

# Degree Credit Caps:

## Report to the Legislature

Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

October, 2010



**Minnesota**  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

## Report Summary

- During FY 2010, 327 degree programs have reduced credit lengths to 60/120.
- 87% of the degree programs are now in compliance with MN Statute and Chancellor's policy and procedure.
- Seven waiver applications were submitted; six applications have been approved and one is in process.
- During FY 2011 and 2012 group waiver applications are expected in areas such as: engineering, law enforcement, health care and teaching programs.

## Comprehensive Overview of System Academic Programs

Table 1 shows, as of August 1, 2010, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offered a total of 4,228 academic programs. For the system, 3,686 programs (87 percent) are within credit limits set by either Chancellor's procedure or the legislated 60/120 credit limits. The remaining 542 system programs (13 percent) that exceed credit limits will be required to submit a waiver request by December 31, 2011 or reduce to 60/120 credits by June 29, 2012.

The total number of programs in compliance with either Chancellor's procedures or 60/120 legislation increased from 79 percent in 2009 to 87 percent in 2010. Similarly, the total number of programs that exceed either limits set in Chancellor's procedures or the legislated 60/120 credit length limits decreased from 21 percent in 2009 to 13 percent in 2010.

Table 1: Programs Required to Comply with <u>both</u> Chancellor's Procedures & 60/120 Legislation.			
Programs (August 1, 2010)		In Compliance (ahead of the 2012 deadline)	Working Toward Compliance (will reduce credits or be granted a waiver by 2012)
Colleges	3,155	2,861 (91%)	294 (9%)
Universities	1,073	825 (77%)	248 (23%)
Total	4,228	3,686 (87%)	542 (13%)

**System colleges** offer 3,155 programs; 2,861 (91 percent) conform to credit length limits as set by either Chancellor's procedures or the legislated 60 credit limit.<sup>1</sup> 294 college programs (9 percent) exceed credit length limits and will be required to submit a waiver request by December 31, 2011, or reduce to 60 credits by June 29, 2012.

**System universities** offer 1,073 programs; 825 (77 percent) are within credit length limits set by either Chancellor's procedures or the legislated 120 credit limit. 248 university programs (23 percent) exceed credit length limits and will be required to submit a waiver request by December 31, 2011, or reduce to 120 credits by June 29, 2012.

<sup>1</sup> Associate of Applied Science (AAS) are exempted from the degree credit cap (60 credits) until July 2, 2012.

## Current Status of Academic Programs

Legislation sets the credit length of degree programs to 60 or 120 credits unless a waiver is granted according to specific criteria outlined by the Legislature. This affects all associate and baccalaureate degree programs, with the exception of associate in applied science degree programs, which were exempted until 2012.

For 2009 and 2010, Table 2 shows the number of programs in and out of compliance with 60/120 legislation. Unless otherwise noted, degree programs are counted at each location where they are offered to maintain consistency with standard practice.

Table 2: Only the Programs Required to Comply with 60/120 Legislation <sup>2</sup>							
	Within Credit Limit		Exceed Credit Limit		Total		Waiver Applications 2010
	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	
<b>COLLEGE AWARDS</b>							
Associate (AA, AS, AES, AFA)	118	198	273	198	391	396	1
<b>UNIVERSITY AWARDS</b>							
Associate (AA, AS, AES, AFA)	4	14	13	3	17	17	0
Baccalaureate	207	441	483	241	690	682	6
Subtotal	211	455	496	244	707	699	
Total	<b>329</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>1098</b>	<b>1095</b>	<b>7</b>

