

# R471, Lower Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits<sup>1</sup>

**R471-1 Purpose:** This policy assists students in completing certificates and degrees efficiently and affordably by ensuring that earned credits will seamlessly transfer between Utah System of Higher Education (“USHE”) institutions.

## R471-2 References

- 2.1 Utah Code § 53B-2-106(2)(c), Duties and Responsibilities of a Degree-Granting President
- 2.2 Utah Code § 53B-16-102, Changes in Curriculum
- 2.3 Utah Code § 53B-16-107, Credit for Military Service and Training – Notification – Transferability – Reporting
- 2.4 Utah Code § 53B-16-105, Common Course Numbering – Transferability of Credits – Agreement with Competency-Based Gen ed Provider
- 2.5 Board Policy R470, General Education
- 2.6 Board Policy R472, Prior Learning Assessment

## R471-3 Definitions

**3.1 “Accredited Institution”** means an institution recognized by an accreditation agency that is approved by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Postsecondary Education. An accredited institution has gone through rigorous evaluation to assure that benchmarks are met that enable the institution to teach students academic content and utilize pedagogies deemed as rigorous and engaging by curriculum experts.

**3.2 “Common Course Number Designation” (“CCN”)** means common numbers assigned to courses the USHE faculty majors committees have identified as having the same course quality, content, competencies, and credit earned at all USHE institutions. CCN designated courses transfer as equivalent credit.

**3.3 “General Education”** means a required set of shared essential learning outcomes, the foundational subject areas required within the general education program, and the individual courses and disciplines that comprise those subject areas. These include written communications, quantitative literacy or mathematics, American Institutions, humanities, fine arts, social sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy was part of R470 until December 2023 when it was separated. Adopted December 1, 2023.

**3.4 “Lower Division Major”** means a program of study designed to prepare lower division students for upper study in a specific major. Lower division major courses are aligned across degree-granting institutions by the USHE faculty majors committees to assure seamless transfer and timely completion of a four-year degree.

**3.5 “Prior Learning Assessment” (“PLA”)** means a validated process through which faculty subject matter experts evaluate a student’s previously learned competencies in a particular field and grant college credit when appropriate. PLA may include national exam equivalencies, portfolio completion, challenge exams (oral or written), or other appropriate forms of assessment used to determine student mastery of course content.

**3.6 “System Articulation Agreement”** means an agreement among USHE institutions that details a common set of curricular program requirements. These agreements are made to facilitate seamless transfer of credits in general education (“gen ed”), lower division major, transfer of work completed by students at technical colleges to degree-granting institutions, and national examination/course equivalencies such as AP, CLEP, DSST, and IB exams.

**3.7 “Third-Party Provider”** means a non-accredited entity that maintains training programs, particularly in technical education areas. These programs may include formal instruction, apprenticeships, technical certifications, and student assessment/testing.

**3.8 “USHE Faculty Majors Committee”** means a committee comprised of faculty from specific disciplines that meet annually to articulate and align lower division courses and lower division major requirements for seamless transferability between USHE institutions.

**3.9 “USHE Transfer Council” (“Transfer Council”)** means a standing committee under the Utah Board of Higher Education (“Board”) that works to improve and advance post-secondary transfer for USHE students. As required by [Utah Code section 53B-16-105\(2\)](#) and (3), the Transfer Council focuses primarily on identifying transfer obstacles and developing transfer policies, best practices, and directives to remove transfer obstacles. These may include recommending better alignment of courses and programs of study, establishing transfer pathways, and adjudicating transfer difficulties between institutions where needed.

**3.10 “Utah Transfer Guide”** means a USHE-licensed, online portal that enables students to determine the transferability of their earned and planned credit to and between USHE institutions.

## **R471-4 Course Credit Transfer and Program Articulation Principles and Procedures**

**4.1 System Integrity:** Each institution is responsible for developing its own transfer policies and procedures consistent with Board policy to ensure credits transfer seamlessly within the system.

**4.2 Minimum Standards:** To transfer as equivalent credit, course quality, content, competency level, and amount of credit earned at one institution must be comparable to those qualities of the same courses at the receiving institution.

**4.3 Academic Department Evaluation:** Academic departments evaluate credit that has not been previously designated as CCN credit, to determine if it meets institutional and departmental standards and to articulate to departmental courses when there is an appropriate course.

