

Dual Degrees Policy

Definition

A dual degree program is defined as a program of study offered collaboratively by two institutions that leads to the award of a separate degree from each of the participating institutions. This policy does not apply to programs of study in which two entities (e.g., schools, colleges, departments) within one institution offer two distinct degrees that share some course requirements (e.g., an MBA from a business school and an MSW from a school of social work).

Application of Substantive Change Policy

Please refer to the [Substantive Change Manual](#) for specific guidance on substantive change procedures that apply to dual degree programs. Institutions should consult with the WSCUC Substantive Change staff and their WSCUC liaison with questions regarding proposed dual degree programs.

Application of Standards and Policies to Dual Degree Programs

Institutions are expected to design and operate dual degree offerings in conformity with the Standards of Accreditation (the Standards) and relevant policies. In particular, institutions must ensure the integrity of operations and quality of programs and courses leading to degrees that they award. Institutions are encouraged to review Commission expectations regarding academic programs and degree requirements by consulting Standard 2 in the 2023 Handbook of Accreditation. CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.7 provide guidance on content, structure, nomenclature, and expectations for student achievement for baccalaureate and graduate degree programs.

While the Standards of Accreditation (the Standards) and the Criteria for Review (CFRs) as a whole provide a framework for institutional self-evaluation, the following aspects of such programs are of special importance. Institutions offering dual degrees are expected to have clear written plans to offer, monitor and assess these programs and to enter into clear written agreements with partnering institutions, which address, as appropriate, the matters below. Citations to relevant Criteria for Review in the Standards and to WSCUC policies are provided.

1. The program is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives (CFR 1.1).
2. The degree awarded represents a coherent course of study that is in keeping with the quality of other degree programs offered by the WSCUC-accredited institution (Standard 2 and CFRs 2.1, 2.2).
3. Sound practices are employed for the award of credit (CFR 2.1, the [Credit Hour Policy](#), and [Transfer of Credit Policy](#)).
4. The program is approved by the faculty, administration, and board of the institution in keeping with its usual decision-making processes (CFRs 2.6, 3.7- 3.9).

5. The program is designed and operated in keeping with all relevant Standards and policies. In particular, the institution takes responsibility for the following aspects of the program:
- a. Truthful representations about the program (CFR 1.3; also see public disclosure requirements below)
 - b. Offerings that allow students to complete the program in a timely fashion (CFR 2.10)
 - c. Appropriate practices in the recruitment of students (CFR 1.3 and relevant federal policies)
 - d. Sound business operations and record keeping (CFR 1.4)
 - e. Appropriate program level, content, and standards (CFRs 2.1, 2.2)
 - f. Adoption of student learning outcomes, expectations for student achievement, and means to assess student achievement (CFRs 2.3, 2.7, 2.9, 4.6)
 - g. Application of institutional quality assurance processes, including program review (CFRs 2.4, 4.1)
 - h. Appropriate analysis of student needs, satisfaction, and success (CFRs 2.11-2.14)
 - i. Advising and other services to support student success (CFRs 2.12-2.14)
 - j. Admission of students in keeping with the program level (CFRs 2.1, 2.12)
 - k. Sufficient and qualified faculty and staff (CFRs 2.5, 3.1)
 - l. Information resources, technology and facilities appropriate to the program (CFR 3.6)
 - m. Teach-out plans that protect the students (see separate [Teach-Out Plans and Agreements Policy](#))
 - n. Sound planning and budgeting to ensure adequate financial and other resources (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 4.8).

Status of and Relationship with Partner Institution(s)

Dual degrees may be offered by WSCUC-accredited institutions in partnership with many other kinds of institutions. These include other WSCUC-accredited institutions, other regionally accredited institutions, other educational institutions with national or specialized accreditation that is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE), or educational institutions in other countries. Dual degrees with unaccredited entities in the US are not allowed under this policy.

