Regulation on Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Advanced Placement Exam Scores

I. Purpose. The following regulation ("this regulation") is designed to provide system-wide consistency and clarity regarding implementation of the Policy on Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Advanced Placement Exam Scores ("the policy"), Section 700.10.1 of the UNC Policy Manual.

Among the goals of the policy and this regulation are to enable improvements to student progression and completion according to student readiness, while avoiding any awarding credit for material that a student has not mastered or placing a student into a course for which she or he is not prepared.

Faculty at the level of individual academic departments should be engaged in institutional decisions for the implementation of the policy and this regulation, to ensure that decisions are informed by the standards of applicable disciplines. Another benefit of faculty involvement in the implementation of the policy and this regulation will be to ensure that implementation is in alignment with accrediting standards of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and of accrediting bodies for specific disciplines and professions.

II. Definitions. The following operational definitions apply to the policy and this regulation:

A. "Academic Outcomes." Results of a student’s performance in the course aligned with the subject content of the Advanced Placement (AP) exam in question or in the Subsequent Course.

B. "Appropriate Credit." A determined number of credit hours granted for a particular course or courses, aligned with the subject content of the AP score in question.

   1. After achieving a Qualified AP Score, therefore, a student shall be awarded specified credit hours for completing an institution’s introductory course(s) that is/are aligned with the subject content of the relevant AP exam.

   2. In general, equivalents for Appropriate Credit for particular introductory course(s) in a constituent institution’s course catalog (and other sources of information for students and potential students) shall be listed for AP scores of three and above. The particular course(s) shall be listed as equivalent to a particular number of credit hours. These particular course(s) and credit hours shall contribute to a student’s progress toward an undergraduate degree.

C. "Compelling Reasons." Rationales of sufficient evidentiary quality, based on Academic Outcomes, as to why scores higher than three might be required of an institution’s students (if those students are to receive Appropriate Credit), submitted in support of an institution’s petition for an exception to the policy; or rationales of sufficient evidentiary quality as to why a constituent institution might discontinue awarding Appropriate Credit on the basis of scores for an AP exam.
D. “Qualified AP Score.” A score of three or higher on an AP exam, unless a constituent institution has been granted an exception whereby the institution may require a score higher than three.

E. “Quantitative Study.” A rigorous analysis based on reliable, numerical data regarding Academic Outcomes.

F. “Subsequent Course.” A course in which a student would be unable to enroll without first obtaining credit in a prerequisite course.

III. Affected Students. The requirements of this policy and regulation shall affect first-time (or “freshman”) undergraduate students entering constituent institutions for the fall semester of the 2019-20 academic year and thereafter. Other undergraduate students may benefit from the requirements of the policy and this regulation by electing into all standards documented in an institution’s catalog for the 2019-20 academic year or thereafter.

IV. Awarding Appropriate Credit. UNC System constituent institutions shall award Appropriate Credit to undergraduates who have earned a score of three or higher on one or more AP exams. An institution with Compelling Reasons as to why a score higher than three must be required for a student to receive Appropriate Credit may petition to have an exception approved by its board of trustees. Compelling Reasons must be based on analyses of Academic Outcomes.

Constituent institutions are not required to modify existing AP standards that apply to AP scores lower than three. Constituent institutions are not required to offer Appropriate Credit for every available AP subject test.

A. An institution may offer Appropriate Credit that varies by different scores for the same AP exam. That is, an institution may offer a specified number of credit hours for an introductory course for students who earn an AP exam score of three, or may offer credit hours for different introductory courses for Qualified AP Scores higher than three.

B. Constituent institutions are not prohibited from awarding Appropriate Credit (on the basis of Qualified AP Scores) for elective courses and credits toward General Education requirements or the introductory requirements of a potential major.

V. Policy Exceptions

A. Evidence in support of an institution’s Compelling Reasons for an exception to the policy shall be supported by the most recently available and practicable data on Academic Outcomes of that constituent institution’s own students, from the undergraduate discipline most analogous or relevant to the content area of the AP exam in question, except as outlined below.