**4.4 Course Numbering:** An essential element of a transparent, seamless transfer system is uniform course numbering. USHE institutions shall number courses using the guidelines in Board Policy R475, *Common Course Numbering*.

**4.5 Lower Division Requirements:** The faculty majors committees shall establish common lower division major requirements that allow students who transfer to receive full value for their academic work. For a very competitive program, an institution may not be able to admit a transfer student to a program because of enrollment limits and the need for applicants to meet certain academic requirements such as an established grade point average.

**4.6 Lower Division Numbered Courses:** Only lower division courses should be required during the first two years of any major. Any exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Transfer Council.

**4.7 Institutional Transfer Procedures:** Institutions must provide students with clear, comprehensive, and accurate transfer procedures to avoid confusion and possible unfairness to individual applicants. Institutions shall, at minimum, provide accurate, current information about program and course requirements, including transfer and articulation agreements between specific institutions in the Utah Transfer Guide and ensure that their transfer profile is up to date for both Fall and Spring semester.

## 4.8 System-Wide Standards and Practices

**4.8.1 Annual Faculty Majors Committee Evaluation:** Faculty majors committees meet at least annually to review institutional policies and practices for awarding credit to ensure consistent system-wide practices for evaluating and awarding credit.

**4.8.2 Credit for Common Course Numbered Courses:** CCN tables, once approved by Faculty majors committees, shall be available in the Utah Transfer Guide. OCHE shall publish common course tables approved by the faculty major committees.

**4.8.3 Evaluation of Courses That Meet Gen ed Requirements:** When a student with completed courses in gen ed transfers from a USHE institution, the receiving USHE institution will honor the sending institution's determination of the type of gen ed credit awarded. *See Board Policy R470, General Education.*

**4.8.4 Pre-Transfer Advisement:** Institutions should advise students to establish educational goals early in their educational program. Institutions shall communicate with the transferring student how to request assistance from an academic advisor to assure the student's educational goals fit with the program at the institution to which they intend to transfer. Transfer policies and practices should facilitate transfer when the student has been accepted to the anticipated program and should ensure information on the transferability of credits is available to students in a timely manner.

## 4.9 Institution Responsibilities: USHE institutions shall:

**4.9.1** Provide current and accurate course, program, and credit equivalency information to the Utah Transfer Guide. Institutions shall meet Transfer Guide annual deadlines for the submission of finalized data;

**4.9.2** Participate in faculty majors committees to share syllabi, course descriptions, expected learning outcomes and competencies, and course sequencing to establish credit equivalencies;

**4.9.3** Assure that all courses satisfying gen ed requirements are articulated to the fullest extent possible to satisfy comparable gen ed requirements at all other USHE institutions;

**4.9.4** Furnish transcripts and course descriptions vital to determining transferability of earned credit;

**4.9.5** Make clear and prompt decisions on credit acceptance and application; and

**4.9.6** Maintain a designated webpage to disseminate transfer information including:

**4.9.6.1** Where students can seek assistance regarding transfer;

**4.9.6.2** The types of documentation needed to evaluate credit transfer, such as transcripts from all previously attended institutions, course descriptions, syllabi, and coursework;

**4.9.6.3** How transfer credit applies to minimum institutional degree requirements including minimum grades;

**4.9.6.4** A student's right to request an explanation on transfer credit decisions and the process to appeal a transfer credit decision with the institution and, after exhausting institutional remedies, through the USHE Transfer Council; and

**4.9.6.5** a link to the Utah Transfer Guide.

## **R471-5 General Transfer of Credits Principles**

### **5.1 Transfer of Gen Ed Credits**

**5.1.1 Transfer of Partially-Completed Gen Ed Requirements:** An institution that receives from another USHE institution a transfer student who has not fully satisfied the gen ed requirements of Board Policy R470, *General Education* shall accept as equivalent all gen ed coursework approved by the sending institution, provided the coursework meets the minimum letter grades accepted by the receiving institution. A receiving institution may change a sending institution's gen ed course attribute if it is in the student's interest in fulfilling the receiving institution's gen ed outcomes and the student is notified and agrees to the change. An institution with a gen ed requirement that is in addition to the USHE core and breadth requirements shall accept a sending institution's completed gen ed requirement that is in addition to USHE core and breadth requirements. A receiving institution shall only require transfer students to complete any additional coursework needed to satisfy their unmet gen ed requirements.

