

Procedure: 5.1.6p

Structure of Associate Degree, Diploma, and Technical Certificate of Credit Programs

Revised: July 19, 2023

Last Reviewed: July 02, 2026

Adopted: May 4, 1989



I. PURPOSE:

Encouraging students to achieve their potential in programs awarding credentials below the baccalaureate degree is fundamental to the mission of the State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia. The structure of associate degrees, diplomas, and technical certificates of credit programs, offered at Georgia's Technical Colleges shall conform to standards set by the State Board and shall be subject to periodic program evaluation.

Individual Technical Colleges shall determine the appropriate credential required based on the needs of business and industry, as well as those of the students. Programs must conform to the standards outlined in this procedure as well as the processes for the submission, review, and approval of new program requests and those for the periodic review and evaluation of existing programs. The Technical Colleges shall notify the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) of any type of changes including program structural changes in accordance with the Commission's substantive change policy and, when required, will seek approval prior to the initiation of changes.

II. RELATED AUTHORITY:

O.C.G.A. § 20-4-11 – Powers of Board

O.C.G.A. § 20-4-14 – TCSG Established; Powers and Duties

TCSG State Board Policy 5.1.2 – General Program and Program Specific Standard.

TCSG State Board Policy 5.1.6 – Structure of Associate Degree, Diploma and Technical Certificate of Credit Programs

III. APPLICABILITY:

All work units and Technical Colleges associated with the Technical College System of Georgia.

IV. DEFINITIONS:

Credit hour: consistent with the definitions in the regulations of the U.S. Department of Education guidance to institutions and accrediting agencies published on October 29, 2010, 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 out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester [...] or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time.
2. at least an equivalent amount of work as required outlined in item 1 above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, práctica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Distance learning or hybrid course credit: an equivalent amount of instruction and student work leading to equivalent learning outcomes, as required for a traditional class.

V. ATTACHMENTS: N/A

VI. PROCEDURE:

A. Approval of Associate Degrees, Diplomas and Technical Certificates of Credit

1. Associate Degrees

Associate degree programs new to the system or to the individual technical college must be approved by the State Board. State Board approval is not required if the corresponding diploma program is performing satisfactorily. Associate degree programs fitting the above criterion may be administratively approved by the TCSG Office of Technical Education.

2. Diploma Programs

Diploma programs new to the system or to the individual Technical College must be approved by the State Board unless:

- a. the college is approved to offer the associate degree level of the program, and the associate degree program is performing satisfactorily. Diploma programs meeting this criterion may be administratively approved by the Office of Technical Education.

3. Technical Certificate of Credit Programs

Technical Certificate of Credit (TCC) programs new to the system or to the individual Technical College must be approved by the State Board unless:

- a. the Technical College currently offers all of the credit courses contained in the TCC program and the certificate relates directly to an existing certificate, diploma, or degree program offered by the college and all programs are performing satisfactorily.

TCC programs meeting the criterion described above may be administratively approved by the TCSG Office of Technical Education on behalf of the board.

B. Standards for Associate Degrees, Diplomas, and Technical Certificates of Credit

1. Associate Degree Range of Semester Credit Hours

The range of semester credit hours required for graduation with an Associate Degree is 60-73. All Associate Degree programs shall have a minimum of 60 semester credit hours required for graduation. With approval of the State Board, the maximum semester credit hours required for graduation for certain associate

degree programs may be extended beyond 73 semester credit hours.

Associate degree programs shall be organized to conform to system-wide models developed through the program standards and approved by the State Board. Compliance with the models shall ensure minimum standardization of associate degree programs within the Technical College System of Georgia. The models require associate degree programs to be organized into general education and occupational courses.

Associate degree programs shall be composed of courses listed in the system-wide Catalog of Courses. Only general education courses numbered at 1100 or above shall be credited toward degree requirements.

The Technical College System of Georgia offers three types of degree programs:

- The Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree is offered for technical program students who intend to enter the workforce upon graduation.
- The Associate of Science (A.S.) degree is offered for students who intend to enter the workforce and/or immediately continue their education at the baccalaureate level.
- The Associate of Science in Nursing (A.S.N) or Associate Degree of Nursing (A.D.N.) is awarded at TCSG colleges meeting certain criteria with State Board approval for two-year nursing programs including appropriate courses in liberal arts and sciences, nursing foundation as well as clinical opportunities.

Each Associate of Applied Science degree program shall require completion of a minimum basic core of 15 semester credit hours of collegiate-level general education. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas: I. Language Arts/Communications; II. Social/Behavioral Sciences; III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics; IV. Humanities/Fine Arts. Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. A minimum of 40 semester credit hours shall be required in technical areas.

