



Minnesota Academic Program Standards

January 2026

Contact

School Licensure and Registration

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About the Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$244 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

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Introduction

In 1985, the Higher Education Coordinating Board convened its first Task Force to create the first Minnesota Associate Degree Standards; the Minnesota Bachelor Degree Standards were adopted in 1993. These standards have been used by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to guide program approval of degree programs offered to Minnesota residents. The Minnesota Degree Standards are used as a factor to determine whether an academic program meets the minimum requirement to be an appropriate educational program under Minnesota Statute §136A.65 subd. 5(1)(ii) and (2)(ii).

In 2019, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education convened a working group to update these standards to reflect 25 years of changes to postsecondary education and create minimum standards for certificate and graduate programs. These changes include a transition of many institutions from the quarter system to the semester system, an expansion of academic program diversity, the need for ladder credentials for those in vocational and trade occupations, the focus on transferability of credit between schools, and the need for flexibility in designing modern degree programs.

In 2025, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education convened a working group to update the standards, aligning them with new accreditor policies that allow bachelor's degrees with fewer than 120 credits.

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education will apply the Minnesota Academic Program Standards to new academic programs once adopted and approved by the Commissioner. Previously approved programs will not have to conform to the new requirements, but institutions are permitted to retroactively apply these changes to academic programs.

It is understood that institutions use credits or other terms (e.g., hours, courses) to express student accomplishment and academic progress. Institutions or programs that do not measure academic progress by credits will need to demonstrate, through equivalent measures, that these standards are met.

Certificate Program Standards

Certificate programs are a relatively free-standing body of knowledge and skills in a well-defined domain. The following categories of certificate programs are provided, but institutions may use different naming conventions. Alternate naming conventions for certificate programs are permitted as long as the institution consistently applies the alternate naming convention.

- Undergraduate Certificates
 - Undergraduate-level classes
 - Admission does not require bachelor's degree
- Post-bachelor Certificates
 - Undergraduate-level classes
 - Admission requires bachelor's degree
- Graduate Certificates
 - Master-level classes
 - Admission requires bachelor's degree
- Post-Graduate Certificates
 - Master-level classes
 - Admission requires a graduate degree
 - Sometimes used as an alternative for doctoral students that completed didactic courses, but not a dissertation ("ABD")

All certificate programs are required to be a minimum of 12 quarter credits or 8 semester credits.

Diploma Program Standards

Diploma programs are short curricula that encompass a broad range of fields defined by the educational institution offering the diploma.

All diploma programs are required to be a minimum of 45 quarter credits or 30 semester credits.

Undergraduate Degree Standards

General Education

General education is an integral part of all undergraduate degree programs, providing basic knowledge that help define an educated person. General education courses can be interdisciplinary and may count towards multiple general education requirements, but credit will be apportioned to the general education categories based on the distribution of coursework between content areas. Some, but not all, general education coursework, may also be used to fulfill major requirements.

There are different standards for the minimum number of general education credits required for associate/bachelor degrees and Associate of Applied Science/Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. Coursework is composed by liberal arts and sciences and are categorized as follows:

- **Communications** is the study of how people share information, ideas, meaning, and culture. Communications offerings are designed to develop a student's understanding and application of research and critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate information, identify and evaluate source material, integrate differing points of view, and establish a reasoned course of action for effectively solving problems and demonstrating effective verbal, nonverbal, and visual skills (i.e. reading, writing, speaking, listening, audience awareness, and conflict resolution).
- **Natural Science** is the study of the physical world and/or how biological life, non-living systems and matter, and/or energy works. Natural Science offerings are designed to develop a student's understanding of the natural world, its processes, and the inter-relationships of its systems; how to apply the scientific method including the appropriate collection, analysis, and interpretation of data and effective communication of findings; harness the ability to use scientific terminology appropriately in meaningful scientific dialogue; and gain an understanding of the process of science as an intellectual pursuit and the ways in which scientific ideas evolve and come to be accepted.
- **Mathematics** is the study of numerical relationships, geometrical and spatial properties, and/or logic. Mathematics offerings are designed to develop students' understanding of basic mathematical concepts, to develop their abilities to analyze and solve mathematical problems, and to promote the importance of mathematics through analysis of problem-solving strategies and the interpretation of results.
- **Social Science** is the study of human society and/or behaviors and cause and effect. Social Science offerings are designed to develop a student's understanding of individual or social human behavior from the perspective of one or more disciplines of the social sciences, knowledge of empirical methods for studying human behavior, and to use theories and concepts of human behavior with appropriate empirical evidence to analyze contemporary social issues (historical events, cultural and societal differences), consumer behavior, and/or the inter-workings of an economy, how to analyze and interpret data from a social science context, and evaluate society as a whole.

