

Meeting of the
OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
March 4, 2021

AGENDA ITEM #23-f:

Policy.

SUBJECT: Approval of institutions to exercise flexibility in applying Academic Affairs policies due to impacts of COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the State Regents approve the COVID-19 Policy Guidance Document to provide flexibility in Academic Affairs policy as described below.

BACKGROUND:

The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education was established in Article XIII-A of the Oklahoma Constitution by a vote of the people on March 11, 1941. The Oklahoma State Regents were established in this article as the coordinating board of control for the State System. Among other significant duties, the citizens of Oklahoma vested the State Regents with the responsibility to “prescribe standards of higher education applicable to each institution,” “determine the functions and courses of study in each of the institutions to conform to the standards prescribed,” and to “grant degrees and other forms of academic recognition for completion of the prescribed courses in all of such institutions.” In order to discharge these duties, the State Regents have established Academic Affairs policies, which are set forth in Chapter 3 of the State Regents’ Policy and Procedures Manual. Chapter 3 consists of 25 sections covering all academic areas within the State System coordinated by the State Regents.

POLICY ISSUES:

This action would provide a policy guidance document to allow institutions to exercise flexibility in applying State Regents’ Academic Affairs policies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANALYSIS:

On March 24, 2020, the governor issued Fourth Amended Executive Order 2020-07, which declared a public health emergency due to COVID-19 in all of Oklahoma’s 77 counties. The growing threat to public health forced State System institutions to make rapid decisions regarding completion of the Spring 2020 semester. Institutions did a commendable job of putting the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff first while maintaining the academic integrity and rigor expected by the public, accreditors, and the State Regents.

As COVID-19 required radical actions to end in-person instructional activities in March 2020, it quickly became apparent that flexibility in application of State Regents’ Academic Affairs policies would be necessary to complete the spring 2020 semester and to prepare for the 2020 summer and fall semesters. Standard operations which supported policy applications were severely disrupted. Both ACT and SAT canceled spring and summer national exam dates, leaving many students with no way to take one of the college admission exams required under by the State Regents’ Institutional Admission and Retention policy

in order to be admitted to a State System institution. Similarly, State System institutions were left without ACT or SAT subject test scores for many students, which the State Regents' Student Assessment and Remediation policy requires to make initial course placement determinations for first-time students. As State System institutions migrated to exclusively online courses to finish the spring 2020 term, flexibility was required in application of the State Regents' Distance Education and Traditional Off-Campus Courses and Programs policy, which requires prior approval for academic programs to be offered online. These examples represent only a few of the areas where flexibility was needed in order for State System institutions to continue to meet the needs of students.

In order to expeditiously meet the needs of State System institutions and students, and after consultation with the State Regents' Chairman and Chancellor, State Regents staff issued a guidance document on March 30, 2020 detailing Academic Affairs policy flexibility for State System institutions. This document, which was revised on April 8, 2020 and May 7, 2020, offered guidance on policy and programs in the following areas:

- Grading
- Oklahoma's Promise
- Concurrent Enrollment
- Title IV Financial Assistance
- Veterans/G.I. Bill © Benefits
- Admission and Assessment & Placement
- Electronic Delivery Approval
- Nursing
- Teacher Education
- English Proficiency Testing
- Online Biology Labs

In the areas of Grading, Concurrent Enrollment, Admission, Assessment and Placement, Electronic Delivery Approval, and English Proficiency Testing, State System institutions were allowed flexibility in application of State Regents' Academic Affairs policy and were advised that this flexibility was not to constitute a broad circumvention of policy. Any flexibility exercised must be consistent with the spirit of the policy, and required monthly reports detailing how flexibility is being applied and the number of students impacted.

Oklahoma COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have increased dramatically since the emergency declaration in March 2020. In preparation for continued disruption to normal operations of State System institutions, it is prudent to extend this policy flexibility and reporting to ensure State System institutions continue to serve students effectively so they are not impeded on their path to degree completion.

