

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The operational definitions have been divided into major topical categories and alphabetized within the categories to help users find terms of interest.

Academic Awards:

Associate's Degree: An undergraduate award granted on completion of an educational program that is lower than the baccalaureate and that requires at least two but less than four academic years of full-time equivalent college work.

Bachelor's Degree: An undergraduate award that normally requires the completion of at least four but not more than five academic years of full-time equivalent college work. Also includes accelerated bachelor's degrees which are completed in three calendar years.

Certificate: A formal award certifying the satisfactory completion of a prescribed program of study. The certificate is less than a degree, and its curriculum in many instances is related to the student's employment or professional advancement. In the two-year college system of Alabama, a Certificate requires a minimum of 10 semester hours and a maximum of 60 semester hours.

Degree: An award conferred by a college, university or other higher/postsecondary education institution as official recognition for the successful completion of a prescribed program of studies.

Diploma: A formal award certifying the successful completion of a prescribed postsecondary education program. In Alabama, the diploma, which ranges from 48 to 90 quarter hours, is only awarded by the community and technical colleges.

Doctoral Degree: An earned graduate level academic award carrying the title of doctor, such as the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Science (Sc.D.) and Doctor of Public Health (D.P.H.). Does not include first-professional degrees such as M.D., D.M.D., or J.D. or "honorary" degrees such as the LL.D., D.H.L., D.D., or Litt.D.

Educational Specialist's Degree (Ed.S): A graduate level award that requires completion of an organized program of study consisting of the full-time equivalent of one academic year of work beyond the master's degree, but does not meet the requirements of academic degrees at the doctoral level.

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First-Professional Degree: An award that requires completion of a program that meets all the following criteria: completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; at least two years of college work prior to entering the program; and a total of at least six academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself. First-professional degrees may be awarded in the following 10 fields: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., Pod.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.); Optometry (O.D.); Law (L.L.B., J.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.); Theology (M.Div., M.H.L., B.D., or Ordination).

Master's Degree: A graduate level award that requires the completion of a program of study at least the full-time equivalent of one but usually not more than two academic years of work beyond the bachelor's degree. In professional fields, it is sometimes an advanced professional degree earned after the first-professional degree.

Academic Calendar:

Academic Year: The period of an institution's regular session, generally extending from September to June, usually divided as semesters, trimesters, quarters or the 4-1-4 plan. These designations are sometimes referred to as "terms."

Quarter: The quarter calendar consists of three quarters of about 10-12 weeks each. There may be an additional summer quarter.

Semester: The semester calendar consists of two semesters of about 16-18 weeks each. There may be an additional summer session.

Trimester: The trimester calendar is composed of three terms of about 15 weeks each.

4-1-4 Plan: The 4-1-4 calendar is composed of four courses taken for four months, one course taken for one month, and four courses taken for four months. There may be an additional summer session.

Credit & Contact Hours:

Contact Hour: A unit of measure that represents a minimum of 50 minutes of scheduled instruction given to students. Also referred to as clock hour.

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Credit: Recognition of attendance and performance in an instructional activity (course or program) that can be applied by a recipient toward the requirements for a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award.

Credit Hour: A unit of measure representing the time and activity required for one hour of credit. Usually, this involves the equivalent of 50 minutes of instruction each week for a semester, trimester, or quarter.

Extensions & Alterations of Existing Programs:

Reasonable Extension or Alteration of a Unit or Program of Instruction:

Modification of an existing unit or program of instruction which does not change its essential character, integrity, or objectives. Such modifications do not create new units or programs of instruction. Program changes may include reasonable extensions such as the addition of a new area of specialization (concentration, option, emphasis, focus, track), or reasonable alterations such as a change in degree nomenclature at the same degree level (except doctoral), or a change in program title or CIP code, provided these modifications are within the Commission guidelines. Provisions for reasonable extensions or alterations of units or programs of instruction do not relate to the addition of off-campus sites or adding any new unit or program. Extensions and alterations are defined as non-substantive (require Commission notification by information) and substantive (require Commission approval). Refer to the Guidelines for Review of Extensions/Alterations of Existing Units or Programs of Instructions for details.

Faculty:

Adjunct Faculty: A faculty position where one has an occasional or temporary affiliation with an institution in performing a duty or service in an auxiliary capacity (as defined by the institution).

Faculty: Persons whose specific assignments customarily are made for the purpose of conducting instruction, research, or public service as a principal activity (or activities), and who hold academic rank titles of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer, or the equivalent of any of these academic ranks. If their principal activity is instructional, faculty may include deans, directors, or the equivalent, as well as associate or assistant deans and departmental or division heads.

Full-Time Faculty: Faculty employed full-time by a single institution (as defined by the institution).

Part-Time Faculty: Faculty employed less than full-time (as defined by the institution).