Each Associate of Science program shall require completion of a minimum basic core of 30 semester credit hours of collegiate-level general education. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas: I. Language Arts/Communications; II. Social/Behavioral Sciences; III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics; IV. Humanities/Fine Arts. Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. A minimum of 15-30 semester credit hours shall be required in technical areas.

Each Associate of Science in General Studies allows students to earn general education credits that will transfer towards a four-year degree. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas: I. Language Arts/Communications; II. Social/Behavioral Sciences; III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics; IV. Humanities/Fine Arts. Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.

Each Associate of Science in Nursing or Associate Degree in Nursing shall require completion of a minimum basic core of 15 semester credit hours of collegiate-level general education. The range of semester credit hours required for graduation with an Associate of Science in Nursing is 60-73. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas:

- I. Language Arts/Communications;
- II. Social/Behavioral Sciences;
- III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics;
- IV. Humanities/Fine Arts.

Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. A minimum of 40 semester credit hours shall be required in technical areas.

2. Diploma Range of Semester Credit Hour

The range of semester credit hours required for graduation with a diploma is typically 37 to 59.

With approval of the State Board, maximum semester credit hours required for graduation for certain diploma programs may be extended beyond 59 semester credit hours.

Diploma programs shall be organized to conform to system wide models developed through the program standards phases and approved by the State Board. Compliance with the models shall ensure minimum standardization of diploma programs within the Technical College System of Georgia. The models shall require diploma programs to be organized in general education and occupational courses.

Diploma programs shall be composed of courses listed in the system-wide Catalog of Courses. Only general education courses numbered 1000 or above shall be credited toward diploma requirements.

Each diploma program shall require a minimum basic core of 8 semester credit hours in general education courses. A minimum of 29 semester credit hours shall be required in occupational courses.

3. Technical Certificate of Credit Range of Semester Credit Hours

The range of semester credit hours required for graduation is 3-36. All certificates shall include at least one course. With approval of the State Board, maximum semester credit hours required for graduation for certain technical certificate programs may be extended beyond 36 semester credit hours.

Technical Certificate of Credit programs shall be organized as a coherent set of competencies that correspond to identifiable exit points which match positions in a field of work, and the credential issued as a technical certificate will describe this area of specialization by a name which is clearly descriptive of the area of specialization.

The technical certificate may be used to provide programs in areas of specialization that do not require study of sufficient length to award a diploma or degree or to add on areas of specialization after the completion of a diploma or degree. Technical certificates of credit may require any combination of general education and occupational courses, specific occupational courses, or approved elective courses. Up to 20 percent of the course of study may be unspecified elective courses for programs at least 15 semester credits in length.

Technical Certificate of Credit programs shall be composed of courses listed in the system wide Catalog of Courses, including elective courses developed specifically for a certificate program. Only courses numbered 1000 or above shall be credited toward technical certificate requirements.

C. Basic Computer Literacy Competencies

With respect to basic computer literacy competences required for an Associate's Degree, Diploma, or TCC, a college may:

- a. Teach the TCSG introduction to computers standard course,
- b. Substitute an institutionally developed or college life course that includes basic computer literacy competencies, or
- c. Embed basic computer literacy competencies in occupational courses.

Should any of the above actions result in the extension of a program beyond the maximum range of semester hours required for graduation, the extension will not require approval from the State Board.

D. Submission, review, and approval of new program requests

Technical Colleges shall submit those programs requiring State Board approval to the TCSG Office of Technical Education in sufficient time for review prior to submission to the Board. Staff with the Office of Technical Education will submit requests that meet the criteria outlined in this Procedure to the State Board and notify the Technical Colleges of the Board's approval or denial of the program request. The submission of incomplete

requests by Technical Colleges may delay submission to the State Board and could delay implementation of the program.

E. Periodic review and evaluation of existing programs

The TCSG Office of Technical Education, in conjunction with staff from the Technical Colleges, will conduct periodic reviews and evaluations of existing programs to ensure consistency with standards outlined in this procedure and to ensure satisfactory performance of programs.

F. Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are skills-based courses that may be included within a Degree, Diploma, or Technical Certificate of Credit. Although a micro-credential may be included within a program of study, the micro-credential itself is not a program of study. Colleges may issue badges signifying the skill or competency gained as the result of completing the course. Although, with Board approval, colleges may establish program graduation requirements that include micro-credential badges, the badges themselves are not college awards.

VII. RECORD RETENTION:

Records pertaining to approved credentials shall be maintained in accordance with the Georgia Secretary of State's Retention Schedule and in accordance with Procedure 6.3.2p Student Records Retention Schedule.