

Analysis of research regarding "Credit compressed" or "Reduced Credit" degrees.

Introduction

The following notes provide an analysis of the proposed draft bill focused on "North Dakota Accelerated Degree" programs. The primary aim is to evaluate whether the draft should instead emphasize "Credit Compressed" or "Reduced Credit" baccalaureate degrees. This discussion addresses national trends, cost implications, and the potential for 90-credit baccalaureate programs to reduce taxpayer funding, alleviate workforce challenges while supporting North Dakota families. The observations also highlight necessary amendments to existing policies, particularly SBHE Policy 409, to accommodate reduced credit degree options. Key considerations include their impact on affordability, graduation timelines, and alignment with workforce and state needs.

Key Considerations

1. Definition and Terminology: North Dakota Accelerated Degree

o Time Compression vs. Reduced Credit Models

The term "accelerated degree" often implies compressing a program into a shorter duration without reducing the total required credits. For instance, a 120-credit baccalaureate degree could still take less time to complete if the course load per term is increased. However, the concept of "Reduced Credit" degrees suggests fewer total credits required to graduate.

2. National Trends and Local Relevance

- o Many states are adopting 90-credit baccalaureate degrees for high-demand and high-priority workforce sectors to address skill gaps and bolster economic development.
- o **North Dakota Context:** Over 100,000 residents possess some college credits but lack a degree. Offering 90-credit degree pathways could enable these individuals to complete their education and enter the workforce more quickly and affordably.
- o **Potential Benefits:**
 - 25% reduction in time-to-graduation.
 - Significant cost savings for students and families.
 - Significant cost savings to taxpayers
 - Increased alignment with state workforce needs.

3. Policy and Financial Implications

- **Current SBHE Policy 409:**
 - Defines baccalaureate degrees as requiring a minimum of 120 semester hours.
 - A policy amendment to reduce this minimum to 90 credits for certain programs could facilitate the implementation of reduced credit degrees.
- **Challenges from Institutions:**
 - Some colleges oppose credit reductions due to perceived revenue losses stemming from shorter program durations and history of declining enrollments.
 - Resistance highlights systemic inefficiencies rather than prioritizing student outcomes or workforce needs.
- **Financial Impact on Students:**
 - Example: At UND, a single credit costs \$383, resulting in \$11,500 for 30 additional credits required under the current 120-credit standard.
 - Additional costs for fees, books, and living expenses exacerbate the financial burden on students.
 - Opportunity costs include lost wages due to extended time in college.

4. Alignment with Workforce Demands

- National projections indicate that 70% of future jobs will require post-high school credentials but not necessarily a four-year degree.
- Reduced credit degrees could offer an efficient pathway for students pursuing careers in fields requiring practical, industry-aligned skills.

5. Implementation and Supporting Evidence

- **Policy Updates:** Amend SBHE Policy 409 to reflect a minimum of 90 semester hours for qualifying programs. See 409 2(f) and 2(f)(c)
- **National and Regional Models:** Examples from other states and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) guidelines demonstrate the feasibility of reduced credit baccalaureate degrees.
- **HLC has released current guidelines for Credit Reduced 90 credit Baccalaureate degrees**

- The SBHE and The NDUS has requested the Chancellor should develop a plan to start offering 90-credit baccalaureate.
- Some NDUS colleges volunteered to design 90-credit baccalaureate degrees and have been stopped by the Chancellor and other NDUS institutions.
- **Chancellor's Envision 2035 Report:** Recommendations for 90-credit degree options align with strategic workforce development goals. However, institutional resistance highlights a need for prioritizing systemic operation and revenue generation protection.

Summary

A shift toward 90-credit baccalaureate degrees could significantly benefit North Dakota students, families, and taxpayers by reducing educational costs and accelerating entry into high-demand fields. While institutional resistance may stem from concerns about revenue loss, the focus must remain on student success and economic development. Policy updates, particularly to SBHE Policy 409, are crucial for enabling this transition. By leveraging national trends and best practices, North Dakota can position itself as a leader in innovative, workforce-aligned education solutions.