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Institutions:

Campus: The grounds and buildings of an institution of higher education.

College or University System: Two or more separately accredited colleges or universities under the governance of a single board and under the control or supervision of a single executive head.

Community College: A lower division institution which offers university parallel transfer programs which culminate in the award of Associate in Arts or Associate in Science degrees as well as "career" or "applied" programs to prepare students for occupational, technical, or paraprofessional employment. The applied programs, varying in length, culminate in certificates, diplomas, or Associate in Applied Science degrees. Considerable emphasis is placed on developmental/remedial studies and continuing education.

Higher Education/Postsecondary Education Institutions: Institutions which provide formal programs of instruction with curricula designed primarily for students who have completed the requirements for a high school diploma or its equivalent. This includes academic, occupational, professional, and continuing professional education programs.

Junior College: A lower division institution similar in role and mission to the Community College. The main distinction is in the scope of the curriculum, i.e. the junior college is generally less comprehensive than the community college in its "applied" programs and is primarily a transfer institution designed to offer the first two years of a baccalaureate degree.

Main Campus: The physical boundaries of the campus where the institution's principal administrative offices are located.

Multi-Campus Institution: A single institution which operates on two or more administratively equal campuses.

Private Institutions of Higher Education: An institution of higher education which is controlled by an individual or agency other than the state, a subdivision of the state, or the federal government and is usually supported primarily by other than public funds and operated by other than publicly elected or appointed officials.

1. **Private For-Profit (Profit-Making) Institution:** A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency of control receives compensation other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk.

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2. **Private Non-Profit Institution:** A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency of control receives no compensation other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk. These include both independent not-for-profit institutions and those affiliated with a religious organization.

Public Institutions of Higher Education: Those public educational institutions in Alabama which have been authorized by the Legislature or by the Constitution to provide formal education, including vocational, technical, collegiate, professional, or any other form of education, above the secondary school level (Code of Alabama, 16-5-1). These institutions are controlled and operated by publicly elected or appointed officials and derive their primary support from public funds.

Technical College: A lower division institution which offers occupational programs in trade and industrial, technical and applied science fields. These programs culminate in certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees. Technical Colleges accredited by the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI) may grant the Associate in Applied Technology degree (AAT), while those accredited by the Commission on Colleges (COC) may grant the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree. The technical college may not offer the transfer AA and AS degrees.

University: An institution of higher education usually composed of several schools and colleges. The institution normally confers undergraduate degrees, primarily the baccalaureate. It also may confer graduate degrees, such as masters, doctorates, and specialist in education, as well as one or more first professional degrees in fields such as law and medicine.

Upper Division College or University: An institution of higher education which does not enroll freshmen or sophomores and offers courses and programs only at the junior, senior, and possibly graduate level. The institution normally confers the baccalaureate degree and, in some instances, graduate degrees. Students matriculated in formal programs of study transfer the lower division (freshman-sophomore) component from other institutions.

Institutional Merger/Consolidation/Consortia:

Administrative Consolidation: Two or more institutions are placed under a single executive head without program interchange. All involved institutions maintain separate functional identities. This does not constitute a multi-campus institution, but rather two or more separate institutions operating under a single executive head.

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Consortium: A formal federation or association of two or more separate institutions for one or more specific purposes usually involving a statement of mutual obligations and resource-sharing.

Institutional Consolidation: Two or more institutions join to form a distinctly new unit, often with a new name. This results in a single multi-campus institution operating under one chief executive officer and under one regional accreditation designation. Often involves program relocation or exchange.

Merger: One institution relinquishes its assets and degree granting authority and is dissolved into another with the second institution remaining as the sole surviving entity. Might involve the closure of a campus or one institution becoming a branch of the other.

Off-Campus:

Branch: A degree-granting division of an institution located in a geographical setting separate from the sponsoring institution's main campus or central administration and authorized for a stated purpose in relation to the sponsoring institution and the area served. The branch offers all requirements for completing degree programs in two or more fields of study as classified by the CIP taxonomy at the six-digit level. A branch provides the necessary administrative services, student services, financial resources, library, and physical facilities to provide adequate support for degree programs offered.

Branch Campus: The physical boundaries of the location of an institutional branch.

Off-Campus Course: A course provided to any group of students for academic credit at a particular off-campus site in an organized classroom setting, regardless of the instructional delivery system.

Off-Campus Facility: The actual physical plant in which instruction is conducted at an off-campus site.

Off-Campus Program: A program of instruction offered in its entirety at an off-campus site.

Off-Campus Site: The specific location where one or more courses are offered for academic credit away from the sponsoring institution's main campus.

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Programs:

Active Program: A program listed in the Commission's inventory that has admitted students.