**5.1.2 Transfer of Completed Gen Ed Requirements:** A student who has earned an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science ("AA/AS") or higher degree at a USHE institution will meet the gen ed requirements of all USHE institutions. If a

student has completed all gen ed requirements at a USHE institution but not an associate degree, the institution shall issue a certificate or letter signifying that the student has met the gen ed requirements at any receiving USHE institution.

**5.1.2.1 Special Associate Degree Programs That do not Require**

**Gen Ed Completion:** In some specialized associate degree programs, students may not have completed all gen ed requirements and will need to complete those requirements prior to graduating with a bachelor's degree.

**5.1.3 Gen Ed Certificate Using Non-USHE Credits/Courses:** Students who enter a USHE institution with most of their gen ed credits earned from an accredited non-USHE institution and who want a certificate designating gen ed completion from the USHE institution must complete at least nine credit hours or meet the minimum residency and grade point average requirements of the USHE institution from which the certificate is requested.

**5.1.4 Substitution of Courses in Lower Division Major Area for Gen Ed**

**Requirements:** Institutions may allow students to substitute study and achievement in their lower division major area for gen ed requirements. USHE transfer students who retain the same lower division major area will be allowed to maintain the substitution at the receiving institution and will not be required to complete additional gen ed coursework after transfer.

**5.1.5 Substitution of Gen Ed Courses as an Accommodation:** USHE transfer students who were provided, as an accommodation, alternative courses to complete gen ed requirements will be allowed to maintain the substitution at the receiving institution and will not be required to complete additional gen ed coursework after transfer.

**5.2 Transfer of Non-gen Ed Credits:** Credit for courses numbered 1000 or above earned at a USHE institution is transferable within the system—regardless of whether the course is a gen ed course or not—and will be recorded on the student's transcript at the receiving institution.

**5.3 Transfer of Credits Awarded through PLA:** When transferring in credits, institutions shall treat credits awarded through an assessment of prior learning the same as credits earned in a traditional classroom-based course.

**5.4 Transfer of Credits from USHE Technical Colleges:** A USHE degree-granting institution may award credit for completion of courses at a USHE technical college after curriculum specialists at the receiving institution review courses to ensure that:

**5.4.1** Course content, learning outcomes, course procedures, and student assessment are comparable and applicable to the institution's program(s) to which the credit is applied;

**5.4.2** A student who completes a certificate program at a USHE technical college can transfer stackable course credits to a USHE degree-granting institution associate degree program as appropriate;

**5.4.3** A student who has completed coursework and transferred from a USHE technical college in a specific discipline can be awarded up to 30 credits towards the completion of an applied associate degree in that field at a degree-granting institution as determined by a curriculum specialist at the receiving institution; and

**5.4.4** A student who has completed coursework and transferred from a USHE technical college in a non-specific discipline may be awarded up to 30 credits towards the completion of an applied associate degree in general technology at a degree-granting institution as determined by a curriculum specialist at the receiving institution.

**5.5 Transfer of Credits from Third-Party Providers:** USHE degree-granting institutions and technical colleges may award credit for completion of non-credit courses from third-party providers after curriculum specialists review courses to ensure that:

**5.5.1** Course content, learning outcomes, course procedures, and student assessment are compatible and applicable to the institution's program(s) to which the credit is applied;

**5.5.2** A student who completes a certificate program through a third-party provider can transfer stackable course credits to a USHE technical college or degree-granting institution's degree program as appropriate; and

**5.5.3** A student who transfers from a third-party provider and has completed coursework may be awarded credits toward the completion of a certificate or degree program as determined by a curriculum specialist at the receiving institution. Where they exist, faculty major committees should make this determination to enhance transfer across the system. Degree-granting institutions may award up to 30 transfer credits.

#### **R471-6 Application of Transfer Credit**

**6.1 Transfer with Upper Division Status:** Institutions shall allow students who complete AA/AS degrees in a lower division major with requirements established by the faculty majors

committee to transfer with upper status to any USHE four-year institution without taking any lower division major courses at the receiving institution.

