Academic and Student Affairs

DEGREE CREDIT CAPS

2026 Report to the Legislature

Minnesota State

MINNESOTA STATE

Background

The Minnesota state legislature, in Laws 2007, chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, directed the Minnesota State Board of Trustees to create degree credit caps:

> *By January 1, 2009, the board must adopt a policy setting the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 semester credits or the equivalent and the number of semester credits required for an associate degree at 60 semester credits or the equivalent. The board policy may provide for a process for granting waivers for specific degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of semester credits.*

During the 2008 legislative session, the legislature requested the board to submit an annual report, as codified by Minnesota Statutes 2015, section 136F.301:

> *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.*

Policy and Procedure

In response to the legislative mandate, the Minnesota State Board of Trustees amended Board Policy 3.36 to include a provision setting degree credit caps for baccalaureate and associate degrees. To implement the policy change, the chancellor amended System Procedure 3.36.1, Part 3 to specify the 120 and 60 semester credit requirements for baccalaureate and associate degrees offered by system colleges and universities, and to establish a process for seeking a waiver from those credit limits. The relevant sections of Policy 3.36 and Procedure 3.36.1 are included in Appendix A.

Minnesota State is following the legislative directive to reduce associate degree requirements to 60 credits and baccalaureate degree requirements to 120 credits. All current programs that exceed the credit caps have been reviewed and granted a waiver based on industry and professional standards.

Waiver Requests 2025-2026

During the 2025-26 academic year, two waiver requests were submitted and approved:

1. St. Cloud Community and Technical College:
   Echocardiography Technology, AAS, 70 credits, was approved based on National Specialized Program Accreditation.
2. Central Lakes College:
   Dental Hygiene, 83 credits, was approved with conditions based on National Specialized Program Accreditation.

There was one new program which included a waiver request that was not approved due to program duplication and challenges with finding enough clinical placements in the region:

1. Minnesota State Community and Technical College:
   Respiratory Therapy, AAS.

APPENDIX A

Minnesota State Board Policies Chapter 3 – Educational Policies
3.36 Academic Programs

Part 3. Authorized Academic Awards.

Subpart C. Academic program credit length limits. Academic programs that lead to an associate degree shall be limited to 60 credits and academic programs that lead to a baccalaureate degree shall be limited to 120 credits unless the chancellor grants a waiver based on industry or professional accreditation standards that require a greater number of credits.

The chancellor shall set program credit length requirements and waiver criteria for undergraduate certificates, diplomas and graduate level awards.

Minnesota State System Procedure Chapter 3 – Educational Policies
Procedure 3.36.1 Academic Programs

Part 3. Authorized Academic Awards.

Subpart C. Program Credit Length Waivers for Associate and Baccalaureate Degrees.

1. Authority. The system office determines the approval or disapproval of all requests for waivers to exceed program credit length limitations.

2. Criteria for Granting Waivers. Credit length waivers may be granted when determined necessary to ensure that the degree provided meets industry or professional standards. Waivers shall be granted only when a need for a longer program credit length is demonstrated by one or more of the following:

a. Industry Standards

(1) National or international program certification,

(2) National or international standards, including skill standards,

(3) Standards recommended by a primary employer or multiple employers within a program service area.

b. Professional Standards

(1) National specialized program accreditation,

(2) State licensure requirements,

(3) National practices or standards.

3. Waiver Process for Associate of Science, Associate of Fine Arts, and Baccalaureate degrees. The following process shall be followed to request a waiver:

a. Preparation of a waiver application for submission to the system office shall be consistent with accepted system college or university curriculum approval processes. Group waiver requests for baccalaureate, associate of fine arts, and associate of science degree programs in the same discipline must be pursued by all schools offering that degree program (e.g. Nursing, Music, Engineering, etc.). An associate of arts program cannot seek a degree credit cap waiver.

b. Academic program advisory committees may provide recommendations on learning requirements. Program advisory committee recommendations that support the standards may be submitted with the waiver request. For student representation on college or university academic program advisory committees, see Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1 Student Involvement in Decision-Making.

c. Waiver applications will be distributed for review and comment to state student associations, faculty union leadership, and system college and university administrators.
d. The system office will act on the waiver application and notify the applicant.
e. Appeals related to waiver decisions will be processed through the vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
f. Public information regarding the waiver process, review criteria, rationale for decisions, and decisions reached will be available on the system office website

4. Waiver Process for Associate of Applied Science degrees. The following process shall be followed to request a waiver:

a. Preparation of a waiver application for submission to the system office shall be consistent with accepted system college or university curriculum approval processes.
b. An associate of applied science waiver application shall compare and contrast credit lengths of comparable programs and provide a program analysis describing learning outcomes not found in shorter programs.
c. Academic program advisory committees shall provide recommendations on learning requirements. For student representation on college or university academic program advisory committees, see Board Policy 2.3 and System Procedure 2.3.1.
d. Waiver applications shall document the approval of the system college or university curriculum committee, the program advisory committee, and the system college or university student representative on the program advisory committee. If there was no student representative on the program advisory committee, the system college or university student association shall review and comment on the waiver application.
e. Waiver applications will be distributed for review and comment to state student associations, faculty union leadership, and system college and university administrators.
f. The system office will act on the waiver application and notify the applicant.
g. Appeals related to waiver decisions will be processed through the senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.
h. Public information regarding the waiver process, review criteria, rationale for decisions, and decisions reached will be available on the system office website.
i. Associate of applied science programs approved to exceed 60 credits shall include an explanation of why the program is longer than similar programs in the catalog description.