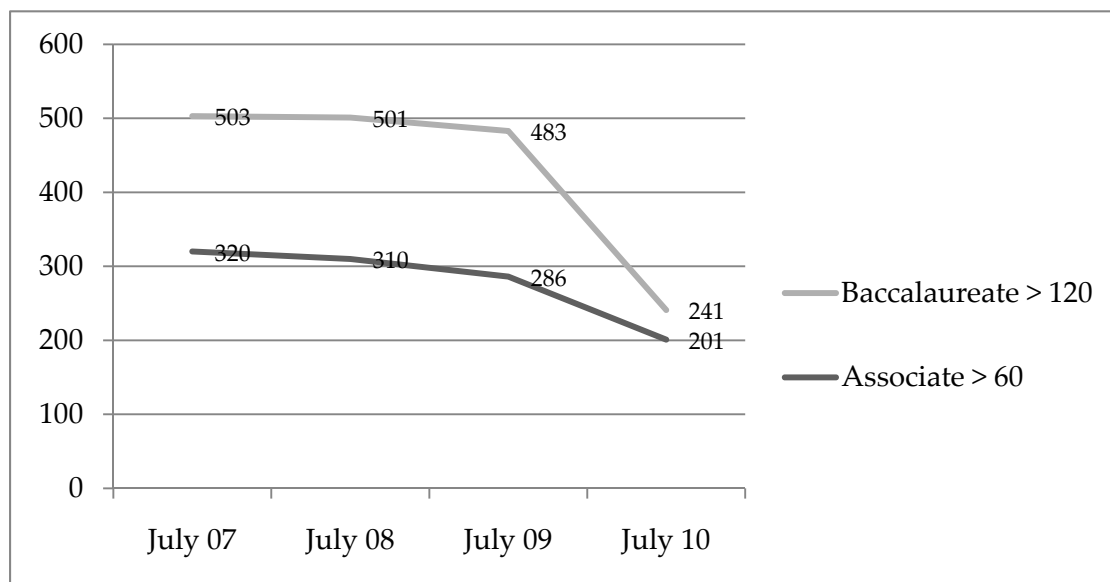
As of August 1, 2010, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offered a total of 1095 programs that are required to comply with 60/120 legislation. Of these, 653 programs (60 percent) are within credit limits set by the 60/120 legislation and 442 (40 percent) exceed the legislated credit limits and will be required to submit a waiver request by December 31, 2011, or reduce to 60/120 credits by June 29, 2012.

### Academic Program Trends

Trend data indicate that there has been a significant reduction in the number of programs that exceed the 60/120 credit length limit. Table 3, below, summarizes the changes in the number of programs by type of award and credit length over time. From July, 2007 (when 60/120 legislation became effective), through August 1, 2010, the number of associate degree programs over 60 credits has declined from 348 to 201 (42 percent). Baccalaureate degree programs over 120 credits have decreased from 503 to 241 (52 percent).

<sup>2</sup> Associate in Applied Science degrees are exempt from the 60/120 credit length requirement until July 2, 2012.

Table 3: Changes in Programs Credit Length Over Time



### Credit Length Waiver Applications

In order to exceed legislated credit limits, colleges and universities must submit single or group waiver applications. Single waiver applications are appropriate for programs that are “one of a kind” within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. Group waiver applications are appropriate when two or more colleges or universities offer programs with similar learning outcomes.

Waiver applications must document the need to exceed the 60/120 credit length limits based on industry or professional standards. A thorough program analysis is required when industry, professional or accreditation standards do not require a specific program length above 60 or 120 credits.

**Single Waiver Applications** were submitted to the Office of the Chancellor by December 31, 2009. As shown in Table 4, Winona State University submitted an application for the Composite Engineering program. Minnesota State University – Mankato submitted applications for Civil Engineering, Automotive Engineering Technology, Computer Engineering Technology, Electrical Engineering Technology, and Manufacturing Engineering Technology.

The applications were reviewed by the Office of the Chancellor staff prior to being posted to the Waiver Listserv<sup>3</sup> for a 30-day review and comment period. Because no comments were submitted, Office of the Chancellor staff contacted each constituent group to make sure they had received the information and to answer any questions. There were no objections to the approval of the engineering program waivers.

<sup>3</sup> Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Student and Faculty Associations

Credit length waivers were approved for MSU-Mankato and Winona State University engineering programs. The applications were reviewed according to the following waiver criteria: 1) documented industry standards; 2) national specialized accreditation standards; 3) program curriculum analysis; and 4) comparison to other regional programs. Waiver application files are available for review upon request.

A single waiver application for an Associate in Science Graphic Design program was also submitted by North Hennepin Community College. The application is currently being reviewed for appropriateness as there may be similar programs within the system that could work with them to develop a group application.

