

# Academic Program Terminology and Approval Process Guidelines

## Southern Illinois University System

What is the definition of a major? What is a minor? How is that different from a specialization, or an emphasis or an option? The Illinois Board of Higher Education defines some of these terms. Other terms are not officially defined, and different academic units use the terms differently. To move towards consistency, this document was created to help faculty members select the most appropriate description of the new program they are developing. All IBHE definitions are noted, as are definitions cited from other organizations. All other definitions were developed through discussions with academic officers and faculty. A (T) indicates that the degree or non-degree designation (e.g., major, minor, certification) is transcriptable. This document also identifies program proposals or other items that must be submitted to IBHE and HLC for review.

### Degrees Types

*Associate Degree (T)* – “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study of at least two, but less than 4, years of full-time academic study; or more than 60, but less than 120, semester credit hours.”<sup>1</sup>

*Undergraduate Certificate (1-2 yrs)* – “A postsecondary award, certificate or diploma requiring completion of an organized program of study of at least one, but less than two, full-time equivalent academic years; or designed for completion in at least 30, but less than 60, semester credit hours; or in at least 900, but less than 1800, contact hours.”<sup>2</sup>

*Undergraduate Certificate (2-4 yrs)* – “A postsecondary award, certificate or diploma, requiring completion of an organized program of study of at least two, but less than four, full-time academic years; or designed for completion in at least 60, but less than 120, semester credit hours, or in at least 1800, but less than 3600, contact hours.”<sup>3</sup>

*Bachelor’s Degree (T)* – “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study of at least 4, but not more than 5, years of full-time academic study, with at least 120, but less than 150, semester credit hours.”<sup>4</sup>

*Liberal Studies Degree (T)* – “Liberal Studies degrees are generally designed to allow for baccalaureate degree completion in non-traditional circumstances. The IBHE is extremely conservative in approving

---

<sup>1</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

such degrees and generally will do so only when the preponderance of evidence suggests both a serious need and a sufficiently diverse and qualified faculty able to serve the degree.”<sup>5</sup>

*Post-Baccalaureate Certificate (T-SIUE)* – “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study requiring 18 semester credit hours beyond the bachelor’s and is designed for persons who have completed a baccalaureate degree but do not meet the requirements of academic degrees carrying the title of ‘master’.”<sup>6</sup>

*Master’s Degree (T)* – “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study of at least one, but not more than two, full-time academic years of work beyond the bachelor’s degree, and consisting of at least 30, but less than 60, semester credit hours.”<sup>7</sup>

*Post-Master Certificate (T-SIUE)* – “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study requiring 24 semester credit hours beyond the master degree and is designed for persons who have completed a master degree, but does not meet the requirements of academic degrees at the doctor’s level.”<sup>8</sup>

*Specialist Degree (T-SIUE)* – “The Specialist degree is found in some programs of education or psychology and is awarded for study beyond the Master’s degree but below the doctorate. It is most often referred to as an Ed.S. (Specialist of Education), SSP (Specialist of School Psychology), or Psy.S. (Specialist of Psychology). Schooling usually involves two or three years of coursework and practica, followed by a one year internship. . . . The Specialist degree is designed as a terminal degree, and is not designed to be a stepping-stone toward a doctorate, although specialist-level practitioners cannot be prevented from pursuing a doctorate.”<sup>9</sup>

*Doctorate: Professional Practice (T)* – As defined by IBHE: “An award requiring completion of an organized program of study that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 60 semester hours of postsecondary credit required for admission to the program; and (3) a total of at least six academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required postsecondary work plus the length of the professional program itself.”<sup>10</sup>

IPEDS defines a doctoral degree - professional practice as follows: “A doctor's degree that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice. The degree is awarded after a period of study such that the total time to the degree, including both pre-professional and professional preparation, equals at least six

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.glossary.com/encyclopedia.php?q=Specialist\\_degree](http://www.glossary.com/encyclopedia.php?q=Specialist_degree)

<sup>10</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 7.

