



COOPERATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

## College Credit Committee Plan

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Best Practice Guidelines in Accepting Graduate Credits  
for Movement on an Employee Salary Schedule

**Updated 03/07/18**

**Originally Approved June 2010**

School districts must ensure that the granting of graduate college credit hours for advancement on a district's salary schedule reflects actual benefits for students and advance a district's mission and goals for learning. Over time, advancement on a salary schedule reflects a substantial investment by school districts. As a result, school districts are obligated to review accreditation and best practices in accepting graduate credits on the salary schedule.



## Report Preview

The basics of the College Credit Committee plan are as follows:

1. Accept all graduate degree credits from a college that has accreditation recognized by the federal government or DESE and are part of a graduate degree program.
2. Offer an approved list of colleges/universities that offer graduate degree programs.
3. For advancement on the teacher salary schedule, graduate hours must be taken from a university on the CSDGKC approved list. When **NOT** enrolled in an approved degree program, only courses **REQUIRED** for a graduate degree program, in an educational related field, may be counted toward advancement on the salary schedule. Local school districts may work with Universities to develop specific courses to meet local needs. Those courses may result in movement on the salary schedule contingent upon local school district approval.
4. Develop a standing committee to meet as necessary (twice a year) to review the approved college/university list. This committee will also work with area colleges/universities providing information about the approval rubric.

# College Credit Committee Report

School districts must ensure that the granting of graduate college credit hours for advancement on a district's salary schedule reflects actual benefits for students and advance a district's mission and goals for learning. Over time, advancement on a salary schedule reflects a substantial investment by school districts. As a result, school districts are obligated to review accreditation and best practices in accepting graduate credits on the salary schedule.

## Accreditation Agencies

### The Agencies That Recognize Accrediting Agencies

There are six geographic regions in the United States with an agency that accredits college and university higher education programs. Each of the six regional accrediting associations is responsible for schools in one region of the United States and its territories. Each one has the authority to accredit an entire college or university. There are also about 80 professional associations, each with authority to accredit either specialized schools or specific departments or programs within a school.

### Accrediting agencies recognized by the Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City (CSDGKC)

#### Department of Education

Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation  
Bureau of Postsecondary Education  
Washington, DC 20202  
Phone: (202) 245-9875

#### Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

P.O. Box 480  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
Phone: 573-751-4212  
Fax: 573-751-8613

#### CHEA, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation

One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20036-1135  
Phone: 202-955-6126 Fax: 202-955-612  
E-mail: [chea@chea.org](mailto:chea@chea.org)  
Website: [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)

### **GAAP, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles**

(The acronym is borrowed from the field of accounting. GAAP standards are the highest to which accountants can be held, and we feel that accreditation should be viewed as an equally serious matter.) In the U.S., there is near-unanimous agreement on GAAP (although not everyone calls it this, the concept is the same) by the relevant key decision-makers: university registrars and admissions officers, corporate human resources officers, and government agencies.

To offer recognized accreditation under GAAP, an accrediting agency must meet at least one of the following four criteria:

- Recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation in Washington, DC
- Recognized by the U.S. Department of Education
- Recognized by (or more commonly, a part of) their relevant national education agency
- Schools they accredit are routinely listed in one or more of the following publications: the International Handbook of Universities (a UNESCO publication); the Commonwealth Universities Yearbook; the World Education Series, published by PIER; or the Countries Series, published by NOOSR in Australia.

To learn more about Fake accrediting agencies go to the following website:

[http://www.degree.net/accreditation/fake-accrediting-agencies\\_199911302319.html](http://www.degree.net/accreditation/fake-accrediting-agencies_199911302319.html)

## **Accrediting Agencies Recognized Under GAAP**

### **Regional Accrediting Agencies**

#### **Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools**

Commission on Higher Education  
3624 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Phone: (215) 662-5606 Fax: (215) 662-5950

[www.css-msa.org](http://www.css-msa.org)

Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland,  
New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania,  
Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

#### **New England Association of Schools and Colleges**

209 Burlington Road  
Bedford, MA 01730  
Phone: (617) 271-0022 Fax: (617) 271-0950

[www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org)

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New  
Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont,  
Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky,  
Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina,  
South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

#### **Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

Box 9990, Mills College  
Oakland, CA 94613  
Phone: (510) 632-5000 Fax: (510) 632-8361  
California, Hawaii, Guam, Trust Territory of  
the Pacific