College/University	Program	Credits	Disposition
Winona State U	BS, Composite Engineering	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128
MSU – Mankato	BS, Civil Engineering	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128
MSU – Mankato	BS, Automotive Engineering Technology	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128
MSU – Mankato	BS, Computer Engineering Technology	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128
MSU – Mankato	BS, Electrical Engineering Technology	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128
MSU – Mankato	BS, Manufacturing Engineering Technology	128	Granted waiver to remain at 128

**Group Waiver Applications** are to be submitted to the Office of the Chancellor on or before December 31, 2011; none have been submitted to date. Over the next year and a half, colleges and universities with similar programs seeking a waiver must come together to develop applications that meet the waiver criteria as set forth in Minnesota Session Law.<sup>4</sup> All participants in the development of the group waiver application must agree on the number of credits required to achieve the desired outcome of the degree program. The industry standards, professional standards, national specialized accreditation standards, program curriculum analysis and comparison to other regional programs must be sufficiently documented in the waiver application. All participants must sign off on the joint Group Waiver application prior to submission to the Office of the Chancellor.

#### **Plans for FY 2011 and FY 2012**

Over the coming year and a half, colleges and universities with degree programs that do not comply with the 60/120 legislation or Chancellor's procedures will be:

1. Working together with similar programs to complete and submit Group Waiver applications by **December 31, 2011**, or
2. Working to redesign programs to reduce the credit length to 60/120 by **June 29, 2012**.

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2007, Chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b)

## APPENDICES A – E

### APPENDIX A: LEGISLATION

Session laws in 2007, 2008 and 2009 affect the credit length of selected degree programs. Session law in 2007<sup>5</sup> directs the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees to set the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits, and for an associate degree at 60 credits. The law permits the Board of Trustees to grant waivers for specific degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of credits. In January 2009 the Board of Trustees adopted policy and the Chancellor approved procedure to guide the system's response to this legislation.

Legislation in 2008, below, requires the Board of Trustees to annually report to the house and senate higher education committees regarding waivers that have been requested and granted.

#### MAXIMUM CREDIT FOR GRADUATION; WAIVER REPORTING.

*The board must annually by October 1 report to the chairs of the house of representatives and senate committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education policy on the board's current policy setting the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate and an associate of arts degree at 120 and 60 semester credits or their equivalent, respectively, as required by Laws 2007, chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b). The report must specifically identify requests in the previous academic year for waivers from the policy and the requests granted. The specific identification must include, among other things, the program and the campus for which a request was made and for which a waiver was granted. EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective January 1, 2009.<sup>6</sup>*

Session law in 2009, below, modifies the 2007 legislation by (a) directing that, until July 2, 2012, associate of applied science degree programs be exempt from the 60 credit length limit set by Board of Trustees policy and (b) permitting additional waiver review criteria for emerging or innovative programs.

#### MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES DEGREE REQUIREMENTS.

*Until July 2, 2012, an associate of applied science degree offered by a college in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system is exempt from the 60-semester credit length limit for an associate degree specified in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board Policy number 3.36, part 3, subpart C. The chancellor may consider criteria for waiving the credit length limits under this board policy for emerging or innovative programs. By January 2, 2012, the Minnesota State College Faculty and the Minnesota State College Student Association must present a joint report to the house of representatives and senate committees with jurisdiction over higher education policy on process for reviewing the credit requirements for an associate of applied science degree. EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective the day following final enactment and applies to associate of applied science degrees whether first offered before, on, or after that date.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2007 Chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b)

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Statute, 136F.301

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2009, Chapter 95, article 2, section 44

## APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND

Prior to January 2009, chancellor's procedure set academic program credit lengths with the following limits: associate degrees could range from 60 to 64 credits except for associate in applied science degrees that could be up to 72 credits and baccalaureate degrees could range from 120 to 128 credits. The procedures allowed individual academic programs to exceed these limits when criteria were met. (There was no expectation that similar programs at different colleges and universities would adopt a standard credit length.)