full-time equivalent academic years. Some of these degrees were formerly classified as ‘first-professional’ and may include: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Law (L.L.B. or J.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Optometry (O.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., Pod.D., D.P.); or, Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), and others, as designated by the awarding institution.”<sup>11</sup>

*Doctorate: Research and Scholarship (T)* – As defined by IBHE: “The highest award a student can earn for graduate study. An award requiring completion of an organized program of study beyond the master degree and representing the highest level of study in a discipline and resulting in the creation of new knowledge through research and scholarship.”<sup>12</sup>

IPEDS defines this degree as: “A Ph.D. or other doctor's degree that requires advanced work beyond the master's level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement. Some examples of this type of degree may include Ed.D., D.M.A., D.B.A., D.Sc., D.A., or D.M., and others, as designated by the awarding institution.”<sup>13</sup>

*Doctoral Degree: Other (T)* – “A doctor's degree that does not meet the definition of a doctor's degree - research/scholarship or a doctor's degree - professional practice.”<sup>14</sup>

*Honorary Degree (T)* – “Degree awarded upon an individual who has made outstanding contributions to society through intellectual, artistic, scientific, professional, or public service accomplishments. The following criteria shall guide institutions in selection of individuals to receive honorary degrees and in the awarding of such degrees.

1. An institution shall confer honorary degrees only at the highest level for which it is authorized to award earned degrees.
2. Any such honorary degree conferred shall be distinguishable from earned degrees.
3. Institutions desiring to confer honorary degrees shall do so only after receiving approval from the IBHE based upon a written request setting forth the proposed honorary degrees to be awarded, the criteria by which the recipients are to be selected, and the format of the diploma or certificate to be awarded.
4. Institutions may confer a number of honorary degrees not to exceed five during any fiscal year. During any five-year period, the number of such awards may not exceed a ratio of one honorary

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/?charindex=D>

<sup>12</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 7.

<sup>13</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/?charindex=D>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

degree to each one thousand earned degrees conferred by the institution during the same period.

5. Institutions shall not confer honorary degrees upon any faculty member, administrator, or other official associated with the institution until such individuals have been separated from the institution for two or more academic semesters.
6. Institutions shall not confer honorary degrees based upon quid pro quo arrangements, either for contributions promised or received, or for any other mutually beneficial arrangement between the institution or an official of the awarding institution and the recipient.”<sup>15</sup>

*Posthumous Degree (T)* – “Nonacademic degree awarded to a deceased student who may not have completed all requirements for graduation. Posthumous degrees must clearly be indicated as such on any and all documentation.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Non-Degree Types**

*Certification (T)* – A course of study that prepares graduates for certification or licensure in select professions, such as teaching or school administration. The curriculum is defined by the discipline and state licensing or certification requirements.

*Diploma* – “An academic credential conferred by a postsecondary institution as official recognition for the successful completion of an instruction program that does not lead to a degree.”<sup>17</sup>

*Emphasis/Option/Track* – An emphasis/option/track is defined as “a focused component of an academic program.”<sup>18</sup> There are no standard guidelines for an emphasis/option/track. An emphasis/option/track is not transcriptable.

*Professional Development Sequence (PDS)* – A PDS is a focused collection of 3 to 5 courses that are not part of a degree. A PDS is generally designed to meet the skill and knowledge needs of professionals in the discipline. A PDS is not to be confused with a certificate, which is a formal award certifying the satisfactory completion of a postsecondary education program.

*Specialization/Concentration (T)* – A specialization or concentration is a focused percentage of courses within a major. The percent varies by major. A specialization/concentration is transcriptable.