At their September 3, 2020 meeting, the State Regents approved the use of flexibility in application of Academic Affairs policies for the duration of the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on this evolving pandemic, it is recommended that the State Regents approve continued application of policy flexibility and the revision of the guidance document for State System institutions for the duration of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Attachment.

COVID-19 Guidance for Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Academic Affairs Policy (Chapter 3)

APPROVED BY THE OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ON
FEBRUARY 25, 2021

State Regents Academic Affairs policies specified in Chapter 3 of the Oklahoma State Regents *Policy and Procedures Manual* remain in effect. However, as institutions respond to the needs of students during this crisis, some modifications to limit negative impacts on students may be necessary.

Effective March 15, 2020 with the Governor's emergency declaration for all 77 counties, and until further notice, higher education institutions in the State System are empowered to comply with the spirit of the Academic Affairs policy manual and Procedures Handbook while allowing appropriate flexibility to ensure mitigation of any negative impacts to students and their academic progression due to the COVID-19 crisis. Any action taken by a State System institution that is not in strict compliance with policy and deviates from the specific guidance provided must 1) be consistent with the spirit of the policy, 2) must not be a blatant circumvention of policy, and 3) must be reported to the State Regents monthly until return to regular operations as determined by the Chancellor. State Regents staff will provide a template for such reporting and will assist with questions regarding reporting. This guidance may be updated and modified in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Due to the COVID-19 issues impacting all students and higher education institutions in Oklahoma, some broad policy issues are addressed through the following guidance:

GRADING

Since grading will have implications for progression/graduation, major degree requirements, scholarships, graduate admission, etc., please consider the following:

1. ***Encourage faculty to assign letter grades as planned for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years.***
2. For a specified period of time following the posting of grades, provide students the option to elect to change a letter grade for course in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years to S/U or P/NP. The window of time for students to make this election may be determined at the discretion of the institution.
3. Discourage W or WF grade assignments as much as possible. If necessary, a policy exception will be made by the State Regents for the semester deadlines during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years for the assignment of the automatic W in response to this unique circumstance.

Please note the following:

- Institutions must provide clear information and instructions to all students regarding all grading issues.
- By policy, P/F grading is only allowed as an option for students in specified courses where the student understood this as the grading option prior to enrollment, its use is discouraged.
- Grades of "S"- "U"/ "P"- "NP", "W", and "AW" are GPA neutral, but count in hours attempted for retention and earned hours for graduation.

- Institutions may want to draft a document that explains the ramifications of the GPA-neutral grades and require a signature from the student if such documentation is not a standard requirement for a grade change.
- A letter grade of “F” is calculated into the GPA.
- The grade “I” is at the instructor’s discretion, but cannot substitute for the “F” grade. The time limit to satisfy the incomplete requirements from the assigned “I” grade is at the discretion of the institution.
- Institutions will need to specify if an assigned grade of “F” will be considered eligible for change to a “U” or “NP” once assigned.
- Some institutions are submitting A-C grades and providing an automatic P/NP or S/U for grades of “D” and “F” without election by the student. If done, clear information and guidance needs to be provided to the student regarding the implications of a GPA neutral grade and provide them an opportunity to object, even if unlikely.

CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

To mitigate negative impacts on concurrent enrollment students, the following guidance is provided:

1. Institutions are expected to reach out to concurrent enrollment students to ensure that they have access to adequate technology to complete their coursework, and if not, direct them to appropriate resources for connectivity or ways to complete instruction for the course(s).
2. For concurrent admission and enrollment during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years, institutions may use emails and/or other electronic methods from parents and counselors/principals in lieu of original signatures on permission forms.
3. For academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 concurrent enrollment, institutions may use alternative methods for admission and course placement in lieu of a currently prescribed curricular and performance standards if the student does not have and/or cannot access standard assessments and/or records.
4. All alternative admission and placement methods must be reported to the State Regents monthly in the template provided.

ADMISSION AND ASSESSMENT & PLACEMENT

For the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years, the following guidance is provided:

ADMISSION

For entering undergraduate students (either concurrent high school students or high school completers) unable to provide academic records for curricular or performance requirements, the institution may:

1. Admit the student as degree-seeking (including “Undecided”) without academic records/transcripts demonstrating the student meets curricular and performance requirements. Students admitted under this exception must be reported monthly to the State Regents on the report template provided.