The dual degree program must be subject to a detailed agreement with the partnering institution(s) that fully describes all aspects of the relationship. If the partnering institution is not accredited by WSCUC but is accredited by another agency recognized by USDE or is an educational institution in another country, the agreement must assure that the WSCUC-accredited institution has sufficient authority over the program, as determined by the Substantive Change Committee process, in keeping with sound educational practices and the Standards of Accreditation.

Institutions seeking to partner with an international institution that is not accredited by a USDE-recognized accrediting agency must take steps to ensure that the partnering entity is appropriately licensed, approved or otherwise recognized by an applicable governmental or government-approved entity in the country where the coursework is being offered. Institutions should also exercise due diligence in investigating such entities to assure themselves of the quality of their offerings and the integrity of their operations.

A WSCUC-accredited institution seeking to partner with another institution to offer a degree program with shared coursework in the same discipline should also see the [Joint Degrees Policy](#).

Residency Requirements and Awarding of Credit for Dual Degree Programs

In dual degree programs, the Commission expects that a substantial proportion of the credit towards the degree awarded by the WSCUC-accredited institution is earned in courses offered by the WSCUC-accredited institution and taught by its faculty.

WSCUC does not approve awarding dual degrees for substantially the same body of work. WSCUC-accredited institutions may not offer a dual degree program with a partnering institution for which the student is awarded two degrees of the same name for completion of what would normally be the course of study for one degree (e.g., an MBA from one institution and a second MBA from another institution for the same set of 30 to 36 semester units that would normally lead to a single MBA). Partnering institutions may, however, offer two degrees with the same name provided that the degree program complies with the provisions of this policy and the Standards, that the degree program is sufficiently extensive and unique in design, and that it exceeds the amount of academic work typically required for a single degree.

A WSCUC-accredited institution seeking to partner with another institution to offer a degree program with shared coursework in the same discipline should also see the Joint Degrees Policy. A joint degree program is defined as a program offered collaboratively by two or more accredited institutions that leads to the award of a single degree issued jointly by participating institutions.

In dual degrees, no more than 25 percent of the credits being offered at the upper-division level of undergraduate degrees or at the graduate level may be double-counted or overlap. Institutions offering dual degrees must have clearly articulated policies and standards on the transfer of credits for dual degrees with the maximum being no more than the credit hours cited in this policy. Institutions in consortia agreements are exempt from the overlap limits outlined in this policy.

Public Disclosure Requirements

Institutions offering dual degree programs must take steps to ensure that students and the public fully understand the accredited status of the institutions offering the dual degrees, and that the award of two degrees by the partnering institutions does not represent two completely distinct courses of study (e.g., there may be some sharing of coursework between the two degrees).

Required Disclaimer

When the partnering institution is not accredited by WSCUC, the institution must make clear in all written communications with students and the public that its accreditation by WSCUC does not extend to the partner institution. The following disclaimers must be used:

“[Name of member institution] is accredited by WASC Senior College and University Commission of the United States of America. [Name of partnering entity or institution] is [accredited or approved] by [the name of the agency].”

Required Notation on Student Records for Dual Degrees

Institutions offering dual degrees must take special care not to mislead students and the public about the meaning and content of the dual degree. Therefore, language must be used on permanent student records, including transcripts and diplomas, to indicate that the program in which the student was enrolled is a dual degree program. In keeping with good practice, student transcripts should indicate which courses were completed at the partnering institution.

A Note on Dual Enrollment in Courses

High schools may have formal arrangements with local colleges and universities as part of the high school curriculum. In these cases, colleges and universities should be aware of potential problem issues with dual enrollment programs, including inadequate maintenance of academic rigor; inadequate instructor qualifications; failure to provide an authentic college experience; and uncertainty of course transferability*. WSCUC standards and policies that pertain to dual degree programs address these potential issues for dual enrollment high school courses and programs and are outlined above regarding relevant Criteria for Review in the Standards and relevant WSCUC policies.

*Higher Learning Commission. (February 25, 2013). Dual credit in U.S. higher education. A study of state policy and quality assurance practices. Accessed from:

https://download.hlcommission.org/DualCreditinUSHigherEd_2013_INF.pdf

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