### **Curriculum Definitions**

---

<sup>15</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/instructions/progdevel-academicprogramdesign.pdf>

*Degree (T)* – “An academic credential conferred by a postsecondary institution as official recognition for the successful completion of an organized program of study; any designation, appellation, series of letters or words, or other symbol that signifies or purports to signify the recipient has satisfactorily completed an organized academic program of study beyond the secondary school level.”<sup>19</sup>

*Major (T)* – An organized program of study in an academic discipline usually requiring completion of 30 to 90 credit hours. “Major means a curriculum component of an academic program intended to provide in-depth study in a discipline, a professional field of study or an occupation. A major may include an academic program emphasis. A major has a core of courses which are perceived to be the basic foundation courses of an academic area without which students would have difficulty continuing to learn or which provide an overview of the field.”<sup>20</sup>

*Minor (T)* – An organized program of study in an academic discipline. “A minor is defined as a coherent group of courses which stands alone and provides a student with broad knowledge of and competency in an area outside the student's major.”<sup>21</sup> A minor usually requires 12 to 20 credit hours of study.

### **IBHE Reportable Items**

IBHE requires universities to report certain program changes. In addition, some changes are reported annually, while others must go through a review process. All reportable changes, along with significant restructuring activities, should be reviewed by the Office of the President. All existing programs that are being moved to a new geographic region as an off-campus program must undergo IBHE review. It should also be noted that new programs may have to undergo Higher Learning Commission review (such as off-campus programs) or a specialized accreditation review (such as a new health care program) before implementation.

The following information is from IBHE’s publication regarding operating and degree-granting authority.<sup>22</sup>

#### *No Reporting and No Action*

- “Creation of a new, non-credit program or a program of study, composed of credit courses, that does not result in the formal award of a degree.

---

<sup>19</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 7.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/instructions/progdevel-academicprogramdesign.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.academicprograms.calpoly.edu/academicpolicies/Policies-Undergrad/Minors.html>

<sup>22</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Information for Institutions of Higher Education On How to Obtain Operating or Degree-Granting Authority* (Springfield, 22 September 2010), 32-33.

- Creation of a new unit that does not have an instructional, research, or public service mission, including new units that might be named department, division, center or institute.”

#### *Annual Listing of Changes*

- “Addition of a new organized set of courses within a major (e.g., option, concentration, specialization, or sequence) to an existing degree program.
- Addition of an externally funded research or public service activity labeled as a center or institute because of grant requirements. The activity is temporary, not formally organized, and has no continuous mission.
- Addition of a new minor.
- Change in degree title (e.g., the name of a discipline or major without changes in objectives or content, such as the change from ‘medical terminology’ to ‘clinical laboratory sciences.’
- Change in the name of an administrative (including departments), research, or public service unit.
- Elimination, temporary suspension, or phase down of an existing degree program.
- Reorganization, restructuring, consolidation, elimination, and other changes of existing administrative (including departments), research, or public service units that does not result in an increase in subunits.
- Creation of a certificate program in a field in which there is a previously approved degree program (e.g., undergraduate certificates from a prior approved bachelor’s program; post-baccalaureate certificates from a prior approved master’s program; a post-master’s certificate from a prior approved doctoral program; or post-degree, first-professional certificates from a previously approved first-professional degree in the field.)
- Creation of a joint degree program from two previously approved programs.”

#### *RME Request with IBHE Staff Review*

- “Creation of a new formally organized research or public service unit that has a temporary mission of up to five years. (Criteria for continuation and a date for submission and request for permanent approval should accompany the RME.)
- Creation of a certificate program in a field or at a level in which there is not a previously approved degree program at that level or a higher level.
- Creation of a new program that results from the reorganization or restructuring of the curricular elements of an existing program that have over time evolved into separate and distinct programs (e.g., split into two, or options have evolved into separate programs).
- Reclassification (change of CIP) of a program resulting from incremental changes or consolidation of two or more degree programs into a single program.

- Changes in degree designation at the same level (e.g., BA to BS, MA to MBA).”

#### *IBHE Board Action Required*

- “Creation of a degree program (excluding certificate programs) in a new field or at a new level (based on CIPS or IPEDS definitions).
- Creation of new units of instruction, research, or public service that involve a change or expansion in mission, including programs, departments, colleges, centers or institutes, or other formally organized units.
- Creation of a new campus.”