#### **Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training**

1772 N. Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: 202) 955-1113

[www.accet.org](http://www.accet.org)

#### **Distance Education and Training Council**

1601 18<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Phone: (202) 234-5100 Fax: (202) 332-1386

[www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org)

#### **American Academy for Liberal Education**

1015 18<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 204  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 452-8611 Fax: (202) 452-8620

#### **Education**

#### **National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education**

2010 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 466-7496 Fax: (202) 296-6620

[www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)

#### **American Library Association**

50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
Phone: (312) 944-6780 Fax (312) 280-2433

[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

(Recognized by CHEA but not by U.S.  
Department of Education)

## Other Accrediting Agencies Recognized by CSDGKC

**The Higher Learning Commission (HLC)** is an independent corporation and one of two commission members of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), which is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. The Higher Learning Commission accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region.

**Commission on Colleges (COC)** is currently comprised of the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) and the Commission on Colleges (COC). The Commission on Colleges was founded in 1912 and was organized to develop standards and a process for accrediting colleges and universities in the South.

**Distance Education and Training Council (DETC)** The Council was founded in 1926 to promote sound educational standards and ethical business practices within the correspondence field. The independent nine-member Accrediting Commission of the DETC was established in 1955; shortly thereafter it gained the approval of the [U.S. Department of Education](#) as the “nationally recognized accrediting agency” under terms of Public Law. [The Council for Higher Education Accreditation](#) (CHEA) also recognizes the Accrediting Commission. With its 80-plus years of history and its highly refined and federally recognized accreditation program, DETC offers distance learning institutions the most current, relevant and practical services for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

# Accreditation: The Whole Story

Accreditation is perhaps the most complex, confusing, and important issue in higher education. It is surely the most misunderstood and the most misused concept both intentionally and unintentionally. In reviewing a school, there are three important things to know about accreditation:

1. Why is it important in certain situations?
2. What are the many kinds of accreditors?
3. What are the controversies surrounding accreditation?

## What Is Accreditation?

Quite simply, it is a validation statement by a group of persons who are, theoretically, impartial experts in higher education, that a given school, or department within a school, has been thoroughly investigated and found worthy of approval.

Accreditation is a peculiarly American concept. In every other country in the world, all colleges and universities either are operated by the government, or gain the full right to grant degrees directly from the government, so there is no need for a separate, independent agency to say that a given school is OK.

In the United States, accreditation is an entirely voluntary process, done by private, nongovernmental agencies. As a result of this lack of central control or authority, there have evolved good accrediting agencies and bad ones, recognized ones and unrecognized ones, legitimate ones and phony ones.

So when a school says "we are accredited," that statement alone means nothing. You must always ask, "Accredited by whom?" Unfortunately, many consumer-oriented articles and bulletins simply say that one is much safer dealing only with accredited schools, but they do not attempt to unravel the complex situation. The wrong kind of accreditation can be worse than none at all.

Normally, a school wishing to be accredited will make application to the appropriate accrediting agency. After a substantial preliminary investigation to determine that the school is probably operating legally and run legitimately, it may be granted correspondent or provisional status. Typically this step will take anywhere from several months to several years or more, and when completed does not imply any kind of endorsement or recommendation, but is merely an indication that the first steps on a long path have been taken.

Next, teams from the accrediting agency, often composed of faculty of already accredited institutions, will visit the school. These "visitations," conducted at regular intervals throughout the year, are to observe the school in action, and to study the copious amounts of information that the school must prepare, relating to its legal and academic structure, educational philosophy, curriculum, financial status, planning, and so forth.

After these investigations and, normally, following at least two years of successful operation (sometimes a great deal more), the school may be advanced to the status of “candidate for accreditation.” Being a candidate means, in effect, “Yes, you are probably worthy of accreditation, but we want to watch your operation for a while longer.”

This “while” can range from a year or two to six years or more. The great majority of schools that reach candidacy status eventually achieve full accreditation. Some accreditors do not have a candidacy status; with them it is an all-or-nothing situation. (The terms “accredited” and “fully accredited” are used interchangeably. There is no such thing as “partly accredited.”) Once a school is accredited, it is visited by inspection teams at infrequent intervals (every five to ten years is common) to see if it is still worthy of its accreditation. The status is always subject to review at any time, should new programs be developed or should there be any significant new developments, positive or negative.

