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South Carolina Exam-Based Credit Awards Policy

Effective Date: Fall 2026 (for students entering college)

Full Implementation: Fall 2027 (for initial college and university catalog and website updates)

Review Cycle: Every three years or as needed to align with state and national college exam-based credit awarding standards.

Statute: The South Carolina code § 59-29-190 directs the Commission on Higher Education, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, to specify the manner in which advanced placement exam credit shall be awarded at each public, post-secondary college in the state.

Purpose

This policy updates the types of exam-based credit, and minimum score ranges that public, post-secondary institutions in South Carolina shall use to award credit for exam-based prior learning. These updated standards were determined by a task force with representation from the Commission on Higher Education as well as admissions and registrar professionals from post-secondary institutions.

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This policy is set forth to provide guidance for the issuance of college-level credit for completion of exam-based instruments. Following these guidelines reduces student time-to-credential and costs while supporting completion, especially for traditionally underserved populations. This policy is intended to provide transparency and information for parents and students as well as guidance to institutions regarding awarding credit. The chart below is provided as a guide for reference throughout the policy.

Organization or Examination Name	Abbreviation
Advanced Placement	AP
American Council on Education	ACE
Cambridge Assessment International Education	AICE
College-Level Examination Program	CLEP
DANTES Subject Standardized Test	DSST
International Baccalaureate	IB
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education	CHE

Definitions:

- 1. Type of credit awarded:** Guaranteeing the fulfillment of general education/core curriculum requirements by direct equivalence instead of elective credit is the intent of this policy.
- 2. Appropriate Courses:** “Appropriate courses” are those offered by the institution that parallel the content covered by the relevant exam. Institutions are urged to publish comprehensive course equivalency charts to clarify how exam-based credits translate to specific courses.

3. Maximum Credit Limits: Institutions shall not be required to award more than eight credits in any one discipline area. However, flexibility in credit limits and utilization of multiple exam types to meet discipline specific course credit may be allowed based on institutional needs and course enrollment.

I. Advanced Placement (AP) Credit Award Policy

AP is a program offered in the United States and Canada that allows high school students to take college-level courses and exams. Successful completion of an AP exam can result in college credit or advanced placement in college courses, depending on the student's score and institutional policies.

In accordance with §59-29-190 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, as amended, each public institution of higher education shall award credit in appropriate courses for scores of three or higher on pertinent AP examinations. The following guidelines outline the application of this policy:

1. Credit Awarding Practices: Institutions shall award credit for scores of 3 or higher on AP exams. A tiered credit system may be adopted where scores of 4 or 5 earn additional credits, in alignment with the latest edition of the AP credit-granting recommendations from the ACE and the College Board.

2. Interdisciplinary Courses: Institutions are encouraged to award general elective credit for scores of 3 or higher on AP Seminar and Research exams, or to award credit for a comparable course if available.

II. Cambridge Assessment International Education (AICE) Credit Award Policy

AICE offers a series of internationally recognized academic qualifications, including AICE A Levels and AS Levels, which prepare students for university and provide a pathway to higher education. Achieving high scores on AICE exams can lead to college credit at many institutions.

Each public institution of higher education shall award credit in appropriate courses for scores of E or higher on an AICE Advanced AS and A Level examination. Institutions shall provide justification for each case where the minimum threshold for granting credit is higher than the score indicated above. Such justification must be approved by the CHE.

III. College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) Credit Award Policy

CLEP is a nationally recognized exam program administered by the College Board allowing exam takers to demonstrate expertise in specific subject areas. The assessments reward students with college credit for high scores on standardized exams.

Each public institution of higher education shall award credit for minimum qualifying scores on relevant CLEP exams, consistent with national standards such as the ACE recommendations (generally, scores of 50 or higher).

IV. DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST) Credit Award Policy

DSST is a nationally recognized exam program administered by Prometric. Prior to 2004, the exams were administered by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support and limited access to the military community. Today, DSST is a pathway for non-traditional learners, including military members and dependents as well as adult students, and high school students. The assessments reward students with college credit for high scores on standardized exams.

Each public institution of higher education shall award credit for minimum qualifying scores on relevant DSST exams, consistent with national standards such as the ACE recommendations which provides minimum passing scores to receive credit per exam completed.

V. International Baccalaureate (IB) Credit Award Policy

IB is an internationally recognized educational program offering high-level courses for high school students that emphasize critical thinking, global awareness, and intercultural understanding. The program includes assessments that reward students with college credit for high scores on standardized exams.

Each public institution of higher education shall award credit in appropriate courses for scores of four or higher on any higher-level IB course examination. Alternatively, institutions may award 24 semester hours for full IB diploma completion with scores of 4 or higher on all subjects.

VI. Transparency and Accessibility

The policies on exam-based credit awards shall be referenced in academic catalogs and made accessible on institutional websites. Efforts should be made to enhance the accessibility of these policies through clear, user-friendly information and resources such as including frequently asked questions (FAQs) to assist students. Score thresholds, minimum credit awards, and course

equivalencies must be standardized, transparent, and guarantee the fulfillment of general education/core curriculum requirements where applicable. The amount of college course credit awarded will be equivalent to the credit hour value of the college course for which the exam-based credit is accepted.

VII. Regular Review and Updates

This policy shall undergo a formal review process by the CHE every three years, involving input from faculty, administrators, and students, to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness as well as alignment with best practices and evolving national standards. Continuous engagement with stakeholders and adaptation to educational trends shall be prioritized.

VIII. Outreach and Communication

Institutions are encouraged to implement outreach initiatives that inform high school students about available credit opportunities through exam-based credit programs to encourage wider participation.

Approved by the SC Commission on Higher Education:

Revised: March 24, 2026