

North Dakota State Board of Higher Education

Academic and Student Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes

The State Board of Higher Education Academic and Student Affairs Committee met on September 4, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. CT via Teams.

SBHE Academic and Student Affairs Committee members

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|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mr. Curtis Biller, Chair | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mr. Max Eriksrud |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mr. Kevin Black | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dr. Lisa Montplaisir, faculty advisor |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mr. DJ Campbell | |

Institution Presidents/Representatives

BSC Interim President Leingang, Ms. Alicia Uhde, **DCB** Interim Dean Gorder, **DSU** President Molander, Dr. Holly Gruhlke, **LRSC** Interim President Simone, **MaSU** President Van Horn, Dr. Brian Huschle, Ms. Rhonda Nelson, **MiSU** President Shirley, Dr. Laurie Geller, **NDSCS** President Flanigan, Dr. Lisa Karch, Ms. Melissa Johnson, **NDSU** Dr. David Bertolini, Dr. Laura Oster-Aaland, **UND** Dr. Eric Link, Dr. Art Malloy, Ms. Janelle Kilgore, **VCSU** President LaFave, Mr. Larry Brooks, Mr. Mark Nelson, Dr. James Boe, Dr. Allen Burgad, **WSC** Dr. Zahi Attallah

System Office/CTS/Guests

NDUS Interim Chancellor Sanford, VC Lisa Johnson, VC David Krebsbach, VC Meredith Larson, Mr. Chris Pieske, Dr. Billie Jo Lorius, Ms. Jamie Wilke, Ms. Claire Gunwall, Mr. Eric Jensen, Ms. Bethany Kadrmaz, Ms. Sharon Schwartzbauer, Ms. Mindy Sturn, **CTS** Mr. Corey Quirk

Call to Order

1. Agenda

Black moved, Eriksrud seconded, to approve the agenda, as presented.

Approved unanimously by voice vote.

Reports/Updates/Discussions

2. Dual Credit Offerings

- a. SBHE Policy [469](#) College Credit in High School
- b. NDUS Procedure [469.1](#) Early Entry Coursework
- c. NDUS Procedure [469.2](#) Dual Credit Coursework
- d. Draft Policy 469 Options
 - i. [Option 1](#)
 - ii. [Option 2](#)

VC Johnson briefed the committee on the draft options of Policy 469 related to the offerings of dual credit. Option 1 is recommended as a policy change from the August

14, 2025, SBHE Retreat. It authorizes UND and NDSU to offer dual credit courses to students located in Grand Forks County and Cass County, respectively. Option 2 includes suggestions from institutions and the Academic Affairs Council. It authorizes UND and NDSU to offer dual credit courses if students are physically attending courses in person on campus, expands to in-person or online delivery of general education courses not currently offered by NDSCS or VCSU (Cass County) and LRSC or MaSU (Grand Fork County), and allows offering to any student statewide if the course is unique to that institution or is a legislative mandate requiring it.

President Flanigan recommended modifications to Option 2, particularly in section 2b by removing the county specific limitations and recommending allowing UND and NDSU to offer online dual credit courses to any student statewide, with the condition that another institution is not currently offering a 100-level general education course. President Flanigan emphasized that the goal is to expand access and flexibility for students, aligning with the broader intent to serve student needs effectively.

Member Eriksrud questioned whether the language in Option 2, referring to students physically attending classes on campus, actually described early entry rather than dual credit. VC Johnson clarified that dual credit guarantees both high school and college credit, unlike early entry, which does not ensure high school credit. Eriksrud agreed with the distinction and stated that it should be clearly defined in policy regardless of which option is selected. Johnson confirmed that the draft policy already includes a definition of dual credit and early entry.

Member Montplaisir expressed concerns about Option 2, particularly its reliance on MOU language within formal policy. She noted that MOUs are typically reviewed and revised annually, raising concerns about the practicality of embedding them into policy, which is more static. Montplaisir questioned whether this would require frequent policy revisions. She also indicated that Option 2 doesn't appear to offer significant changes from the current policy and questioned the clarity around online vs. in-person course delivery under the proposed edits.

Member Black emphasized that Option 1 offers greater access and flexibility for students and their families, aligning with the intent of the SBHE retreat. He expressed concern that Option 2 would impose limitations by restricting 100-level course offerings to students residing in specific counties.

Member Biller voiced support for Option 1, stating that the existing memorandum (MOU) has created roadblocks for institutions attempting to expand offerings. He cautioned that without broader access, the board may find itself revisiting the issue frequently. Biller emphasized that the core issue is student choice and that policy should support students' ability to access courses. While acknowledging potential financial implications, he stated that those can be addressed separately if they arise. His position remained focused on doing what is best for students.

Black moved, Campbell seconded, to approve Option 1, as presented.

Campbell, Black, Eriksrud, and Biller voted yes. Motion passed 4-0.

3. Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degrees

- a. SBHE Policy [409](#) Degree Offered
- b. Draft Policy [409](#) Degrees Offered
- c. HLC Resources
 - i. HLC Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree [Announcement](#)
 - ii. HLC Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree [Guidelines](#)
 - iii. HLC's [Assumed Practices](#)
 - iv. HLC's Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree [Form](#)

VC Johnson provided a recap of proposed edits to policy regarding reduced credit bachelor's degrees, a topic previously discussed at the board retreat. The edits align with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) guidance, allowing bachelor's degrees to be reduced to no less than 90 credit hours, while maintaining 36 hours of general education and upper-division coursework. The draft clarifies that reduced credit degrees may be in new or existing fields and initially require board approval, though that may change over time. Three institutions, BSC, MaSU, and VCSU have submitted degree proposals awaiting approval. Johnson also noted that accrediting agencies do not require different naming conventions for reduced-credit degrees on transcripts.