**Note:** *Everything in the foregoing section applies to accreditation as done by recognized agencies. Many of the other agencies, even those that are not illegal, will typically accredit a new school within days, even minutes, of its coming into existence.*

### **The Importance of Accreditation**

Although accreditation is undeniably important to both schools and students (and would-be students), this importance is undermined and confused by several factors:

There are no significant national standards for accreditation. What is creditable in New York may not be creditable in California, and vice versa. The demands and standards of the group that accredits schools of chemistry may be very different from the people who accredit schools of forestry, and so on. Some decent schools (or departments within schools) are not accredited, either by their own choice (since accreditation is a totally voluntary and often very expensive procedure), or because they are too new (all schools were unaccredited at one time in their lives) or too experimental (some would say too innovative) for the generally conservative accreditors. Many very bad schools claim to be accredited, but it is always by unrecognized, sometimes nonexistent accrediting associations, often of their own creation. Still, accreditation is the only widespread system of school evaluation that we have. A school’s accreditation status can be helpful to the potential student in this way: while some good schools are not accredited, it is very unlikely that any very bad or illegal school is authentically accredited. (There have been exceptions, but they are quite rare.)

In other words, authentic accreditation is a pretty good sign that a given school is legitimate. But it is important to remember that lack of accreditation need not mean that a school is either inferior or illegal. Authentic accreditation is based on performance, not proposed performance.

CSDGKC stresses the term authentic accreditation, since there are very few laws or regulations anywhere governing the establishment of an accrediting association. Anyone can start a degree mill, then turn around and open an accrediting agency next door, give his school its blessing,



and begin advertising “fully accredited degrees.” Indeed, this has happened many times. There have been quite an extraordinary number of new accrediting associations started in the last few years, and they are getting harder and harder to check out, either because they seem to exist only on the Internet, or because they exist in so many places: an address in Hawaii, another in Switzerland, a third in Germany, a fourth in Hong Kong, and so on. Some new ones have adopted the clever idea of bestowing their accreditation on some major universities, quite possibly unbeknownst to those schools. Then they can say truthfully, but misleadingly, that they accredit such well-known schools. This is the accreditation equivalent of those degree mills that send their diplomas to some famous people, and then list those people as graduates. Don’t believe everything anyone says. It seems extraordinary that any school would lie about something so easily checked as accreditation, but it is done. Degree mills have unabashedly claimed accreditation by a recognized agency. Such claims are totally untrue. They are counting on the fact that many people won’t check up on these claims.

Salespeople trying to recruit students sometimes make accreditation claims that are patently false. Quite a few schools ballyhoo their “fully accredited” status but never mention that the accrediting agency is unrecognized, and so the accreditation is of little or no value.

## **Online and Distance Learning**

People out in the world generally feel OK about distance learning if the school is accredited under GAAP. In one major study (by Sosdian & Sharp), 100% of HR and personnel officers at major companies said they not only would accept such degrees, many actually preferred them, since it showed that the person was capable of independent study and self-directed work.

There are many different academic models offered by distance learning schools. Some are highly interactive (either by phone, mail, e-mail, or even local cohort groups); others are very non-interactive. Some are highly structured; some are quite free-form. Some expect you to be on-line several hours a week; others expect to hear from you once or twice a year to take exams. Some have regularly accessible on-line or telephone mentors or faculty. For many people, a “hybrid” program, combining a great deal of distance learning with some in-person work (one evening a week, one Saturday a month, several weeks on campus during the summer). Costs also vary. Among the schools accredited under GAAP, semester units can cost less than \$10 each (in the case of the 30 units awarded by Regents for a single GRE subject exam) to more than \$300 each.

Accreditation once again is a major issue for school districts. Because the number of online courses has grown exponentially, a corresponding number of false accrediting agencies have come on the scene to support bogus learning. In order for accreditation to have any meaning, it is important that your online college’s accrediting agency be recognized by the Council on Higher Accreditation Education (CHEA) or the U.S. Department of Accreditation.

- As of January 2005, USDE publishes a database of Postsecondary Education Institutions and Programs Accredited by Accrediting Agencies and State Approval Agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. This is available at [www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation](http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation). The database lists approximately 6,900 post secondary institutions and programs, each of which is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U. S. Secretary of Education.
- The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) database lists more than 7,700 degree-granting and non-degree-granting institutions and more than 18,700 programs that are accredited by United States accrediting organizations that have been recognized by CHEA or by the United States Department of Education (USDE) or both. <http://www.chea.org/default.asp?link=4>

## **Best Practices for Accepting Graduate Credit for Movement on District Salary Schedules**

In an effort to address the issues surrounding accreditation and on-line learning, the Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City has created Best Practice Guidelines and a list of accepted schools for accepting Graduate Hours for movement on a district pay scale.