**6.1.1 Exceptions to Applying Lower Division Major Coursework Credit:**

Exceptions may apply when mandated by accreditation, licensing, extra-departmental professional requirements, as agreed upon by the faculty majors committees, or as directed by the Transfer Council. In such cases, the transfer student will be expected to complete lower division coursework required at the four-year institution.

**6.2 Admission to Upper Division Major Program:** Institutions should clearly communicate to prospective transfer students that completing required lower division major coursework at USHE community colleges or institutions serving a community college role does not assure they will be admitted into a specific major program at a USHE four-year institution. Institutions must inform students when a particular program has a limited number of openings and highly competitive admissions to the program.

**6.3 Disclosure of Partial Program:** If an institution does not have the faculty or resources to offer, as part of its curriculum, all of the agreed-upon lower division major courses in a given discipline and emphasis, it will inform prospective students interested in that lower division major area that the institution does not offer all of the needed lower division major courses so that students may consider attending another institution offering the required coursework or enroll in online courses offered elsewhere in USHE.

**6.4 Allowable Credit:** Institutions may not impose limits on the number of gen ed credits students may earn by means other than taking courses directly from the institution unless limited by the accreditation standards of a specific academic program.

**6.5 Length of Time for Acceptance and Applicability of Credit:** Institutions must accept credit transferred from other institutions within the system. An institution's colleges and departments may review courses taken over the prior 15 years and make a determination of applicability to current requirements of a credential or degree based on the appropriateness of course content, rigor, and standards. Students wanting transfer credits that were earned more than 15 years earlier may be asked to demonstrate competencies in the learning outcomes expected in gen ed courses they have completed by using portfolios, challenge examinations, or other forms of PLA.

**R471-7 Transfer of Credit from Institutions Outside USHE**

**7.1 Evaluating Credit from non-USHE Institutions:** A receiving institution should have reasonable confidence that students from non-USHE accredited institutions are qualified to undertake its educational program. In cases where students are attempting to



transfer credit from non-accredited institutions and foreign institutions, additional evaluation may be necessary before assigning credit to a student's transcript.

**7.1.1 Students Entering with Associate Degrees:** A student who enters a USHE institution with an AA/AS degree from an accredited institution will have their transcript reviewed to assure they have successfully completed relevant courses in the three gen ed core areas required of USHE students: Written Communication, Quantitative Literacy, and American Institutions. While USHE will honor associate degrees, deficiencies found in one or more of the three gen ed core areas may need to be addressed. A student who enters a USHE institution with an AA/AS degree but deficient in lower division prerequisite courses required for their major course of study will be required to successfully complete such courses.

**7.1.2 Students Entering from Accredited Institutions without Associate Degrees:** Students who enter USHE without having completed an associate degree must have their transcripts evaluated by the receiving institution to determine if additional lower division major and/or gen ed coursework will be required to meet USHE requirements.

**7.1.3 Students Entering from Non-accredited Institutions and Foreign Institutions:** Receiving institutions should evaluate on a case-by-case basis any credits earned at unaccredited or foreign institutions. The evaluation may include information provided by or about the unaccredited or foreign institution, such as a catalog covering the years the student attended, a description of courses the student completed, course syllabi, faculty credentials, and library facilities. An assessment will be made to determine if additional lower division major and/or gen ed coursework will be required to meet institutional requirements.

**7.1.3.1** Institutions may require verification of competency attainment through assessments or examinations.

**7.1.3.2** A USHE institution that makes a determination of equivalency in transferring in credit will share their findings with the appropriate technical college or degree-granting faculty major committee. The faculty major committee will determine whether the credit equivalency should be treated as equivalent for transfer by all USHE institutions.

**7.1.3.3** Institutions may bring requests for exceptions to the Transfer Council.

**R471-8 Committees to Facilitate Articulation and Transfer:** In establishing policies and procedures to support ease of transfer and timely completion for USHE students, the Board recognizes that lower division majors and emphases may differ because of USHE institutions' unique missions. The Board therefore establishes faculty majors committees and procedures to provide common lower division major requirements that allow transfer students who apply for upper majors to receive full value for their academic work.

**8.1 USHE Faculty Majors Committees:** To achieve these objectives, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education ("OCHE") shall organize USHE faculty majors committees in each academic discipline. Major departments at the universities shall work closely with the faculty majors committees to effectively articulate and align lower division major emphases at community colleges and four-year institutions with a community college role and lower division major requirements at four-year institutions.