The motivation to set lower credit length limits for associate and baccalaureate degrees did not emanate from an academic policy initiative. Rather, the impetus came from student concern about debt load variations based on their observation that credit lengths of seemingly similar programs varied across colleges and universities.

Legislation, cited above, resulted in revised Board of Trustees policy and Chancellor's procedure. These revisions, which considered recommendations from a statewide taskforce, were approved in January 2009.

### Statewide Taskforce

A taskforce on Degree Credit Caps was established in the fall of 2007 by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, with representatives from the Academic and Student Affairs Leadership Council, college and university academic administrators, Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF), Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA), Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA), Administrative and Service Faculty (ASF, formerly MSUAASF), and the Office of the Chancellor.

The taskforce charge was to recommend policy and procedure related to statutory requirements for credit limitations on associate and baccalaureate degree programs within the system. The final report included recommendations on (1) applicability to degree program categories, (2) program waiver processes, (3) program-length waiver criteria for all awards, (4) timelines, and (5) policy language. The [full report](#)<sup>8</sup> is available on the Web.

### Examples from Other States

Several other states have implemented credit length caps: Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin. The CUNY system in New York and the California State University System have also implemented policies addressing credit length limits and degree program comparability.

In 1995 the state of Florida undertook a national survey of 75 universities regarding common practices in baccalaureate programs.<sup>9</sup> The study found that programs clustered in three groups: disciplines with low credit hour requirements, 120-124 credits; disciplines of moderate length, 124-126; and disciplines at 128 credits and a few exceeding 128. Florida subsequently reduced 506 of 614 baccalaureate programs to 120 credit hours.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Hours to Graduation: A National Survey of Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degrees, 1995.

A California State University system report noted that “. . . three-fourths of the programs now require 120 total semester units. About 85% have lowered their total unit requirement.” At the College of DuPage (the largest community college in Illinois), most associate of applied science programs are 64 credits (consistent with the Illinois Community College System policy). Florida’s community college system has established a formal list of approved program credit lengths. Programs may not exceed the approved limits.

### Revenues and Expenditures

Reducing the credit length of programs affects revenues and expenditures of colleges and universities. The impact on revenue is easier to estimate than it is for expenditures.

Revenue from student tuition, which accounts for approximately half of system revenue, will decline in proportion to the full year equivalent student enrollment eliminated as a result of course credits being dropped from academic programs. Some academic programs will be granted a waiver to exceed the 60 or 120 credit length limits, which would lessen revenue losses.

Colleges and universities have several options for reducing expenditures. Expenditures may be reduced when courses or course-sections in the major are no longer offered. Workloads may be adjusted and reductions in other budget categories may occur. Expenditures on new courses, sections or programs may lessen the impact of reduced tuition revenue.

### Timeframe

Listed below are key dates and activities related to system response for the degree credit cap legislation. Overall, development and implementation processes will take about three and one-half years, that is, from January 2009 when policy and procedure were approved until July 2012. By the fall of 2012, degree programs should be reduced to 60 or 120 credits or be granted a waiver for a longer credit length.

Date	Activity
2007	Session law on degree credit caps.
2008 – March	Taskforce report completed
2008	Statute requires annual reporting
2008 – Nov	Proposed policy and procedure: First reading November 2008
2009 – Jan	Approved policy and procedure: Second reading January 2009
2009 – Jun	Deadline for notice of intent to file a waiver application
2009 – Oct	First report to the legislature
2009 to 2011	Development and submission of waiver applications
2011 – Dec	Waiver submission deadline
2012 – July	Implementation



## **APPENDIX C: WAIVER APPLICATION CRITERIA AND PROCESS**

Program credit lengths may exceed limits set in procedure only with approval of the Office of Chancellor. Revised policy 3.36 and chancellor's procedures 3.36.1, approved in January of 2009, are being implemented.

Applications for program credit length waivers are initiated on college and university campuses using their agreed upon curriculum review processes. After systemwide review, waiver applications are confirmed by colleges and universities and then submitted to the office of the chancellor. Page | 9

Guidelines have been developed to assist with the preparation of a waiver requests.

