



Curriculum Handbook

Chapter 5: Criteria and Standards

5.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the regulatory and statutory criteria for curriculum approval contained in California Education Code and California Code of Regulations (title 5). These standards and criteria guide the work of the Curriculum Committee in creating local curriculum forms and approval processes for:

- Degree-Applicable Credit Courses
- Nondegree-Applicable Credit Courses
- Noncredit Courses
- Degrees and Certificates

The most recent edition of the *Program and Course Approval Handbook*, published by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and available on the Curriculum Committee website, provides a more detailed explanation of current curriculum regulations and review criteria.

This chapter will also outline Napa Valley College's standards for distance education courses, which are developed and maintained, in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations, by the Curriculum Committee in consultation with the Distance Education and Education Technology Committee.

5.2 Development Criteria

All courses and programs at Napa Valley College must meet five basic criteria for approval as required by the Chancellor's Office. These development criteria were derived from statute, regulation, intersegmental agreements, guidelines provided by transfer institutions and industry, recommendations of accrediting institutions, and the standards of good practice established in the field of curriculum design. These criteria have been endorsed by the California Community College Curriculum Committee as an integral part of the best practice for curriculum development.

The five criteria are as follows:

- A. *Appropriateness to Mission.* Curriculum must be directed at the appropriate level for community colleges; must address a valid transfer, occupational, basic skills, civic education, or lifelong learning purpose; should be congruent with the mission

statement and master plan of the college; and must provide distinct instructional content and specific instructional objectives.

- B. *Need*. The proposal must demonstrate a need for a program or course that meets the stated goals and objective in the region the college proposes to serve with the program and must not cause harmful competition with an existing program at another community college.
- C. *Curriculum Standards*. Proposals must follow the requirements of the local curriculum review process; must be approved by the Curriculum Committee and Board of Trustees; must be recommended by CTE Regional Consortia, where applicable; and should be consistent with the requirements of accrediting agencies.
- D. *Adequate Resources*. The college must demonstrate that it has the resources to realistically maintain the program or course at the level of quality described in the proposal, including funding for faculty compensation, facilities and equipment, and library and resources. Additionally, the college must commit to offering all required courses for the program at least once every two years, unless the program goals justify a longer time frame as being the best interests of students.
- E. *Compliance*. The design of the program or the course may not be in conflict with any state or federal laws, statutes, or regulation, and should consider licensing laws in a particular occupation that may affect the program or course.

5.3 Standards for Course Approval

The course outline should contain sufficient information to permit the Curriculum Committee to correctly determine whether the course should be recommended for approval according to the standards for degree-applicable credit courses, nondegree-applicable credit courses, and noncredit course, as outlined in title 5 §55002.

For all three types of courses:

- The course must be described in a course outline of record that shall be maintained in the official college files and made available to each instructor. (The requirements of the CORs are described in more detail in Chapter 6).
- Each section of the course is to be taught by a qualified instructors in accordance with a set of objectives and with other specifications defined in the course outline of record.
- Repeated enrollment is allowed only in accordance with title 5 §55040-55046 and §58161.

5.3.1 Degree-Applicable Credit Courses (Course Numbers 90-499, C1000-C9999)

The Curriculum Committee shall recommend approval of a course for associate degree credit if it meets the following standards:

- A. *Grading Policy.* The course provides for measurement of student performance in terms of the stated course objectives and culminates in a formal, permanently recorded grade based upon demonstrated proficiency in subject matter consistent with the provisions of article 2 of subchapter 1 of Chapter 6. Proficiency may be demonstrated through written assignments, problem solving exercises, skills demonstrations, or other means as deemed appropriate by the curriculum committee.
- B. *Units.* The course grants units of credit in a manner consistent with the provisions of title 5 §55002.5. The course outline of record shall record the total number of hours in each instructional category specified in Administrative Procedure 4029, the total number of expected outside-of-class hours, and the total student learning hours used to calculate the award of credit.
- C. *Difficulty, Level and Intensity.* The course requires critical thinking, learning skills, vocabulary, and allocation of concepts at college level as determined by the curriculum committee. The course treats subject matter with a scope and intensity that requires students to study independently outside-of-class time.
- D. *Prerequisites and Corequisites.* Except as provided in title 5 §55522, when the Curriculum Committee determines, based on a review of the course outline of record, that a student would be highly unlikely to receive a satisfactory grade unless the student has knowledge or skills not taught in the course, then the course shall require prerequisites or corequisites (credit or noncredit) that are established, reviewed, and applied in accordance with title 5 requirements.
- E. *Basic Skills Requirements.* If success in the course is dependent upon communication or computation skills, then the course shall require, consistent with the provisions of this article, as prerequisites or corequisites eligibility for enrollment in associate degree credit courses in English and/or mathematics, respectively.