- **Humanities/Arts** is the study human culture and/or expression. Humanities/Arts offerings are designed to develop a student's understanding of the relationship between a work of art or text and its cultural context and ability to form judgments through the critical and aesthetic analysis of works of art, literature, religion, history, and philosophy.

Relationship of Bachelor Degrees to Associate Degrees

An Associate degree is equivalent to a minimum of 90 quarter or 60 semester credit hours, which may apply towards a bachelor's degree. The general education portion of an Associate in Applied Science degree is equivalent to a minimum of 23 quarter or 15 semester credit hours, which may apply towards a bachelor's degree. An Associate of Applied Science degree is equivalent to a minimum of 90 quarter or 60 semester credit hours, which may apply towards a Bachelor of Applied Science degree.

Associate Degree Standards

Associate degrees are awarded upon completion of a minimum of 90 quarter credits or 60 semester credits in a program designed to either prepare for an occupation or provide a foundation for a bachelor degree program.

Associate degrees may be designed to provide the foundation for bachelor programs with highly structured lower division requirements and may additionally be designed to include major requirements. Associate degrees must provide evidence of competencies in Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities/Arts.

Associate degree programs must include a minimum of 45 quarter or 30 semester credits distributed across at least the following four areas: Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities/Arts. Included in the 45 quarter or 30 semester credits must be at least four quarter or three semester credits in each of the four categories. The remaining general education credits must be chosen from one or more of these four categories.

Associate of Applied Science Degree Standards

Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees are awarded upon completion of a minimum of 90 quarter credits or 60 semester credits in a named field of study in occupation or a range of occupations. At least 45-quarter or 30- semester credits must be program-related occupational or technical courses.

A.A.S. Science degree programs must include a minimum of 23 quarter or 15 semester credits distributed across at least the following four areas: Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities/Arts. Included in the 23 quarter or 15 semester credits must be at least four-quarter or three semester credits in each of the four categories. The remaining general education credits must be chosen from one or more of these four categories and the credits may be prescribed to provide theoretical support for an occupation.

An A.A.S. degree may also be accepted in transfer to a related bachelor program, including a Bachelor of Applied Science. Because A.A.S. degree programs are not intended as preparation for all bachelor degrees, schools must disclose to students that four-year institutions may accept only the general education coursework and a limited portion of the other coursework as applying toward the requirements of a bachelor's degree.

Bachelor Degree Standards

Bachelor degrees are awarded upon completion of a minimum of 180 quarter credits or 120 semester credits in a program built around general education competencies in Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities/Art, as well as the ability to learn on one's own the understanding of a defined area of knowledge (major program of study).

The minimum number of credits required within a major program of study must be 45 quarter or 30 semester credits. Study within a major program must form a coherent pattern in which introductory work in the major field provide foundation for advanced work.

A bachelor degree must include both introductory and advanced coursework. Introductory coursework must provide a broad exposure to the concepts, principles, and substance of individual disciplines. Advanced coursework must be of sufficient intensity and complexity to provide an in-depth examination of the concepts, principles and substance of individual disciplines. The minimum number of required advanced-level credits, including courses from a major program of study, must include a minimum 54 quarter or 36 semester credits required to complete a bachelor degree program.

Bachelor of (arts, science, discipline specific, interdisciplinary studies, other specialized nomenclature) degree programs must include a minimum of 45 quarter or 30 semester credits distributed across at least the following general education four areas: Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Humanities/Arts, and Social Science. The 45-quarter or 30 semester credits must include at least four quarter or three semester credits in each of the four categories. The remaining general education credits must be chosen from one or more of these four categories.

Bachelor of Applied Science Degrees

Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.) degrees are awarded upon completion of a 180 quarter credit or 120 semester credit academic program in a named field of study in occupation or a range of occupations. At least 45 quarter or 30 semester credits must be program-related occupational or technical courses, in addition to the minimum number of advanced-level coursework and courses within a major.

The minimum number of credits required within a major program of study must be 45 quarter or 30 semester credits. Study within a major program must form a coherent pattern in which introductory work in the major field provide a foundation for advanced work. Some, but not all, of the program-related occupational or technical courses may also be used to fulfill major requirements.

