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Commission works with Indiana colleges to curb “credit creep”

The Indiana Commission for Higher Education today announced the results of a year-long effort to streamline college degree requirements, part of an ongoing focus on increasing the number of Hoosiers with education beyond high school.

“We’ve placed a priority on working with our colleges to remove barriers that prevent students from earning a degree,” said Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “Credit creep—the gradual increase in college credit requirements—is one obstacle that increases college costs and leads to lower on-time completion rates.”

In 2012, the Commission for Higher Education conducted a statewide audit which revealed that nearly 90 percent of college degree programs exceeded the historical standard of 120 credit hours for a bachelor’s degree and 60 credit hours for an associate degree. On the academic calendar, that equates to four years of full-time attendance (30 credit hours per year) for a bachelor’s degree and two years for an associate degree.

In response to the Commission’s spotlight on the credit creep issue, the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation (HEA 1220) with gubernatorial support that required the state’s colleges and universities to provide a clear justification for any bachelor’s degree program requiring more than 120 credit hours and any associate degree program requiring more than 60 credit hours. One year later, nearly 90 percent of Indiana college degrees now meet that standard. The Commission has approved some exceptions to the credit-hour standard based on specific program accreditation, licensure or employment requirements that call for additional credits.

“The swift action by Indiana lawmakers and our colleges to curb credit creep is a win for students and for taxpayers,” said Lubbers. “The result is high-quality degrees that support college affordability and on-time college completion.”

Other Commission policy priorities that have spurred recent state legislation include new measures that established student financial aid incentives tied to credit completion, clear degree maps for every Indiana college student and single articulation pathways designed to streamline credit transfer between our colleges and universities. Each of these strategies is a key policy recommendation in the Commission’s *Reaching Higher, Achieving More* strategic plan.

Reaching Higher, Achieving More aims to increase student success by creating more pathways for degree completion, safeguarding college affordability and ensuring academic quality at all levels of Indiana’s higher education system. Learn more about *Reaching Higher, Achieving More* online at www.che.in.gov.

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The Commission's for Higher Education's strategic plan and many of its activities aim to increase on-time completion and reduce the cost of college for students and taxpayers. One obstacle in this pursuit is "credit creep," or the gradual increase in college credit requirements. The Commission shined a light on this issue with a 2010 report showing that nearly 90 percent of degree programs *exceeded* the historical credit expectations of 120 credits for a bachelor's degree and 60 for an associate degree. These historical expectations are not inconsequential – they are the sum of credits that can be acquired in two or for years by taking 15 credits per semester. When programs exceed this threshold, the student faces a choice of delaying graduation or taking larger course-loads than the 15 credit per semester standard.

The Indiana General Assembly was quick to address the issue and passed House Enrolled Act 1220, also known as the Credit Creep Act, which took effect on July 1, 2012. This new law required Indiana's public colleges and universities to justify to the Commission any program that exceeded the historical credit expectations. The response by institutions was laudable. Within just one year, program credits were scaled back to the historical standard and 89 percent now *meet* the standard, making excessive credits the exception rather than the rule.

The chart below shows the effectiveness, by institution, of the legislation.

Baccalaureate Degree Programs	Total Number of Programs Offered	Number of Programs Meeting Standard	Percent of Programs Meeting Standard
Ball State University	94	76	81%
Indiana State University	78	74	95%
Indiana University			
Bloomington	97	90	93%
East	23	21	91%
Kokomo	28	26	93%
Northwest	40	39	98%
South Bend	54	49	91%
Southeast	36	33	92%
IUPUI	83	72	87%
IU Subtotal	361	330	91%
Purdue University			
West Lafayette	150	115	77%
Calumet	41	29	71%
North Central	21	16	76%
IPFW	54	48	89%
Purdue Subtotal	266	208	78%
University of Southern Indiana	52	52	100%
Vincennes University	7	2	29%
Total	858	760	89%

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Associate Degree Programs	Total Number of Programs Offered	Number of Programs Meeting Standard	Percent of Programs Meeting Standard
Ivy Tech Community College	85	75	88%
Vincennes University *	104	58	56%
Total	189	133	70%

All Undergraduate Degree Programs	Total Number of Programs Offered	Number of Programs Meeting Standard	Percent of Programs Meeting Standard
Grand Total	1,047	893	85%

*Includes programs that are expected to meet the standard expectation in Fall 2013.