

MONTANA BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Policy and Procedures Manual

SUBJECT: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Policy 301.12 – Undergraduate Degree Requirements; Associate Degrees and Certificates

Effective: November 17, 2006; Issued: November 27, 2006; Revised: May 16, 2024

A. Units of the Montana University System (MUS) and the publicly-funded community colleges may offer the associate of arts and the associate of science degrees. They may also offer the associate of applied science degree, and the certificate of applied science, in those academic and occupational areas approved by the board of regents. They may also offer the certificate of general studies, which is designed to provide evidence of completing an MUS-recognized general education core curriculum.

B. Career Certificate

A career certificate is a short academic or technical program of between 9 and 15 semester credits designed to provide a student with well-defined competency or a focus of study.

C. Certificate of Technical Studies

The certificate of technical studies is an applied, technical program between 16 and 29 credits designed to provide a student with broad technical competencies. The CTS must lead to, or incorporate the results of, either industry-recognized credentials or certificates or an industry-accepted block of entry-level skills training.

D. Certificate of Applied Science

1. The certificate of applied science is a program of applied study primarily designed to prepare students for immediate employment in a job indicated by the certificate title. The certificate must ordinarily be approved by the board of regents under board policy 303.1. With the exceptions noted in paragraph D.2 below, the certificate of applied science is normally distinguished by the following characteristics:

- (a) a short program of study (30-45 total credits) with the expectation that the certificate can be completed in, at most, one calendar year; and
- (b) general education coursework that meets accreditation requirements and comprises no more than 1/3rd of the total credits in the certificate program.

2. When the program of study for a proposed certificate of applied science does not meet the characteristics described in paragraph D.1 above, the institution must submit formal request to the regents for an exception, citing a compelling reason for the variation. The request shall be considered a Level II change.

3. Except as provided in paragraph I.C. of board policy 301.11, which describes the Bachelor of Applied Science degree, the certificate of applied science does not transfer as a block of coursework meeting lower-division requirements toward a baccalaureate degree. Individual courses within the degree may transfer to meet course requirements at the receiving institution at the discretion of that institution.

E. Certificate of General Studies

The certificate of general studies is designed for transfer and recognizes completion of an approved general education program that satisfies the requirements of board policy 301.10.

F. Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Degrees

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1. The associate of arts or the associate of science degree is designed for transfer to a four-year institution and require a student complete:
 - (a) a minimum of 60 semester credit hours of college level work, and;
 - (b) an approved general education program that satisfies the requirements of board policy 301.10.

2. The Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees may not require more than 60 semester-credits of college work unless granted an exception. Such exceptions should be rare and driven by a compelling and externally imposed requirement justifying the exception. Campuses seeking exceptions to the 60-credit maximum must submit formal requests to the Board of Regents for approval, following the guidelines established by policy 303.1. The request shall be considered a Level II change. The rationale for the exception must document the existence of one or more of the criteria below.
 - (a) Accreditation standards of the appropriate specialized accrediting agency mandate an associate program of over 60 credit hours, including completion of an approved general education program.
 - (b) Licensing standards of the profession involved require an associate program of over 60 credit hours, including completion of an approved general education program.
 - (c) Employment and initial success in the profession require an associate program of over 60 credit hours.

3. The degree title for the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees will generally carry no designation of field of study. In rare cases, the associate of arts degree or the associate of science degree may be given an additional name designation when such designation demonstrably communicates skills the graduate has attained that can lead to immediate licensure or employment upon graduation in an occupation or facilitate seamless transfer through a statewide transfer or articulation pathway. Campuses seeking approval for an additional name designation must submit a formal request to the Board of Regents for approval. The request shall be considered a Level II change. The request must present a compelling case that additional name designation is warranted, and requires clear demonstration that either:
 - (a) An external entity (e.g. a specialized accreditor, licensing board, or industry association) recognizes the named degree as leading to licensure or employment in a clearly defined occupation upon graduation.
 - (b) The associate of arts or associate of science degree has curriculum that has been defined by a statewide transfer or articulation pathway.

G. Associate of Applied Science Degree

1. The associate of applied science degree combines applied and academic course work in a program of study designed to prepare students for career entry into a specific occupational area, as indicated by the degree title. The program design may combine a certificate of applied science program with additional required courses or may be a distinct curriculum unrelated to any co-existing certificate program. With the exceptions noted in paragraph G.2, below, the associate of applied science degree will have the following characteristics:

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- (a) A program of study (60-72 credits) requiring at least four semesters to complete, but no more than two academic years, including a summer session between the academic years if necessary;
 - (b) An occupational emphasis, achieved through a minimum of 2/3 of the total credits in the degree devoted to technical course work in the discipline specific to the occupational goal;
 - (c) General education or related education courses that meet accreditation requirements and that align with the amount and level of general education required in similar associate of applied science degree programs in Montana.
2. When the program of study for a proposed associate of applied science degree does not meet the characteristics described in paragraph G.1, above, the institution must request an exception to the requirements for associate of applied science degree programs through the deputy commissioner for academic, research, and student affairs, citing a compelling reason for the variation from the degree requirements. The request shall be considered a level I change.
- H. In determining the number of credits in a degree program, under this policy, campuses will include every class that a student must complete to earn the credential, including (but not limited to) pre-requisite classes, classes that must be completed to apply for admission to a program and general education coursework. If remedial or developmental courses are appropriately required for an associate of applied science or certificate credential, they must be included in the credit total. Otherwise, they are excluded from the credit calculation.

History:

Action of the Board of Regents to adopt Two-Year Committee recommendations, July 11, 1997; Item 104-105-R0799 amended by action of the Board of Regents July 8, 1998; policy approved September 24, 1999. Revised May 20, 2005 (Item 127-103-R0505), clarified requirements for AAS and created new degree, format change. Revised November 17, 2006 (Item 133-101-R1106), approved November 17, 2006. Revised May 16, 2024 (ITEM 212-105-R0524).