### **Waiver Criteria**

Credit length waivers may be granted when determined necessary to ensure that the degree provided meets industry or professional standards. Program advisory committee recommendations that support the standards may be submitted with the waiver request.

Proposed waiver criteria include:

1. Industry standards
  - a. National or international program certification
  - b. National or international standards, including skill standards
  - c. Standards recommended by a primary employer or from multiple employers within a program service area
2. Professional standards
  - a. National specialized program accreditation
  - b. State licensure requirements
  - c. National practices or standards

### **Waiver Rationale and Evidence**

Colleges and universities must provide supportive documentation which demonstrates that the proposed program credit length is justified by externally established standards or guidelines. Documentation may include specific credit length requirements established by accrediting or certification bodies, evidence of state licensure requirements, research literature which supports industry skill standards or national practices, and letters of support from employers attesting to the need for specific skills requiring longer programs.

### **Program Analysis Guidelines**

An in-depth program analysis is required for all programs seeking a waiver request, except when industry or professional standards set a specific minimum program credit length above 60/120 and the program meets those standards or is designed to be consistent with those standards.

A detailed program analysis must discuss how the program meets industry or professional standards and how it compares in credit length to similar programs within the system. A program analysis covering the following must be included in a group waiver application.

- a. Description (catalog description)
- b. Design (major, emphases, general education, etc.)
- c. Objectives or purposes
- d. Learning outcomes
- e. Curriculum (course listing with course number, name, description and credits)
- f. Comparison to other programs
- g. Other factors, e.g., task analysis

Programs determined to be similar will have the same program credit length. Program similarity is based on the extent to which there are similar program learning outcomes. Curriculum design and course requirements can be different.

### **Articulation Agreements**

Where applicable, articulation agreements must be revised and submitted as part of the waiver request. Colleges and universities complete an [articulation agreement table](#)<sup>10</sup> that is reviewed to confirm that all courses in the associate degree program transfer and count toward completion of a specific baccalaureate degree program.

### **Waiver Process**

The process for requesting a waiver to exceed approved credit lengths is described below. The process, which begins on college and university campuses and follows the institution's academic curriculum approval process, has six steps. The quick steps are followed by a flowchart that graphically displays this six step sequence.

#### ***STEP 1. Decide to reduce program credit length OR seek a waiver***

Faculty members initiate the decision-making through their college or university academic curriculum approval process.

A decision is made to A) reduce program credit lengths to 60 or 120 credits; or B) submit a Notice of Intent to file a waiver application.

All forms and instructions can be found at the [Academic Programs](#) website<sup>11</sup>.

#### ***STEP 2. Complete an appropriate application for each degree program***

- A. **Reduce to 60/120 Credits.** If the college or university decides to reduce credit lengths to 60 or 120 credits, complete the REDESIGN: Change Program and/or Emphasis Credit Length form and submit it to the Office of the Chancellor by December 31, 2011. No further action will be necessary unless the program becomes involved in a statewide group waiver application. The

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>

Office of the Chancellor will use the [Degree Credit Caps](#)<sup>12</sup> Web site to inform colleges and universities of programs that have been reduced to 60 or 120 credits.

— Or —

B. Seek a Waiver. Complete a Notice of Intent: 60/120 Credit Waiver form and submit electronically (subject: WAIVER INTENT) to [Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu) by June 30, 2009. The Office of the Chancellor will post the Notice of Intent to the Waiver Listserv as an information item. Notices of Intent will be used for statewide planning.

### ***STEP 3. Assess for Similarity and Complete a Waiver Application***

Prior to completing any waiver application, colleges and universities assess whether their program is similar to other programs in the state. Colleges and universities can begin the process of comparing programs by reviewing the system [program inventory](#)<sup>13</sup> and finding other programs that are grouped in the same CIP code<sup>14</sup>. A comparison of catalog descriptions of program requirements may also be helpful. Other comparisons might include data from national or state studies.

