

Glossary of Academic Terms: Middle States & NY State Education Dept.

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

MSCHE Definition: A period of time designated by a college or university that includes dates for registration, additions and deletions to students' class schedules, beginning and ending of semesters/terms, mid-term and final exams, application for graduation, and other key activities.

ACADEMIC YEAR

MSCHE Definition: A period of time that colleges use to measure a quantity of study. A typical academic year may consist of two semesters (fall and spring) of approximately 15 weeks each or three quarters of approximately 10 weeks each. Academic years can vary from college to college or from program to program within the same college or university. For the purposes of federal student financial assistance programs, an academic year has a minimum of 30 weeks of instructional time for a course of study that measures its program length in credit hours or a minimum of 26 weeks of instructional time for a course of study that measures its program length in clock hours. A full-time student in an undergraduate course of study is expected to complete at least 24 semester credit hours or 36 quarter credit hours in a course of study that measures its program length in credit hours, or at least 900 clock hours in a course of study that measures its program length in clock hours. *Source:* 20 USC 1088.

An academic year in a direct assessment program is a period of instructional time that consists of a minimum of 30 weeks of instructional time during which, for an undergraduate educational program, a full-time student is expected to complete the equivalent of at least 24 semester credit hours, 36 quarter credit hours, or 900 clock hours. *Source:* 34 CFR 668.10.

ACCREDITATION

MSCHE Definition: A process of peer review that the educational community has adopted for self-regulation since early in the 20th century. It is a voluntary process intended to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity of higher education, making it worthy of public confidence. Institutions choose to apply for accredited status, and once accredited, they agree to abide by the standards of their accrediting organization and to regulate themselves by taking responsibility for their own improvement.

ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS

MSCHE Definition: A location, other than a branch campus, that is geographically apart from the main campus and at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Additional locations may be domestic or international. Institutions are required to obtain MSCHE approval of new additional locations before offering classes at such locations. In addition, institutions must report to MSCHE on activity at additional locations on an annual basis through the Institutional Profile.

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ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

NYSED definition: A credential issued by an institution in recognition of the completion of a curriculum other than one leading to a degree. Courses offered as part of an **advanced certificate** are all at the graduate level, and all courses within the certificate should be able to be applied to completion of a degree.

Number of Credits: not specified by NYSED

In practice, certificates are defined as a structured group of courses that focus on a specific field or area of knowledge. As such they may be valuable to students for job applications, career advancement or personal development. Attainment of certificates should be properly documented through the registrar's office.

Registration Requirement: All certificates are required to be registered with NYSED.

Advanced Certificates cannot be advertised until approved by NYSED.

Once a program has been approved by NSYED, elimination of any requirement for program completion requires NYSED approval.

ARTICULATION AGREEMENT

MSCHE Definition: Also known as Transfer Articulation, this process involves cooperation between two or more higher education institutions to match courses and facilitate the transfer of students' credits from one college or university to another.

ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

MSCHE Definition: A process whereby a college or university has developed and implemented steps to evaluate its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals, and its compliance with Middle States accreditation standards.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

MSCHE Definition: A process which demonstrates that, at graduation or other appropriate points, an institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies that are consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

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CERTIFICATE

NYSED definition: A credential issued by an institution in recognition of the completion of a curriculum other than one leading to a degree. Courses are offered at the undergraduate level and all courses within the certificate should be able to be applied to completion of a degree.

Number of Credits: not specified by NYSED

In practice, certificates are defined as a structured group of courses that focus on a specific field or area of knowledge. As such they may be valuable to students for job applications, career advancement or personal development. Attainment of certificates should be properly documented through the registrar's office.

Registration Requirement: All certificates are required to be registered with NYSED.

Certificates cannot be advertised until approved by NYSED.

Once a program has been approved by NSYED, elimination of any requirement for program completion requires NYSED approval.

CONCENTRATION*

NYSED Definition: a group of courses taken **within** a program that allows a student to focus in a particular area of that field.

Number of Credits: not specified by NYSED

Registration Requirement: All concentrations must be registered with NYSED.

Changes to the minimum number of credit hours required for an existing concentration requires NYSED approval.

Undergraduate concentrations should not be advertised as a major or a degree.*

*Special Note: only the NYSED Teacher Education Program defines a concentration as a major.

CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

MSCHE Definition: Certain agreements (contracts) with an institution or organization not accredited by a federally recognized agency to provide any portion of a postsecondary educational program that leads to an academic or professional degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential on behalf of the accredited institution, are subject to review by MSCHE. Contractual relationships for the offering of academic courses must be approved by the Commission through the Substantive Change process.

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COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

MSCHE Definition: An educational process under which students are able to earn credits toward graduation by working in positions directly related to their academic major. Cooperative Education typically includes the establishment of learning objectives and the measurement of their achievement. This is done jointly by a Cooperative Education faculty advisor, the student, and the immediate supervisor in the student's workplace. See the definition of *Experiential Learning* to see how that differs from Cooperative Education.

CREDIT

NYSED Requirements for Undergraduate Credit: Credit toward an undergraduate degree shall be earned only for college level work.

NYSED Requirements for Graduate Credit: Credit toward a graduate degree shall be earned only through work designed expressly for graduate students.

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CREDIT HOUR

FEDERAL Definition: Semester credit hour or semester hour.

§600.2 Definitions. Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than—

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

(2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

NYSED Definition of Credit (semester) hour

Semester hour means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of this Subchapter. This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year.

Please see below MSCHE requirements for assignment of credit hours.

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CREDIT HOUR

MSCHE Requirements for Assignment of Credit Hours

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(f), the Commission “must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution’s assignment of credit hours.” Specifically, the Commission must review the institution’s policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded as well as the application of the institution’s policies and procedures to its programs and coursework, and make a “reasonable determination of whether the institution’s assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education.”

Institutions must provide the follow documentation:

1. Written policies and procedures for credit hour assignment covering all types of courses, disciplines, programs, degree levels, formats, and modalities of instruction.

Include each policy that documents the assignment of credit hours specific to the types noted above. Specify the location of the policy in the catalog and website. The following should be clearly indicated:

- Academic period (e.g., 15 weeks plus one week exam over two semesters)
- Recommended instructional time (e.g., three 50-minute sessions or two 75-minute sessions per week)
- Recommended out-of-class time requirements (e.g., twice in-class time)

2. Evidence that the institution’s credit hour policies and procedures are applied consistently across the full range of institutional offerings. If the institution is required to obtain approval from the relevant State Department of Education, compliance with this requirement should be documented. Other evidence must include:

- Documentation from recent academic program reviews;
- New course or program approvals;
- Documentation for registration software/systems that ensure a consistent schedule of courses based on the credit hour assignment;
- Academic calendars and/or schedules, and course matrices; and
- Documentation of adherence to credit hour requirements, consistent with federal regulations, from a university system requirements, or disciplinary organization, etc.

3. A description and evidence of the processes used by the institution to review periodically the application of its policies and procedures for credit hour assignment.

Indicate the individual(s) and/or entities responsible for the final review and approval.

4. A list of the courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of credit hour or its equivalent as specified in the MSCHE Credit Hour Policy (e.g., online or hybrid, laboratory, studio, clinical, internship, independent study, and accelerated format) and evidence that such variations in credit hour assignment conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education.

- Each course or program that does not adhere to the federal definition should be specified and supporting evidence that it conforms to commonly accepted practice should be provided using the criteria described above in Item 2.

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CURRICULUM

NYSED Definition: curriculum or program is the formal educational requirements necessary to qualify for certificates or degrees. A curriculum or program includes general education or specialized study in depth in a particular field, or both.

DIRECT ASSESSMENT

MSCHE Definition: Direct assessment involves an examination of samples of student work. Such work could include student portfolios, research papers, classroom presentations, and final exams, demonstrating that a student has attained the learning objectives that were identified in the course syllabus.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

NYSED Definition: formal education activity in which the student is separated by a distance from the source of the instruction, and usually from the associated support services (e.g., library, academic advising) as well. Most but not all distance education involves the use of one or more technological delivery systems.

MSCHE Definition: An educational process in which all or the majority of the instruction occurs with the instructor and student in different locations. Instruction may be synchronous (in real time; simultaneous) or asynchronous.

DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM

NYSED Definition: one program leading to two degrees offered by a single institution (e.g., BS/MS).

In practice, students admitted to a dual degree program apply and are admitted once for both programs. Separate applications are not required for each degree that is part of dual degree program.