B. In general, evidence for a Compelling Reason may address whether or not students who earn a Qualified AP Score are prepared to succeed in the Subsequent Course within the relevant discipline. Constituent institutions may demonstrate that students who earned a Qualified AP Score would perform significantly better, according to one or more Academic Outcomes, if those students were required to take the equivalent course for the AP exam at the constituent
institution, versus if those students were given credit for said course solely on the basis of the Qualified AP Score.

To generate this sort of evidence, institutions should endeavor to compare the Academic Outcomes of their enrolled students through Quantitative Study at a conventional level of statistical significance.

Evidence in support of an institution’s Compelling Reasons for an exception to the policy may be supported by data on the Academic Outcomes of another institution’s (or other institutions’) students if:

1. Data on Academic Outcomes available are as recent as possible and practicable, from the undergraduate discipline most analogous or relevant to the content area of the AP exam in question; and

2. The other institution(s) for comparison is/are limited to those peer institutions approved by the Board of Governors.

C. The above examples of Compelling Reasons that constituent institutions may submit when petitioning for an exception to the policy are not comprehensive and do not preclude a constituent institution from submitting other, equally Compelling Reasons (in the form of Quantitative Studies) as to why an exception should be granted.

VI. Student Choice Regarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of AP Exam Scores. Although an institution is required by the policy to offer credit based on a Qualified AP Score, a student may decline to accept the offered credit, audit the introductory course aligned with the AP test in question, or enroll in the introductory course aligned with the AP test in question, depending on institutional practice.

A. Whenever possible, institutional academic advisors should inform eligible undergraduates of the above-described options available to them under the policy and this regulation, along with the potential benefits and disadvantages of those options.

B. Institutions may choose to complement advice from academic advisors with a standardized communication to incoming students regarding AP standards and the potential benefits and disadvantages of the above-mentioned options.

VII. Prohibition Against Additional Requirements for Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Scores for an AP Exam. A constituent institution shall not require a student to fulfill additional requirements in order to receive credit on the basis of Qualified AP Scores. A placement test or other assessment may be required, however, to determine Subsequent Courses for which a student is prepared.

VIII. Prohibition Against Discontinuance of Awarding Undergraduate Credit on the Basis of Scores for an AP Exam. Any institutional policy or practice of awarding credit on the basis of scores for any AP exam in place prior to the implementation of the policy (during the 2018-19 academic year) shall not be discontinued thereafter without approval of the institution’s board of trustees.
IX. Documenting and Communicating Institutional AP Standards to Undergraduate Students and Potential Undergraduate Students. Institutional AP standards, devised to comply with this policy and regulation, shall be documented and updated annually in institutional course catalogs, undergraduate student handbooks, and online resources for undergraduate students. Institutional AP standards shall likewise be documented and updated annually in online and printed resources for potential undergraduate students.

X. Reporting Requirements. Initial reports regarding exceptions to the policy or discontinuances of awarding Appropriate Credit on the basis of Qualified AP Scores, granted by institutional boards of trustees, shall be reported to the president by July 1, 2019. Subsequent reports of exceptions, discontinuances, or other alterations relative to this policy shall be reported to the president annually by July 1. Reports to the president shall include full documentation of Compelling Reasons considered by boards of trustees.

XI. Assessment of the Policy and this Regulation’s Effectiveness. The effects of the policy and this regulation, at the level of the UNC System and across its constituent institutions, shall be assessed by the UNC System Office every three years. Recommendations for altering the policy and this regulation shall be made accordingly to the president (for this regulation) or Board of Governors (for the policy), on the basis of appropriate evidence.

XII. Other Matters

A. Effective Date. The requirements of the policy and this regulation shall be effective as of the fall semester of the 2019-20 academic year and thereafter.

B. Relation to Federal and State Laws. The foregoing regulation as adopted by the president is meant to supplement, and does not purport to supplant or modify, those statutory enactments, regulations, and policies which may govern or related to the subject matter of this regulation.