

Forms of Credit

Advanced Placement (AP)

A program administered by the College Board which provides high school students with the opportunity to take college-level curriculum in specific subject areas and earn college credits by scoring well on a final test (typically at least a three, though some institutions may demand higher). Not to be confused with dual-enrollment coursework (e.g. coursework taken for college credit through a community college, where a grade is received).

College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)

A group of standardized, credit-by-examination tests offered by the College Board. It differs from Advanced Placement in the fact that no courses are associated. It is especially useful for “individuals who have obtained knowledge outside the classroom, such as through independent study, homeschooling, job experience, or cultural interaction” and for international students.

Dual Enrollment / Dual Credit

Dual enrollment refers to when a student is enrolled concurrently within two different institutions. The most common example would be a high school student pursuing coursework through a local community college or four-year institution. It goes by a plethora of different names: “joint enrollment,” “post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO),” “Senior Year Plus,” “early college,” etc. The most common feature is that students will be earning credit not through an examination, but by a grade at the conclusion of the course, most typically in the form of a transcript from an institution of higher education. Institutions may have different policies on how they accept these courses as well as different policies on how they interpret the grades received.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

A group of standardized tests of varying difficulty administered by International Baccalaureate, based in Switzerland. The organization provides high-level programming and curriculum for students across the world including subject tests and an IB diploma program. Although not very common within the state of Iowa, IB is a program with a growing presence.

Types of Credit

General Education (“gen-ed,” etc.)

General education courses, more commonly referred to as “gen-eds,” are the foundational courses required for a four-year degree but may vary based on institution as well as a student’s major. Typical gen-ed coursework includes English (writing/literature), science, mathematics, social sciences (psychology, economics, etc.), arts/music, humanities (history, philosophy, etc.), and/or other subjects. Students/parents are usually aware of the term, but often view the area from a “checklist” perspective. It is often best to have students directly contact institutions they are interested in attending to learn more about what each institution has for general education requirements and recommendations they may have.

Major Coursework

Major-related coursework would include any academically rigorous coursework which relates directly to a student’s intended major. These courses are often introductory or narrow in focus (e.g. Intro to Social Work, Business Statistics, etc.).

Electives

Elective coursework is a blanket term for any transferrable coursework, graded or ungraded, which does not fit into a student’s major or an institution’s general education requirements. Elective credit tends to get a bad reputation, especially from parents who often feel their student is not fulfilling specific requirements. Electives are meant to be flexible. They are not bad!

Career and Technical Education (“CTE,” “C&T,” etc.)

Career and Technical coursework is any coursework which is typically more vocational in its curricula. These courses are often involved in skilled trades associated with an AAS degree. Institutions may have different policies regarding these courses, including a cap on the number that may transfer, whether a grade will transfer, or if the course is even accepted.

Developmental/Non-transferring/Remedial

Developmental courses are typically remedial in their nature, meant to bring a student’s skill-level in a subject area up to a college readiness level. Typical examples include lower-level mathematics or science coursework and some writing courses.

Types of Two-Year Degrees

Associate of Arts (AA)

A two-year degree at most community/junior colleges which emphasizes a broad focus on English, science, social sciences, arts/music, and humanities. As such, it is the standard degree for most students to pursue if they intend to transfer to a four-year institution since it aligns well with the general education curriculum at most institutions. Many institutions may have articulation agreements, whereby a transfer student possessing an AA degree may have all or most of their general education coursework completed.

Associate of Science (AS)

A two-year degree at most community/junior colleges which emphasizes a more directed focus on STEM subjects such as mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. Associate of Science degrees are more narrowly focused on typical liberal arts coursework, in lieu of focusing on subjects that must be completed early on sequentially in order to take upper-level coursework. Some institutions may have articulation agreements for students possessing an AS degree, but given the nature of STEM majors, it is usually best for students to confer with their intended transfer institution prior to beginning an AS program.

Associate of Applied Science (AAS)

A two-year degree at most community/junior colleges which emphasizes technical or vocational knowledge meant to lead students directly into the workforce in the form of a trade or other skilled career path. Many of these programs are not directly intended to transfer into a bachelor's degree program. As such, coursework may transfer as Career and Technical credit. Some institutions have "continuing education programs" meant to help those who achieve an AAS move up to a general bachelors-level degree (e.g. BAS program at University of Iowa, BLS at Iowa State, BASc Applied Management at Buena Vista, etc.)

Other (AGS-Associates in General Studies, APS-Associates in Professional Studies, etc.)

A two-year degree which may be unique to a community/junior college district. Not nearly as common, they may or may not be designed to transfer to a four-year institution. It is usually best for students to confer with their intended transfer institution prior to beginning a program such as these.

Miscellaneous Terms

Articulation Agreement

An articulation agreement is a signed document in which one institution agrees to accept all coursework and/or students who complete specific requirements at their prior institution. This is typically the case for when a student completes an AA degree at an Iowa community college and then transfers to a four-year institution. It provides simple portability of credits from an institutional and student standpoint.

Credit Hour/Semester Hour

A popular method of measuring volume and extend of coursework at many two-year and four-year institutions. Historically, most courses are three-to-four credit hours, translating to three-to-four hours of lecture/discussion/lab per week in addition to outside homework. The terms "credit hour" and "semester hour" are often used interchangeably, including at all of Iowa's Regent institutions, community college districts, and many private institutions. The term "credits" is sometimes used, but may be confusing, as some private institutions may use a different course scheduling and/or evaluating method and instead measure each course as being "one credit," etc. Examples would be the "block schedule" method used at Cornell College.

Reverse Credit Transfer

A reverse credit transfer is a process in which students may transfer their coursework completed at a four-year institution back to a previously attended two-year institution in the hopes of receiving an Associates-level degree or certification. This is especially useful if a student was only a few courses away from completing a two-year program prior to transferring. In recent years, the state of Iowa has strongly emphasized the importance of such measures, as it encourages the attainment of at least some post-secondary credential.