Registration Requirement: All dual degree programs must be registered with NYSED.

Dual Degree Programs cannot be advertised until approved by NYSED.

NOTE MSCHE Definition for Concurrent or Dual Degree: Concurrent or Dual Degrees

In these programs, often referred to as joint degrees, two separate degrees are pursued concurrently and seamlessly by the student. The degrees may be conferred by one or more institutions. For example: a dual J.D./M.B.A. program in which the transcript and diploma for the J.D. bear the name of the law school's parent institution, while the transcript and diploma for the M.B.A. bear the name of the business school's parent institution.

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

MSCHE Definition: Knowledge gained through practical work experience for which an institution, through a formalized process, may analyze and award related academic credit to a student. See the definition of *Cooperative Education*, to see how that differs from Experiential Learning.

EXTENSION CENTER

NYSED Definition: Extension center or interinstitutional center is a unit of an institution located at a place other than the institution's principal center or at another degree-granting institution, at which the institution does not offer any curricula leading to a certificate or degree, but at which the institution conducts more than 15 courses for credit or has more than 350 course registrations for credit in any academic year.

Also note **MSCHE Definition** of an additional location: A location, other than a branch campus, that is geographically apart from the main campus and at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Additional locations may be domestic or international. Institutions are required to obtain MSCHE approval of new additional locations before offering classes at such locations. In addition, institutions must report to MSCHE on activity at additional locations on an annual basis through the Institutional Profile.

EXTENSION SITE

NYSED Definition: Extension site or interinstitutional site is a unit of an institution located at a place other than the institution's principal center or at another degree-granting institution, at which the institution does not offer any curricula leading to a certificate or degree, and at which the institution conducts no more than 15 courses for credit and has no more than 350 course registrations for credit in any academic year.

Also note **MSCHE Definition** of an additional location: A location, other than a branch campus, that is geographically apart from the main campus and at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Additional locations may be domestic or international. Institutions are required to obtain MSCHE approval of new additional locations before offering classes at such locations. In addition, institutions must report to MSCHE on activity at additional locations on an annual basis through the Institutional Profile.

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FORMATS

NYSED Definitions for formats:

Weekend format: all requirements for the degree or other award must be offered during weekend study.

Evening format: all requirements for the degree or other award must be offered during evening study.

Evening/weekend format: all requirements for the degree or other award must be offered during a combination of evening and weekend study.

JOINTLY REGISTERED PROGRAM

NYSED Definition: Jointly registered program or program offered jointly: one program that is offered by two or more institutions.

Registration Requirements: Joint programs are required to be registered with NYSED.

In practice, an alternate route to a joint curriculum is to develop an articulation agreement between the institutions to allow for transfer of credit.

Also note MSCHE Definition for Articulation Agreement: this process involves cooperation between two or more higher education institutions to match courses and facilitate the transfer of students' credits from one college or university to another.

MASTER'S DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

NYSED Requirements: Master's degree programs shall normally require a minimum of one academic year of full-time graduate level study, or its equivalent in part-time study, with an accumulation of not less than 30 semester hours. Research or a comparable occupational or professional experience shall be a component of each master's degree program. The requirements for a master's degree shall normally include at least one of the following: passing a comprehensive test, writing a thesis based on independent research or completing an appropriate special project.

MINOR

NYSED Definition: a group of courses taken **outside** of the major program of study that allows a student to focus in a particular area.

Number of credits: not specified by NYSED

Registration Requirement: NONE

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REGISTRATION

NYSED Definition: approval by the State Education Department of a curriculum in an institution of higher education for general purposes, for admission to professional practice, or for acceptance toward a credential issued by the department or by the institution.

SEMESTER HOUR

NYSED Definition: Semester hour is a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of the [Commissioner's Regulations](#). This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year.

SYLLABUS REQUIREMENTS (NYSED)

NYSED required components of a syllabus:

- course description
- course objectives
- prerequisites
- credits allocated
- assignments
- method of assessing student achievement, including the assessment rubrics at the course and project levels
- basis of grade determination;
- bibliographic and other resources
- other course policies related to integrity of credit
- Author(s) of syllabus

TRACK

NYSED does not use this term and does not define it.

NYSED understands a **track** to be an informal term used by some institutions to prepare students for a particular field of study.

The term **track** should not be used to refer to any official program of study.