- A. Single Waiver Application. If the program does not appear to be similar to other programs, consult with the Office of the Chancellor and then, if appropriate, complete the SINGLE: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER application and submit it electronically (subject: SINGLE WAIVER) to [Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu) by December 31, 2009. The Office of the Chancellor determines if a single application is appropriate or if the program should be considered as part of a group application.
- B. Group Waiver Application. If similarity is likely, faculty should begin communicating with faculty at other institutions. Consult with the Office of the Chancellor and then, if appropriate, complete the GROUP: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER application and submit it electronically (subject: GROUP WAIVER) to [Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu) by December 31, 2011. The Office of the Chancellor determines if the group application is appropriate.

### ***STEP 4. Completed applications posted to listserv for comment***

Applications will be posted to the Waiver Listserv for 30 business days. Members of the listserv (Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Student and Faculty Associations) will have an opportunity to review the application and submit comments to the listserv. Comments posted to the listserv, including applicants' responses, will be considered by the Office of the Chancellor when reviewing the application.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu>

<sup>14</sup> CIP is the acronym for the national Classification of Instructional Programs

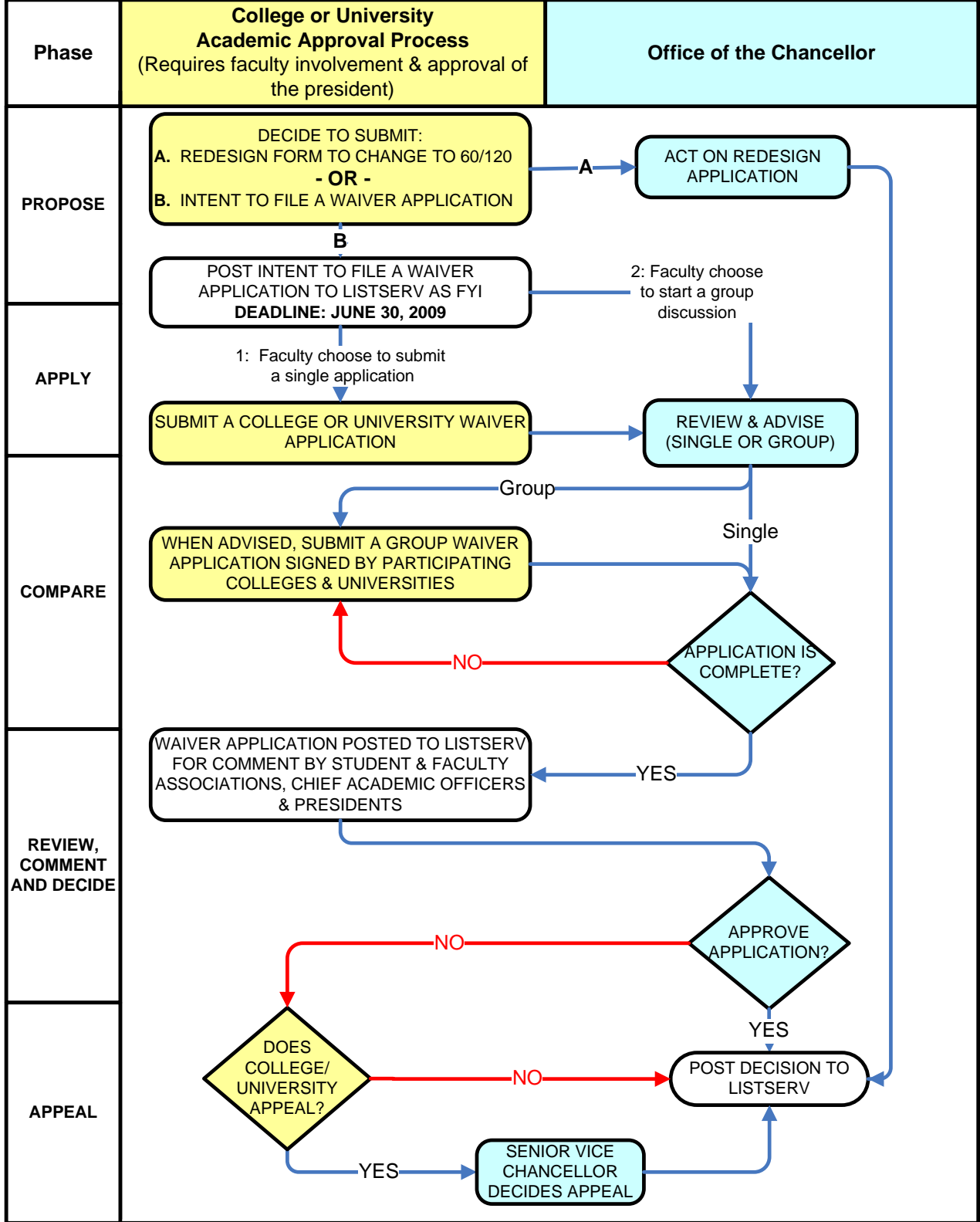
***STEP 5. Accept or reject waiver application***