### **Best Practices to Ensure Rigor, Relevance, and Efficacy of Learning in Awarding College Credit Hours on School District Salary Schedules**

School districts must ensure that the granting of graduate college credit hours for advancement on a district's salary schedule reflects actual benefits for students and advances the district's mission and goals for learning.

Over time, advancement on a salary schedule reflects a substantial investment by a school district. As a result school districts are obligated to review best practices in granting credit hours. Those best practices include all the following:

- Accept all **required** graduate degree credits from-colleges/universities that hold accreditation recognized by the federal government or DESE and are part of a graduate degree program, in an educational related field.
- For advancement on the teacher salary schedule, graduate hours must be taken from a university on the CSDGKC approved list.
- Local school districts may work with Universities to develop specific courses to meet local needs. Those courses may result in movement on the salary schedule contingent upon local school district approval.
- Develop a standing committee to meet as necessary (twice a year) to review the approved college/university list. This committee will also work with area colleges/universities providing information about the approval rubric.

## List of Schools Approved for Degree or Certification Earning Programs

School districts will accept educational graduate degrees and **required** graduate courses taken as a part of a degree or certification program from the following colleges/universities.

|                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Arizona State University          | Northwest Missouri State University |
| Arkansas State University         | Park University                     |
| Avila University                  | Rockhurst University                |
| Baker University                  | Saint Louis University              |
| Central Methodist University      | Southwest Baptist University        |
| Columbia College                  | Truman State University             |
| Emporia State University          | University of Central Missouri      |
| Evangel University                | University of Kansas                |
| Florida Institute of Technology   | University of Missouri Columbia     |
| Fontbonne University              | University of Missouri Kansas City  |
| Graceland University              | University of Missouri St. Louis    |
| Kansas State University           | University of Nebraska Lincoln      |
| Lindenwood University             | Webster University                  |
| MidAmerica Nazarene University    | Western Governors University        |
| Missouri State University         | William Jewell College              |
| Missouri Western State University | William Woods University            |

## Recommended Requirements for College/University Courses Taken for Graduate Credit:

- ✓ Must be **required** by the granting institution for their graduate level degrees.
- ✓ Must meet “recommended” requirements in all seven-categories on the following rubric:

| Category              | Recommended  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Non-Profit            | Non-profit institutions operate independently of an owner structure and are free to focus on providing quality education to students.  |
| Accreditation         | Accreditation information provided--two (2) or more known/reputable outside organizations endorse this institution (e.g. NCATE, DESE)  |
| Learning Outcomes     | Well-articulated learning outcomes that are appropriately clear and rigorous for graduate study  |
| Materials & Resources | Provides a specific list of materials and/or resources that are appropriately rigorous for graduate study  |
| Learning Assessment   | Provides information demonstrating a variety of learning assessments appropriately rigorous for graduate study (e.g., 7 hours homework per credit)                                     |
| Contact Time          | Courses require a minimum of 12 hours of contact time per credit hour <b>OR</b> courses are competency based <b>OR</b> courses are a combination of contact time and competency based. |
| Final Exam            | Course evaluation consists of an objective test and/or a project involving research, findings, recommendations and a presentation  |

- ✓ **Best practice puts responsibility for verifying that a prospective college meets all the criteria required by the rubric on the employee, not the school district.**
- ✓ **Verification form provided upon request.**

## ***CSDGKC College Credit Committee***

| <u>Name</u>       | <u>School District</u> |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Lisa Cummings     | Belton                 |
| Leslie Evans      | Blue Springs           |
| Jason Woolf       | Blue Springs           |
| Gayden Carruth    | CSDGKC                 |
| Paul Shrout       | CSDGKC                 |
| Anissa Gustin     | Fort Osage             |
| Crystal Frederick | Grain Valley           |
| Jeff Miller       | Lee's Summit           |
| Robert Vogelaar   | Liberty                |
| Bill Redinger     | Park Hill              |
| Rob Gardner       | Platte County          |
| Lisa Hatfield     | Raymore-Peculiar       |
| Marlene DeVilbiss | Raytown                |