### **HLC Reportable Items**

Authorization to submit requests and notifications on behalf of the institution must be processed through the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

The types of changes that may use electronic forms through the campus approval process include:<sup>23</sup>

- New programs
- Certificate programs (the form will explain those certificates that need to be reviewed for approval and those that need no separate approval)
- New additional locations or branch campuses
- Teach-out of an existing location or branch campus
- Change in clock or credit hours
- Initiation or expansion of distance education activity to a new level
- Contractual or consortial arrangements in delivering one or more existing programs (Note: the institution should contact the commission staff liaison regarding contractual programs where more than 50% of any educational program is outsourced to the other party)
- Course locations out of state and outside the United States

#### *Distance Delivery*

##### *Correspondence Education/Course Definition*

(1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic

---

<sup>23</sup> ©The Higher Learning Commission, *Overview of Institutional Changes Requiring Commission Notification or Approval (n.d.)*. Retrieved May 9, 2011.

transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. (4) Correspondence education is a form of distance education.

#### *Distance Education/Course Definition*

Education that uses one or more of the {following} technologies (1) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor; and (2) to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously.

The technologies used may include: (1) the Internet; (2) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (3) audioconferencing; or (4) videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the videocassettes, DVDs or CD-ROMs are used in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in clauses (1) through (3).

#### *Distance Delivery Approval*

The commission does not approve individual degree programs for distance education, rather it reviews whether an institution can expand into the next bracket for distance education. Only a letter of notification must be provided to the commission when a new distance delivery program is offered. A bracket is based upon the percentage of academic programs offered through distance delivery. Once the limit of the approved bracket has been met, the institution is required to complete the Distance Delivery Application form.

#### *New Locations for Existing Degrees*

##### *Full Support Services Definition*

If a location includes full support services, it is a satellite campus. If less than full support service is delivered, it is to be considered an additional location. These location requests should be processed through the MACRO System. There is an exception of a program that has not been previously approved or if the program is being delivered in another location other than a military base.

##### *New Location Approval*

- The commission's Streamlined Review Process (MACRO System) is only available for offering existing degree programs at new additional locations

within the state and at military bases throughout the world or for the master of science in education with a concentration in workforce education and the executive master of business administration at additional locations within the state and at selected international additional locations to be determined by the institution.

- Program locations may be closed utilizing MACRO with a letter of submission to the commission with reference to the teach-out process.

#### *Teach Out of an Existing Location or Branch Campus*

- Any institution affiliated with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that is in the process of closing or is engaged in one of the other circumstances identified below is obliged to provide for the welfare of enrolled students who have invested their time, energy, and money in attending the institution. The institution documents its preparations through a Teach-Out Plan.
- The institution is required to inform the commission of its circumstances and to receive formal commission approval of the Teach-Out Plan prior to initiating it.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Circumstances Requiring a Teach-Out Arrangement*

- An institution must submit a Teach-Out Plan notifying commission approval in each of the following circumstances:
  1. When the U.S. Department of Education takes an emergency action, or a limitation, suspension, or termination or similar action against the institution
  2. When the commission acts to withdraw, suspend, or terminate the status of the institution
  3. When the institution notifies the commission that it intends to cease operations as an educational institution
  4. When the institution permanently closes an additional location at which it offers 100 percent of either a certificate or a degree program before all students enrolled at that location have completed their programs of study

#### *The Teach-Out Plan*

- The Teach-Out Plan should demonstrate that, despite whatever changes are taking place, the institution has made appropriate provisions for the welfare of the students.

---

<sup>24</sup> ©The Higher Learning Commission, *Teach Out Submission (n.d.)*. Retrieved May 9, 2011.

- A communication plan of the proposed timeline and methods for notifying students of the Teach-out Plan, including any students who may be on approved leaves of absence, as well as faculty, staff, and other institutional constituents must be included.

### **Helpful Links**

The Higher Learning Commission

<http://www.ncahlc.org/>

The Illinois Board of Higher Education

<http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/>

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>