Dr. Burgad provided an overview of VCSU's proposed reduced credit Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, which would lower total credits from 120 to 106 while maintaining the required general education credits. The reduction would come from shifting some coursework to optional endorsements (e.g., EL, Special Education, Kindergarten), which students could pursue later. The goal is to allow teacher candidates to enter the field earlier, completing student teaching and becoming licensed at least a semester sooner. He also confirmed that licensing agencies in North Dakota and neighboring states focus on the type of degree (B.S. or B.A.), not the total number of credits.

Member Eriksrud asked if reduced credit bachelor's degrees might lead to future changes in licensure requirements. Dr. Burgad replied that licensure standards would remain unchanged since institutions must meet state and national accreditation criteria. Eriksrud also noted the credit reduction equals about one semester and questioned the relevance of current case studies. Dr. Burgad explained that the credit savings come from endorsements and certificates, enabling students to graduate earlier and helping to alleviate teacher shortages by getting candidates into the workforce sooner. Mr. Brooks emphasized that the 106 credit degree meets accreditation standards, saves students tuition, and supports workforce development by getting graduates into jobs faster.

Member Black asked whether reduced-credit bachelor's degrees are labeled differently (e.g., with an asterisk or special title), and whether they might affect admission to master's programs. Dr. Burgad clarified that reduced credit degrees would not be labeled differently and would still be titled as a standard Bachelor of Science or Arts. Regarding graduate admissions, he shared that institutions, particularly in neighboring states, evaluate the type of degree, not the number of credits, when considering applicants. Black expressed concern that, despite the benefits of accelerated degrees, they could potentially disadvantage students in the eyes of graduate programs or employers, noting the lack of long-term data or case studies on their impact.

Member Campbell shared similar concerns about graduate degree acceptance but noted that HR and licensure boards typically verify the degree itself, not credit hours. He mentioned non-traditional and international degrees usually don't cause issues, implying reduced-credit degrees likely won't either.

Member Montplaisir noted faculty generally support reduced credit degrees but raised concerns about graduate program acceptance, additional course requirements, and loss of financial aid eligibility for students who return for a second undergraduate degree. Montplaisir highlighted that offering reduced credit degrees could blur institutional missions, stressing the need to clearly define each institution's role.

Member Eriksrud asked if the discussion was just informational or if they were approving anything today. Chair Biller clarified that they may move to amend policy 409 to allow reduced credit degrees and then take it to the board for approval. He emphasized the importance of defining real workforce needs and avoiding program redundancy, noting teacher education as a critical need.

Member Black expressed concern that the current policy language is too broad, potentially allowing institutions to switch existing degrees to reduced credit versions without sufficient oversight. He emphasized the need for a precise, cautious policy to avoid rushing into uncharted territory. Chair Biller agreed, supporting the idea that all reduced credit degrees should require board approval initially as a safeguard. VC Johnson confirmed the policy already includes a requirement for board approval of all reduced credit degrees, even if the institution already offers a 120-credit version. She also noted that approval processes with HLC take time, so only a few programs are likely to move forward.

Ms. Uhde indicated BSC is proposing a 90 credit B.A.S. in Secure Software Development program designed to meet workforce demand in software development. Uhde explained that while major courses align with required learning outcomes, credit reductions come mainly from fewer electives. The program includes 36 general education credits, 48 credits from three stackable credentials, and 6 internship credits for hands-on experience. The program was developed in response to industry input from cybersecurity and computer science partners, aiming to support company growth and attract new students.

Dr. Huschle indicated MaSU is looking to offer a B.A.S. in Healthcare Informatics primarily for transfer students with an associate degree, especially in nursing. The program reduces credits by recognizing prior coursework in general education and healthcare related electives like medical terminology and community health. The total credits for the program would range from 96 to 120, depending on how many credits the student transfers, with up to 24 credits potentially substituted based on their associate degree.

Member Eriksrud questioned how certain courses could be waived without hands-on experience, but Huschle explained these would only be waived if already completed as part of the associate degree.

Member Campbell raised a broader concern about competitive imbalance, questioning whether institutions offering reduced-credit degrees might gain an unfair

advantage and suggesting the need for policy limits or phased implementation to manage system-wide consistency and quality.

Chair Biller acknowledged concerns about potential competitive imbalances if some institutions offer reduced-credit degrees (e.g., in business) while others retain 120-credit programs. He emphasized the need for board approval to manage such impacts and reiterated that the focus should be on addressing critical workforce needs, particularly in areas like teacher education and nursing, where faster pathways can make a meaningful difference. Member Campbell raised concerns about system-wide competition, and Member Eriksrud noted such programs could become selective, favoring academically strong students.

VC Johnson confirmed that while accelerated programs already exist, the reduced credit degrees would be new territory and thus require board oversight. She also clarified that Policy 409 must be amended before approving any reduced credit programs. Currently, only three institutions have formally requested reduced credit programs, with more expected once guidance is finalized.

Member Montplaisir expressed confusion over the process for approving reduced credit degrees, seeking clarity on submission requirements, reviewing protocols, and alignment with HLC procedures. VC Johnson clarified that no institution should bypass board approval, and while the three institutions have shown interest and submitted standard academic approvals, a more detailed application form will be developed for these proposals. All reduced credit degrees will require full board approval, and Johnson confirmed that the three institutions are ready to move forward quickly, pending board policy changes and HLC review timelines.

Campbell moved, Eriksrud seconded, to approve the proposed amendments to Policy 409, as presented.

Campbell, Eriksrud, Black, and Biller voted yes. Motion passed 4-0.

Adjourn

Committee Chair Biller adjourned the meeting at 1:02 p.m. CT.

Approved September 16, 2025.