**8.1.1** The Chief Academic Officer of each institution shall nominate a faculty representative in each discipline area to serve on a faculty majors committee. If appropriate, the Chief Academic Officer may also nominate additional faculty or staff in major areas within a discipline to attend faculty majors committee meetings.

**8.1.2** OCHE shall convene faculty majors committees meetings at least annually.

**8.1.3** The Board's Gen Ed Task Force ("Task Force") and OCHE staff will collaborate to develop an agenda for faculty majors committees meetings. Chief Academic Officers and faculty majors committees will review agendas and provide additional agenda items as needed.

**8.2 Faculty Majors committees Responsibilities:** Each faculty majors committee shall be responsible to:

**8.2.1** Reach agreement on specific required lower division major courses that are common at all USHE institutions. Equivalencies are based on content and mastery of subject matter, not only course level. Not all institutions offer all or the same lower division courses, and in such cases, equivalencies for individual courses may not exist at some institutions.

**8.2.2** Continually review course learning outcomes and expected competency levels and content matter that should be satisfied in required lower division major area courses to assure that students who complete the coursework will be fully prepared to successfully complete upper coursework.

**8.2.3** Community colleges shall not offer courses at the lower division that the faculty majors committees agree should be taught at the upper level. Individual faculty major committees and affected institutions will address exceptions. When agreement cannot be reached, the Transfer Council may adjudicate.

**8.2.4** Review lower division CCN courses to assure they fulfill gen ed and lower division major requirements at all USHE degree-granting institutions. Additional lower division courses may be considered for common numbering if they are similar in content, standard, and rigor.

**8.2.5 Maximum Credits:** Each faculty major committee will establish a maximum number of credits, in keeping with institutional practices, for lower division major coursework required in each discipline.

**8.2.6 Minimum Credits:** Each faculty major committee will establish at least 15 credits of lower division major coursework in each discipline. If a faculty major committee determines that fewer than 15 credits of coursework are appropriate for a particular lower division major, they will seek approval of the lower division major from the Transfer Council.

**8.2.6.1** The number of credits required for a lower division major should not prevent students from completing required gen ed coursework within the number of credits allowed for an AA/AS degree.

**8.2.6.2** Exceptions may be made when mandated by accreditation, licensing, extra-departmental professional, or other institutional requirements. When exceptions are made, students may not be able to complete required gen ed coursework within the number of credits allowed for an AA/AS degree. Such exceptions must be approved by the Transfer Council.

**8.2.6.3** If faculty majors committees determine additional lower division credits are needed for students to successfully complete upper coursework, a committee may recommend the delay of some gen ed requirements until after transfer or acceptance to an upper major program. Such exceptions must be approved by the Transfer Council.

### **8.3 Transfer Council Membership and Responsibilities**

**8.3.1 Transfer Council Membership:** Transfer Council membership includes the following:

**8.3.1.1** The Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs. The Associate Commissioner or a designee serves as chair of the Transfer Council;

**8.3.1.2** A transfer expert from each USHE institution, such as a president, Chief Academic Officer, transfer advisor, or registrar, as recommended by the institution's president;

**8.3.1.3** One academic faculty senate leader regularly rotated among institutions; and

**8.3.1.4** The chair of the Task Force

**8.3.2 Transfer Council Responsibilities:** The Transfer Council shall engage in the following on behalf of and with authority of the Board.

**8.3.2.1** Annually ascertain and assess system transfer data and identify transfer and articulation obstacles, develop policies and practices needed to address specific obstacles and to improve system-wide transfer and articulation in general, which will include lower division major alignment, transfer pathways, and transfer outreach and communication to current and incoming students.

**8.3.2.2** Require regular follow-up from institutions on implementing the Transfer Council's directives and transfer and articulation policies.

**8.3.2.3** Establish an appeals process and serve as the final appeal level for students and institutions on contested decisions on transfer and articulation.

**8.3.2.3.1** An appeal to the Transfer Council will be available to a student or institution only after they have exhausted all available administrative remedies at the institution level.

**8.3.2.3.2** Annually report the Transfer Council's activities, directives, recommendations, and priorities to the Board.