2. Admit the student as a “Special Non-Degree Seeking” student, with the limit of nine (9) credit hours of enrollment in this special admissions category.
3. Exceed the nine (9) credit hour enrollment limit without academic records meeting curricular and performance requirements for admission under the “Special Non-Degree Seeking” category. Exception requests must be reported monthly to the State Regents on the report template provided.

ASSESSMENT & PLACEMENT

For admitted undergraduate students (both concurrent and high school completers) unable to provide academic records for curricular or performance requirements, the institution may make informed judgements for all information available to:

1. Enroll the student in the college-level course as part of a corequisite model with flexibility for faculty to modify the required support for students who are doing well in the college course, as demonstrated via course assessments and other relevant assignments.
2. Enroll the student in college-level coursework but shall require the student to be assessed not later than the end of the first semester of enrollment to determine subsequent enrollment options.
3. Any secondary course placement assessments must be controlled with some form of proctoring.
4. All students enrolled without standard assessment measures will be reported to the State Regents on the report template provided.

ELECTRONIC DELIVERY APPROVAL

To address issues from the COVID-19 crisis, institutions have migrated all instruction to electronic and/or alternative and remote delivery modalities. To facilitate this need in our State System, the following guidance is provided:

1. For the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic year, institutions are not required to seek electronic delivery approval for any program not already approved for this method of delivery.
2. Institutions will be required to report on electronic, alternative, and remote delivery modalities that have not been approved through traditional processes when operations return to normal. A report template will be provided.
3. Institutions are encouraged to develop electronic, alternative, and remote delivery modalities for lab instruction.

TEACHER EDUCATION

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (OEQA), the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) and the State Department of Education (OSDE) are working together to address issues impacting coursework and certification requirements as a result of COVID-19. Some of those provisions, resources and guidance for teacher education programs follow:

IN ADDITION TO THE GUIDANCE BELOW, PLEASE REFER TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCY WEBSITES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

- <https://www.ok.gov/oeqa/>

- <https://www.okhighered.org/>
- <https://sde.ok.gov/>

ADMISSION TO TEACHER EDUCATION

1. Students should be admitted under the regular admission policy options available.
2. In the event an admission exception needs to be made for a student who does not meet the minimum admission criteria, it is at the discretion of the EPP/IHE to determine the criteria under which the student can be admitted conditionally.

STUDENT TEACHING

With P-12 school closures, and with the expectation that the impacted clinical experiences remain as close as possible to the minimum requirements set by the state for initial and advanced certification fields, Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) can engage in augmented instruction that includes the following options:

1. Arrange temporary placements in other appropriate settings;
2. Provide virtual and online learning opportunities; and/or
3. Implement alternative assignments and instruction.

EPPs will submit their plan for meeting the field experience and student teaching internship requirements to OEQA for approval. (The OEQA office may be contacted to access the Clinical Experience Form.) Any modifications to regular field experiences and student teaching internship requirements for graduation that are approved by OEQA and the EPP/IHE, meets OSRHE approval for this specific coursework requirement.

CERTIFICATION TESTING

Students who are preparing for certification testing or performance assessments:

- Accommodations are available for students whose testing centers have been closed for cleaning due to COVID-19. If necessary, these students can be re-assigned to other testing centers that are available.
- Students who are conducting their student teaching virtually will be able to conduct the PPAT Task 4 assessment virtually.
- Candidates not taking the PPAT, have the option of requesting a test fee voucher for the Oklahoma Professional Teaching Examination (OPTE). Qualified candidates must be verified by their EPPs and numbers and names of recipients provided to OEQA.
- If students are unable to complete certification exams due to testing center closures, but have completed all other requirements for certification, the EPP can recommend them for a one-year, non-renewable certificate from the State Department of Education. This will allow

candidates a year to complete the certification examination requirements.

FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Distance/virtual learning activities with P-12 students and faculty can be used by EPP faculty to meet the 10-hour requirement whenever possible. When this is not an option, EPPs must document this in the 2020 Annual State Report that goes to OEQA and the OSRHE.

ALL OTHER REQUIREMENTS

The State Regents' response to institutions will be ongoing and fluid with events surrounding COVID-19 and we will work with OEQA and SDE to address issues pertaining to teacher preparation.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTING

The following guidance is provided for English Proficiency Requirements for admission for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years.

1. Institutions are allowed to explore online and at-home testing opportunities for currently approved English proficiency assessments.
2. If currently approved tests are unavailable to an institution's target student(s), institutions may utilize Duolingo and PTE Academic assessments.
3. Institutions using alternative assessments must document and report such use to the State Regents monthly on the reporting template provided.
4. Institutions using this alternative assessment will be required to provide data on academic and student success in the year subsequent to admission.
5. More information on ETS Testing is available at: <https://www.ets.org/s/cv/important-update/>

Students are still required to meet the minimum score set by the State Regents. For institutions accepting the Duolingo and/or PTE Academic assessment to determine English proficiency, the following concordance tables are provided.

Undergraduate students must meet the following minimum scores:	
Assessment	Minimum Score
TOEFL ibt	61
IELTS	5.5
PTE Academic	42
Duolingo	85

For undergraduate students OU requires a minimum score of 79 on the ibt TOEFL, a 6.5 on the IELTS, a 58 on the PTE Academic, and a 100 on the Duolingo.

Graduate students must meet the following minimum scores:	
Assessment	Minimum Score
TOEFL ibt	79
IELTS	6.5
PTE Academic	58
Duolingo	100

Students not meeting the above required scores may be eligible for 12 weeks of study at an approved Intensive English Program by meeting the following scores:

Undergraduate students must meet the following minimum scores:	
Assessment	Minimum Score
TOEFL ibt	48
IELTS	5.0
PTE Academic	36
Duolingo	75

Graduate students must meet the following minimum scores:	
Assessment	Minimum Score
TOEFL ibt	61

IELTS	5.5
PTE Academic	42
Duolingo	85

ONLINE BIOLOGY LABS

To mitigate negative impacts on students completing Biology courses, the following guidance is provided:

The “Course Equivalency Project” (CEP) is a faculty-driven process by which State System institutions establish statewide course equivalencies among institutions. “Course Equivalency Project Matrix” is the listing of courses determined to be equivalent through the CEP process. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, several **Biology** courses (noted below) on the CEP required at least 75% of the lab component to be face-to-face instruction (CEP notation indicates this requirement was added to CEP Biology listings in 09/2011). The CEP process requires courses to identify student learning outcomes (SLOs) developed by discipline faculty groups for each course listed on the CEP. For any course to be listed on the CEP for guaranteed transfer, 100 percent of the SLO’s must be included within the course. Course credit and transfer does not depend on the modality of the course but rather the SLO’s. All State System institutions are approved by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for distance education. Consistent with this approval, and guidance provided by HLC and developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), institutions have demonstrated that “curricula for the institution’s on-line learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.”

As policy guidance for transfer and articulation, all Biology courses with labs listed on the CEP and that appear on student transcripts completed in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic year will be accepted for transfer and application to degree requirements, regardless of the modality of instruction for the lab portion of the course. CEP Biology faculty and the Council on Instruction will provide a review and final determination as soon as possible to create a permanent change.

BIOLOGY COURSES THAT PREVIOUSLY REQUIRED FACE-TO-FACE LAB INSTRUCTION:

- BI 102 General Biology (Majors)
- BI 103 General Biology I (Majors)
- BI 104 General Biology II (Majors)
- BI 201 General Botany
- BI 205 Plant Anatomy
- BI 301 Microbiology
- BI 401 Comp Vertebrate Anatomy

- BI 406 Human Anatomy
- BI 425 Human Anatomy and Physiology
- BI 465 Human Physiology
- BI 701 General Zoology
- BI 714 Invertebrate Zoology
- BI 724 General Entomology
- BI 905 Introduction to Cell Biology