharePoint site for reference. Two examples are included as evidence for the monitoring process [8].

**Assignment of Appropriate Credit for Courses Taught Online or at a Distance**

Courses taught online or at a distance follow the same policies as those required for traditionally delivered courses. The TTU Operating Policies that govern the approval of courses and methods of delivery are OP 36.01 and OP 36.04; these policies require the approval of the departmental and college committees, as well as the Academic Council and Graduate Council (in the case of graduate courses). Specifically, OP 36.01 states:

> An approved course section in which 50 percent or more of the contact hours will be delivered electronically must meet the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Principles of Good Practice and be certified by filing a Principles of Good Practice/Copyright Compliance Form, which is available online at http://www.depts.ttu.edu/distancelearning/faculty, prior to delivery. The Office of the Provost is responsible for ensuring that the course has been entered into the distance education database before the course is offered [2].

OP 36.04 states:

> New courses proposed as a part of a new degree program will not be included in catalog copy until the program is approved by the THECB. An approved course section in which 50 percent or more of the contact hours will be delivered electronically must meet the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Principles of Good Practice and be certified by filing a Principles of Good Practice/Copyright Compliance Form, which is available online at http://www.depts.ttu.edu/distancelearning/faculty, prior to delivery. The Office of the Provost is responsible for ensuring that the course has been entered into the distance education database before the course is offered [3].

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board policy, *Principles of Good Practice for Academic Degree and Certificate Programs and Credit Courses Offered Electronically* [9], includes the following requirements for all distance courses offered by public institutions in the State of Texas:
• Academic standards for all programs or courses offered electronically will be the same as those for programs or courses delivered by other means at the institution where the program or course originates.
• Student learning in programs or courses delivered electronically should be comparable to student learning in programs offered at the campus where the programs or courses originate.

Thus, all standards that apply to face-to-face courses at Texas Tech University also apply to courses delivered at a distance. Following procedures stipulated in OP 36.01, 36.04, and 36.05, courses are approved based on content, student learning outcomes, acceptable assessment methods, etc. and not modality of presentation (e.g., face-to-face, hybrid, or distance).

Examples of syllabi from online and face-to-face courses are provided to illustrate this policy.

Because the institution approves courses based on content and not delivery method, policies related to credit hours are applied equally to all courses.

Assignment of Appropriate Credit Value for Courses Transferred from International Institutions of Higher Education

The Off-Site Committee also expressed concern at how courses transferred in from international institutions are monitored for appropriate calibration of documented student learning to the amount of academically engaged time. TTU has policies for the intake of international credit at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For undergraduate credit, or any credit presented from institutions that are not protected by the legal guarantees that are in place for credit transfer among the public institutions of higher education in Texas, transfer and application of credit from U.S. institutions outside the system of Texas public higher education, as well as credit from international institution, is not guaranteed without appropriate review and evaluation. Texas Tech University policies on transfer credit published online through the TTU Transfer Evaluation Office, under the aegis of the University Registrar [23], follow generally
accepted procedures for establishing the validity of credit earned at international institutions, based on best practices from AACRAO [6] and SACSCOC [7]. This process is described below.

Undergraduate international students who desire to transfer credit for courses taken at international institutions must submit a request to the TTU Transfer Evaluation Office (TEO) within the Office of the Registrar [24]. TEO then submits a request to International Undergraduate Admissions for a line-by-line evaluation. (It is not possible to accurately determine credit for a single class, so a full credential evaluation must be done to determine equivalent credits and grade points for the whole credential.) This evaluation results in a report that includes equivalent credits, grades, and grade points for each course, as well as determination of the credential’s equivalence (i.e., one semester, one academic year, etc. completed at the equivalent of a regionally accredited college/university, depending on how the school is recognized). The completed report is sent back to TEO. Foreign programs generally do not have course syllabi, but if they are available, the student is encouraged to provide course syllabi (sometimes called a course prospectus) for the foreign program. Those are included with the evaluation report materials, as well as the credential evaluation and copy of foreign credentials, that the TEO sends to whichever academic department would actually receive the credit. This process allows the designated faculty member/s to determine, following the review and evaluation of the foreign educational records, whether the courses in question are comparable to any TTU course equivalent/s.

There are a number of criteria that help the process along:

- Courses must have a C or better equivalent grade in order to eligible for transfer credit.
- Transfer credit is only possible if the foreign credential listing the award and/or course of study is determined to be official, according to policies and procedures established by AACRAO.
- Official English translations must accompany any credential in a language other than English.
• TEO does not complete credential evaluations unless the student has provided the official syllabi/prospectus, and syllabi/prospectuses must also have certified English translations if issued in a language other than English.

• Perhaps most importantly, because not all courses are determined to have the same number of credits as the TTU course being considered for equivalency, it is not always possible for credit to be transferred directly as equivalent.

Three examples of foreign credit evaluation are provided as evidence for the consistency of the process [25].

For international graduate students, transfer credit is evaluated and awarded by the Graduate Enrollment Services (ES) division of the Graduate School, rather than by TEO. The process begins when the new graduate student’s degree plan is submitted. The degree plan form includes a section for transfer credit. The graduate program coordinator for the program completes the form with the foreign institution name/location, foreign school course name (and its course prefix/number, if given on the foreign credential), and the TTU course prefix/number for the TTU course. Graduate Admissions does not currently have any role in the transfer credit process, nor is a line-by-line evaluation provided. The graduate program coordinator (faculty member) determines equivalency, and the transfer credit is then assigned by Graduate School Enrollment Services. A uniform campus-wide policy requires that courses must have a grade of B or better in order to be transferred. Graduate programs generally do not accept more than six SCH in transfer, and the responsibility for evaluating foreign graduate credit lies with the faculty member assigned program coordination duties. The Graduate School posts policies on the evaluation of foreign credentials submitted as part of an international student’s application to a graduate program:

• Original or Certified Copies of All College and University Transcripts - Include mark sheets, examination results, etc. An official English translation is required. If the degree is not complete when the application is made, six semesters or three years of course
work are required. After the degree is completed, a final transcript showing the degree awarded must be submitted. Texas Tech University requires a degree that is equivalent to a U.S. undergraduate degree.

- Photocopy of Degree - The original or certified photocopies of the degree certificate, diploma, or official statement that the degree has been granted. An official English translation is required. [26].

In conclusion, the additional evidence provided in this Focused Report addresses the concerns of the Off-Site Review Committee and compliance with FR 4.9. Texas Tech follows clearly established policies, enumerated in this response, for the determination of appropriate credit values for any course proposed to be taught in a shortened format. TTU assigns credit for distance courses in the same manner as credit is assigned for face-to-face courses, because the course requirements must be identical in terms of student learning outcomes and other indicators of student achievement. These practices comply with the THECB Principles of Good Practice and with TTU Operating Policies and Procedures. Texas Tech also monitors the assignment of credit and course equivalence closely and systematically for any courses transferred from institutions of higher education outside the US, as well as from U.S. institutions outside the Texas public university and community college systems.

Supporting Documentation and Evidence

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