Decisions will be posted to the listserv. Program credit length will be changed in the official program inventory for single and group waiver applications that have been approved.

***STEP 6. Appeal*** Waiver requests that are not approved may be appealed to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. Submit appeals in writing within 30 business days to [Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu).

# 60/120 Degree Credit Length Review Process

Version 9, January 9, 2009



## APPENDIX D: PRACTICES IN NEIGHBORING STATES<sup>15</sup>

**Iowa:** Iowa has three public four-year universities, 15 two-year college districts and 45 independent, not-for-profit institutions. The Iowa Board of Regents governs the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa. Board of Regents policy does not set minimum or maximum credit lengths for programs.

The Iowa Association of Community College Trustees support and facilitate the mission of Iowa's 15 community colleges, which are governed by locally elected boards of directors. Each college district determines credit length requirements for its degrees. Colleges set minimum credit lengths for associate degrees that typically range from 60 to 64 credits.

**North Dakota:** The North Dakota University System is made up of eleven public colleges and universities governed by the State Board of Higher Education. The North Dakota University System is composed of two doctoral-granting institutions, two master's-granting institutions, two universities that offer baccalaureate degrees and five campuses that offer associate and trade/technical degrees.

State Board of Higher Education policy 409 – Degrees Offered, which applies to the North Dakota University System, sets minimum program credit lengths. Associate degree programs require a minimum of 60 credits and baccalaureate degree programs require a minimum of 120 credits.

**South Dakota:** In South Dakota six public universities are governed by a Board of Regents and four public technical institutes are governed by the Department of Education.

The Board of Regents has the constitutional responsibility for governing the Unified System of Public Higher Education in South Dakota that consists of six state universities and two special schools. Board of Regents policy does not specify a minimum or maximum number of credits for a degree program.

The Office of Curriculum, Career and Technical Education within the South Dakota Department of Education advocates for career and technical education programs, administers the Perkins program and works closely with the state's four technical institutes. The four technical institutes are governed by local school districts. The minimum and maximum number of credits for an associate degree program is not specified in policy.

**Wisconsin:** Higher education in Wisconsin is delivered through the University of Wisconsin System, technical colleges, and private colleges and universities. The University of Wisconsin System, governed by a Board of Regents, is made up of 13 four-year universities, 13 freshmen-

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<sup>15</sup> The Degree Credits Caps report describes practices in a few states. Board of Trustee members requested credit length policy information for states adjacent to Minnesota.

sophomore University of Wisconsin college campuses, and statewide University of Wisconsin Extension. The Board of Regents has not set minimum or maximum credit lengths for academic programs in its system regent policies. Each college/university in the University of Wisconsin System sets its own policy regarding the credit length of programs.

Wisconsin has 16 locally supported technical college districts governed by a 13 member Wisconsin Technical College System state board, appointed by the governor, that establishes statewide policy and standards for education program and services. By policy, associate degree occupational programs (associate degree in applied arts or applied sciences) require a minimum 60 credits and may exceed 70 credits with written approval. Transfer liberal arts programs (associate in arts and associate in science) require a minimum of 64 credits.

WELLS FARGO PLACE	ph 651.201.1684	ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
30 7 <sup>TH</sup> ST. E., SUITE 350	fx 651.296.3214	OCTOBER, 2010
ST. PAUL, MN 55101-7804	<a href="http://www.mnscu.edu">www.mnscu.edu</a>	