A bachelor degree must include both introductory and advanced coursework. Introductory coursework must provide a broad exposure to the concepts, principles, and substance of individual disciplines. Advanced coursework must be of sufficient intensity and complexity to provide an in-depth examination of the concepts, principles and substance of individual disciplines. The minimum number of required advanced-level credits, including courses from a major program of study, must include a minimum 54 quarter or 36 semester credits.

Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs (arts, science, discipline specific, interdisciplinary studies, other specialized nomenclature) must include a minimum of 23 quarter or 15 semester credits distributed across at least the following four areas: Communication, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Humanities/Arts, and Social Science. The 23-quarter or 15 semester credits must include at least four quarter or three semester credits in each of the four categories. The remaining general education credits must be chosen from one or more of these four categories.

Reduced-Credit Bachelor Degrees

Reduced-credit bachelor degrees offer an alternative pathway that preserve the rigor and breadth of traditional programs while allowing completion with a minimum of 135 quarter credits or 90 semester credits. These degrees may be offered in new fields of study or alongside traditional-length programs in the same discipline.

The framework maintains the full General Education core of 45 quarter or 30 semester credits, distributed across Communication, Social Sciences, Humanities/Arts, and Natural Sciences/Mathematics. Each area includes at least four quarter or three semester credits, with additional credits selected from these domains. Major requirements remain unchanged at a minimum of 45 quarter or 30 semester credits, ensuring coherent progression from introductory to advanced study. To uphold academic depth, the degree also requires at least 54 quarter or 36 semester credits of advanced coursework.

Students enrolling in a reduced-credit program must receive clear advising on the potential financial aid, academic, and career implications of pursuing this pathway.

Undergraduate Degree Standards in Credit Equivalencies by Type of Degree

Curriculum Components Minimum Credits	Associate	Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.)	Bachelor	Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.)	Reduced-credit Bachelor
Minimum Total Credits	90 quarter/ 60 semester	90 quarter/ 60 semester	180 quarter/ 120 semester	180 quarter/ 120 semester	135 quarter/ 90 semester
<i>General Education</i>	45 quarter / 30 semester	23 quarter / 15 semester	45 quarter / 30 semester	23 quarter / 15 semester	45 quarter / 30 semester
Communication	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem
Social Science	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem
Humanities/Arts	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem
Natural Sciences/ Mathematics	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem	4 qtr / 3 sem
Additional credits from general education core areas	29 (qtr)/ 18 (sem)	7 (qtr)/3 (sem)	29 (qtr)/ 18 (sem)	7 (qtr)/ 3 (sem)	29 (qtr)/ 18 (sem)
<i>Technical Education</i>		45 qtr/30 sem		45 quarter/ 30 semester	
<i>Major Requirements</i>			45 quarter/ 30 semester	45 quarter/ 30 semester	45 quarter/ 30 semester
<i>Advanced Level Course Work</i>			54 quarter/ 36 semester	54 quarter/ 36 semester	54 quarter/ 36 semester

Master's Degree Standards

Master's degrees are awarded upon completion of a minimum of 45 quarter or 30 semester credits of an academic program in a named field of study or area of professional practice.

A master's degree normally requires previous study at the bachelor's level, either as a separate degree or as part of an integrated course. Within the area studied, master's graduates are expected to possess advanced knowledge of a specialized body of theoretical and applied topics, high-order skills in analysis, critical evaluation, or professional application, and the ability to solve complex problems and think rigorously and independently.

Doctoral Degree Standards

A doctoral degree is the highest award a student can earn for graduate study. Programs are designed to either prepare for an occupation in a professional practice or recognize academic research or other demonstrations of scholarly or artistic achievement.

Doctoral degrees are awarded after a period of study such that the number of credits meets the requirements of any institutional or programmatic accreditor and the student has demonstrated appropriate knowledge, skills, and research. For doctoral degrees with no accreditation standards for minimum number of credits and no requirement of a master's degree, the minimum number of credits for completion is 90 quarter credits or 60 semester credits. For doctoral degrees with no accreditation standards for minimum number of credits, but a requirement of a master's degree, the minimum number of credits for completion is 45 quarter credits or 30 semester credits.

Doctoral programs for professional practice provide the knowledge and skills required for the recognition, credential, or licensing for professional practice.

Doctoral programs for research or scholarship require 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.



2026