Cooperative Program of Instruction: A program which is under the sponsorship of a single institution (identified as the primary institution) but which contains elements of resource sharing agreed upon by one or more other institutions (the secondary institution(s)). The administrative control of such a program and commitment for maintaining the resources necessary to support it are the responsibility of the primary institution. The degree is granted under the seal of the primary institution and the program will be identified in the Commission's Academic Program Inventory for that institution only. The program is so structured that should the elements contributed by the secondary institution(s) be discontinued, the basic strength of the program will not be damaged seriously and the institution administering the program will be able to continue to do so with few or no additional resources.

Inactive Program: A program listed in the Commission's inventory that is no longer admitting students. Institutions must inform the Commission when they place a program on inactive status. This status will be so noted in the Commission's inventory. To be placed on inactive status, a program must be viable (meet the productivity standards set in the viability legislation). The institution may reinstate a program to active status within five years after the program has been placed on inactive status without submitting a program proposal for approval. However, the institution must inform the Commission on program reinstatement by information item. The information item must provide evidence of adequate resources and student demand to reactivate the program.

Joint Program: A program which is mutually sponsored by two or more institutions leading to a single degree which is conferred by both or all participating institutions. A joint degree program is unique and distinguishable from any program offered independently at any one of the institutions. A joint degree program exhibits the following specific characteristics:

1. The program is planned, implemented, and monitored by a joint committee comprised of representatives from all participating institutions and is managed by an academic administrator or by co-academic administrators jointly appointed by and responsible to both or all participating institutions.
2. The program has a common faculty who hold joint appointments at all participating institutions.

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3. The program has common entrance requirements, curriculum, and degree requirements agreed upon by all participating institutions.
4. For joint graduate programs, common qualifying examinations should be given and jointly graded by the participating institutions.
5. The program is based on carefully prescribed and explicitly stated procedures for sharing resources at participating institutions.
6. The program leads to a single degree granted under the seals of all participating institutions. If a joint program is to be offered by two or more institutions that are within the same system but are under a single executive head, explicit procedures must be developed and stated that will assure equal administrative oversight of the program.
7. The joint program is so designed that its viability is dependent upon the shared resources of the participating institutions. In the event one or more of the participating institutions cannot meet its commitments and responsibilities, the program would be terminated.

Major: That part of a degree program which consists of a specified group of courses in a particular discipline or field. While practices vary among institutions, a baccalaureate program major usually consists of 28 semester hours or more.

Minor: That part of a degree program which consists of a specified group of courses in a particular discipline or field usually constituting a minimum of 18 semester hours.

Program of Instruction: An organized set of courses and related activities for which, upon satisfactory completion, some degree, diploma, or certificate is awarded. This does not include areas of specialization or concentration within a program. If an institution wishes to give such options discrete program identity, they must first be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Options within programs will not be separately identified in the Commission's Academic Program Inventory, and the institution may not identify such options as degree programs in its catalog or other publications.

1. **Existing Program of Instruction:** A program which is currently identified in the Commission's Academic Program Inventory.
2. **New Program of Instruction:** A program which has not been approved by the Commission and added to its Academic Program Inventory.

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Program Pending Implementation: A program listed in the Commission's inventory that has been approved by the Commission but has not yet begun enrolling students. The program will be designated in the inventory with the approval date. It is the institution's responsibility to notify the Commission in writing when the program has been implemented and is admitting students.

Shared Program: A program of instruction that is mutually sponsored by two or more institutions and leads to a single degree or other award of completion which is jointly conferred by all participating institutions. A shared program is very similar to a joint program. However, the withdrawal of one or more participating institutions from a shared program does not automatically preclude the continuation of the program by the remaining participants or the reversion to independent program status by institutions which offered independent programs prior to entering the shared program agreement. The purpose of a shared program is to allow institutions to pool their resources in order to offer a collaborative program of greater depth, breadth, academic quality, productivity, and economy than would generally be possible through independent single programs. It is also expected that shared programs will help reduce program duplication. Guidelines for shared programs are listed below.

1. An institution may participate in a shared program only at a degree level currently recognized within its Commission-approved Instructional Role Matrix.
2. At least one of the participating institutions must have an independent program in the same area and at the same level in operation at the time the shared program is proposed.
3. No institution may offer a separate independent program in the same area and at the same level while participating in a shared program.
4. Should one or more participating institutions withdraw from the shared program, it may be continued if at least two institutions remain. This would constitute an alteration of an existing program and would require Commission approval as such.
5. Should the shared program be discontinued, participating institutions which previously had independent programs may revert back to independent program status subject to program alteration approval by the Commission.
6. The shared program is treated as a single program for viability purposes.

