

Idaho State Board of Education
GOVERNING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
SECTION: III. POSTSECONDARY AFFAIRS
SUBSECTION: E. Certificates and Degrees

December 2025

1. Definitions

Programs of instruction require specified numbers of credits earned through educational work on the part of students. Completion of the program of instruction results in the awarding of a certificate to or conferring of a degree upon the student by the faculty and the Chief Executive Officer. The following definitions have been approved by the Board:

a. MICROCREDENTIALS

Credentials awarded for mastery of defined skills or concepts, including career technical and academic skills. Microcredentials reflect skills, knowledge, and abilities gained in increments and measured by identified outcomes that are equal to or less than a single course of study but may also build upon or complement each other, resulting in a stacked microcredential. Microcredentials are most often distributed as digital badges. To ensure verifiability and interoperability, all digital badges must be issued on a platform that has achieved certification for adherence to Open Badges standards and verifiable digital metadata specification.

i. Stacked Microcredential

A set of organized microcredentials that an individual can earn after meeting specific outcomes. Completion of stacked microcredentials may result in credit through institutions' prior learning assessment policies.

ii. Digital Badge

A visual representation of one or more microcredentials that provides a verifiable and portable record of achievement through embedded metadata. Its issuance is contingent upon successful completion of assessments tied to industry-relevant competencies or academic standards.

b. CERTIFICATES

i. Academic Certificate of Completion

A credential awarded for completion of a coherent program of study consisting of one (1) to six (6) semester credits, representing a coherent body of knowledge that does not lead to an academic undergraduate certificate or a degree.

ii. Academic Undergraduate Certificate

A credential awarded for completion of a coherent program of study consisting of seven (7) semester credits or more, representing a coherent body of knowledge that may lead to an academic degree. Academic undergraduate certificates may be earned as standalone certificates or attached to an

undergraduate degree.

iii. Graduate Certificate

A credential awarded for completion of a coherent program of study consisting of nine (9) or more semester credits of graduate course work, representing a coherent body of knowledge that may lead to a degree or may be unique and standalone. Graduate certificates may be earned as standalone certificates or attached to a graduate degree.

iv. Technical Certificate

A credential awarded for completion of requirements in an approved career technical program that represents mastery of a defined set of competencies. Technical certificates are awarded based on a total number of required credits and intended to be stackable:

- 1) Technical Certificate of Completion – 1 to 7 credits
- 2) Basic Technical Certificate – 8 to 29 credits
- 3) Intermediate Technical Certificate – 30 to 51 credits
- 4) Advanced Technical Certificate – 52 to 59 credits

v. Specialized Certificate

A credential awarded upon successful completion of specific credit-bearing courses within a career technical or academic program of fewer than 60 semester credits that have been industry validated and sequenced for the purpose of developing new skills and upgrading existing skills in an occupation. Specialized certificates are to be stacked on or appended to other credentials as advanced training. In exceptional cases, stand-alone Specialized Certificates may be proposed if justified by the content of the certificate.

- c. ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE DEGREE: A credential awarded for completion of requirements in an approved career technical program of at least 60 semester credits (includes a minimum of 15 general education credits) and represents mastery of a defined set of competencies.
- d. ASSOCIATE DEGREE: A credential awarded for completion of requirements entailing the equivalent of at least 60 semester credits of academic work (includes a minimum of 36 general education credits, see Board Policy Section III.N). An Associate Degree shall not require more than 60 semester credits unless necessary for matriculation to a specific baccalaureate program or for unique accreditation, certification, or professional licensure purposes or by exception approved by the Board.
- e. REDUCED-CREDIT BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: A credential awarded for completion of requirements entailing the equivalent of at least 90 semester credits of academic or a combination of academic and career technical coursework (includes a minimum of 36 general education credits, see Board Policy Section III.G). At least 36 credits must be at the 300x and 400x level. A reduced-credit baccalaureate degree must meet all standards and learning outcomes for a

baccalaureate degree. These baccalaureate degrees are limited to workforce-focused circumstances where this streamlined pathway does not disadvantage learners. Three-year degrees might not align with graduate school entrance requirements, licensure, or certification requirements. Program titles must clearly indicate the reduced-credit threshold and conform to Board-approved naming conventions.

- f. **BACCALAUREATE DEGREE:** A credential awarded for completion of requirements entailing the equivalent of at least 120 semester credits of academic work (includes a minimum of 36 general education credits, see Board Policy Section III.N). A baccalaureate degree shall not require more than 120 semester credits unless needed for unique accreditation, certification, professional licensure purposes, or by exception approved by the Board.
- g. **APPLIED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE:** A credential awarded for completion of requirements entailing the equivalent of at least 120 semester credits of academic and career technical coursework (includes a minimum of 36 general education credits, see Board Policy Section III.N). An applied baccalaureate degree shall not require more than 120 semester credits unless needed for unique accreditation, certification, or professional licensure purposes or by exception approved by the Board.
- h. **GRADUATE DEGREE:** A credential awarded for completion of academic work beyond the baccalaureate degree, including any required research. Graduate degrees consist of master's degrees, specialist degrees, and doctoral degrees.

2. Academic and Career Technical Credit Hour Requirements

A credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than:

- a. One (1) hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
- b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (a) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

3. Requirements for Certificates and Degrees

A postsecondary institution has authority to establish the number of earned credits

required for each certificate and degree (see III.G and Board Policy III.N Statewide General Education). A credit requirements must receive Board approval in accordance with the program approval policies provided in Board Policy III.G. Institutional catalogs shall specify the required number of earned credits for each certificate and degree.

4. Authorization Required

Programs offered at the institution, as well as the certificates and degrees to which they lead, are subject to review and approval in accordance with the program approval policies provided in Board Policy III.G. A certificate or degree conferred upon the student is conferred under the authority of the Board.

5. Authorized Microcredentials, Certificates, and Degrees

A current listing of authorized certificates and degrees awarded by each institution is maintained at the institution by the Chief Executive Officer and for all institutions at the Office of the State Board of Education. Career-technical microcredentials must be tracked as digital badges using a platform approved and managed by the Division of Career Technical Education. Each institution must maintain a comprehensive list of all microcredentials, including those tracked by the Division of Career Technical Education.

6. Honorary Degrees

Each institution may award honorary degrees, not to exceed the highest level of Board-authorized degrees currently awarded by the institution, to persons in recognition of distinguished achievements at the local, state, or national level in areas such as education, public service, research, sciences, humanities, business, or other professions. The award of an honorary degree must receive the prior approval of the Chief Executive Officer upon recommendation by the faculty.

Each institution will develop its own procedures for seeking nominations for and selecting honorary degree recipients. Those procedures may include a statement of eligibility requirements for honorary degrees. However, no person who is currently employed by the institution, is a member of the Board, is staff of the Office of the State Board of Education, or is an incumbent elected official is eligible for an honorary degree during the term of employment, appointment, or office.