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Higher Learning Commission Launches Guidelines and Review Process for Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degrees

CHICAGO - The Higher Learning Commission today released [guidelines](#) and an application process that can pave the way for colleges and universities accredited by HLC to offer reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs.

The new guidelines for institutions interested in offering reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs, or what are sometimes known as three-year bachelor's degrees, provide a blueprint for establishing high-quality degree programs that will serve students' needs and meet HLC accreditation standards.

"HLC recognizes the desire among our institutions to meet students' needs with more flexible degree options," said HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley.

"Our aim at HLC is to ensure that reduced-credit degrees will have as much rigor and quality as traditional degrees," she added. "We are confident that the new guidelines will help institutions in achieving their goals."

HLC has typically required a minimum program length of 120 credit hours for bachelor's degree programs, with institutions asked to explain and justify any variations.

The guidelines are paired with a new [application](#) for institutions to seek HLC approval of reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs. HLC will then review the proposals as part of its normal [substantive change process](#) in order to ensure the degrees are in compliance with HLC's [Criteria for Accreditation](#).

The review process, on average, is expected to take approximately eight months. Factors that HLC will consider in determining whether to approve new programs include:

- Rigor and quality of the program.

- Resources being put in place that support student success.
- Evidence that the program will further an institution’s mission and serve its student populations.
- Evidence that the institution evaluated the implications of the reduced-credit degree format (with regards to matters such as transfer, licensure, employment, etc.) and has strategies to mitigate against any possible limitations.
- Plans for communicating with prospective and current students to ensure transparency as to all aspects of the program.
- Plans for reviewing and assessing student learning outcomes.

“This is a new initiative that we believe can move higher education forward in meeting today’s needs of both students and our institutions,” said Gellman-Danley. “We look forward to working with our member colleges and universities as they develop these new learning options for students,” she said.

About the Higher Learning Commission

The Higher Learning Commission accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States. HLC is a private, nonprofit accrediting agency. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.