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7. Proposals for shared programs must include documentation that necessary approval has been received from all relevant accrediting agencies. Similar documentation must be presented if the program is altered in any way or when an institution wishes to revert to independent program status.
8. The program is planned, implemented, and monitored by a joint committee comprised of representatives from all participating institutions and is managed by an academic administrator or by co-academic administrators jointly appointed by and responsible to all participating institutions.
9. The program has a common faculty who hold joint appointments at all participating institutions.
10. The program has common entrance requirements, curriculum, and degree requirements agreed upon by all participating institutions.
11. For shared graduate programs, common qualifying examinations should be given and jointly graded by the participating institutions.
12. The program is based on carefully prescribed and explicitly stated procedures for sharing resources at participating institutions.
13. The program leads to a single degree granted under the seals of all participating institutions. If a shared program is to be offered by two or more institutions which are within the same system but are under a single executive head, explicit procedures must be developed and stated that will assure equal administrative oversight of the program.

Specialization, Concentration, Option, Focus, Track, Emphasis:

Synonymous terms that represent a specified group of courses within a program of instruction.

Program Action by the Commission:

Approval: A program that receives the positive vote of a majority (7) of all members of the Commission.

Deferral: A program that the Commission votes to defer action on by a majority vote of members present. The Commission must specify the future meeting at which that program will be reconsidered, being mindful of the ten-month deadline for program action. If the ten-month limitation has been reached or will be

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reached before the next scheduled meeting of the Commission, action on the program will not be deferred. However, if the Commission decides that special consideration is warranted, the program may be disapproved by a majority of members present with the provision that the program can be reconsidered at a specified meeting scheduled prior to the one-year restriction on resubmission of disapproved programs. Deferral is a Commission, not an institutional, prerogative.

Disapproval: A program that receives a negative recommendation by a majority vote of the Commission is disapproved.

- A disapproved program may be reconsidered after one year at the request of the institution provided substantive changes indicate a need for reconsideration.
- A program that receives a favorable vote of a majority of the members present but which falls short of receiving a favorable vote by a majority of the members of the Commission may be reconsidered at the next regularly scheduled meeting at the request of the institution provided substantive changes indicate the need for reconsideration.

Withdrawal: A program that has been withdrawn by the institution from Commission consideration. A withdrawn program may be resubmitted at any time; however, the time that has expired prior to the withdrawal will not count toward the ten-months deadline on Commission program action. The Commission will have ten months beginning at the time the program is resubmitted to take action on the program.

Units:

Bureau: A specialized administrative unit of an institution that usually serves as a clearing house or intermediary for exchanging information, making contacts or coordinating related activities.

Center: A place, area, or concentration of resources marked significantly by an indicated activity, pursuit or interest. A center may involve instruction, research or service or some combination of the three. It may or may not offer courses or other activities for academic credit.

College: An instructional unit within a university that usually includes several academic divisions and/or departments and is usually administered by a dean. Often, though not always, a college is a more prominent or inclusive unit than a school. As used here, the term "college" does not pertain to separate institutions known as colleges, such as junior college, community college, or technical college.

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Department: An instructional unit encompassing a discrete branch of study; usually located within a division and/or a school or college. The department is usually a less inclusive unit than a division, although this is not always the case.

Division: An instructional unit that usually includes two or more academic departments representing allied fields of study. (For example, a Division of Natural Sciences might include departments of biology, chemistry, physics and geology). Usually, but not always, a division is a more prominent entity than a department. (Some institutions identify the department as the more inclusive unit. In such cases, the department might include several divisions.

Institute: An association of persons or organizations that collectively constitute a technical or professional authority in a field of work, study, research, or service. An institute may or may not offer courses or other activities for academic credit. Sometimes the term is used interchangeably with a center or an entire special purpose institution.

School: An instructional unit within an institution of higher education which usually encompasses a professional discipline such as medicine, engineering, education, etc. and which often includes several academic divisions and/or departments. A school is usually under the administration of a dean or director. Often, though not always, a school is less inclusive than a college

Unit of Instruction: An organizational structure which offers instructional courses or other activities for academic credit. This definition pertains to institutions, branches, and campuses as well as colleges, schools, divisions, departments, institutes, and centers within institutions which offer courses or other activities for academic credit.

1. **Existing Unit of Instruction:** A unit of instruction in place prior to August 19, 1994. Official documentation must be available to support the existence of a unit of instruction.
2. **Proposed New Unit of Instruction:** A unit of instruction not in place prior to August 19, 1994. Several new units which offer academic credit are subject to Commission approval, including a new institution (including one formed by consolidation), branch, campus, school, college, division, or institute.

Unit of Public Service: An organizational structure established to make available to the public the various unique resources and capabilities of an institution for the specific purpose of responding to local, regional, or statewide needs or problems.

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Unit of Research: An organizational structure for those activities intended to produce one or more research outcomes, including the creation of new knowledge, the organization of knowledge, and the application of knowledge. Might include such entities as research divisions, bureaus, institutes, centers, and experiment stations.

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