5.3.2 Nondegree-Applicable Credit Courses (Course Numbers 50-89)

Title 5 prescribes that credit courses designated as not applicable to the associate degree must provide instruction in critical thinking, prepare students to study independently outside of class, and include reading and writing assignments. However, the course materials and level of difficulty are not required to be at the college level.

Nondegree-applicable courses must fall into one of the following categories:

- Basic skills courses as defined in title 5 §55000(u).
- Courses designed to enable students to succeed in degree-applicable credit courses (including, but not limited to, college orientation and guidance courses, and discipline-specific preparatory courses such as biology, history, or electronics) that integrate basic skills instruction throughout and assign grades partly upon the demonstrated mastery of those skills.

- Precollegiate career education preparation courses designed to provide foundation skills for students preparing for entry into degree-applicable credit career education courses or programs.
- Essential career education instruction for which meeting the standards of an associate degree credit course is neither necessary nor required.

The Curriculum Committee shall recommend approval of a credit course not applicable to the associate degree if it meets the following standards:

- Grading Policy.* The course provides for measurement of student performance in terms of the stated course objectives and culminates in a formal, permanently recorded grade based upon uniform standards in accordance with title 5 §55023 and Administrative Procedure 4230. The grade is based on demonstrated proficiency in the subject matter and the ability to demonstrate that proficiency, at least in part, by means of written expression that may include essays, or, in courses where the curriculum committee deems them to be appropriate, by problem solving exercises or skills demonstrations by students.
- Units.* The course grants units of credit based in a manner consistent with the provisions of title 5 §55002.5. The course outline of record shall record the total number of hours in each instructional category specified in Administrative Procedure 4029, the total number of expected outside-of-class hours, and the total student learning hours used to calculate the award of credit.
- Intensity.* The course provides instruction in critical thinking and generally treats subject matter with a scope and intensity that prepares students to study independently outside-of-class time and includes reading and writing assignments and homework. In particular, the assignments will be sufficiently rigorous that students successfully completing each such course, or sequence of required courses, will have acquired the skills necessary to successfully complete degree-applicable work.
- Prerequisites and Corequisites.* When the Curriculum Committee deems appropriate, the course may require prerequisites or corequisites (credit and noncredit) for the course that are established, reviewed, and applied in accordance with title 5.

5.3.3 Noncredit Courses (Course Numbers 01-49)

Noncredit courses may or may not be designed to prepare students to succeed in degree-applicable courses. Courses are assigned as noncredit based on course objectives and target population to be served within a given instructional area. A noncredit course must fall under one of the following areas covered by the Education Code §84757 or title 5 §55151:

1. English as a Second Language
2. Immigrant Education

3. Elementary and Secondary Basic Skills
4. Health and Safety
5. Substantial Disabilities
6. Parenting
7. Home Economics
8. Courses for Older Adults
9. Short-term Vocational Programs
10. Workforce Preparation

In addition, community colleges can claim apportionment for supervised tutoring and learning assistance, subject to regulations under title 5.

The Curriculum Committee shall recommend approval of a noncredit course if the course treats subject matter and uses resource materials, teaching methods, and standards of attendance and achievement that the committee deems appropriate for the enrolled students.

In order to be eligible for state apportionment, such courses must be approved by the Chancellor's Office pursuant to title 5 §55150 and satisfy the funding requirements of §58160 and other applicable provisions related to attendance accounting standards (commencing with §58000). The Chancellor's Office reviews and chapters noncredit course submission to ensure that courses meet these standards and to validate that the associated data elements for each course are correct and compliant with regulations. When the Curriculum Committee deems appropriate, a noncredit course may serve as a prerequisite or corequisite for a credit course.

5.4 Articulation

Articulation is the foundation upon which any effective transfer program must be built. Course articulation is the process of developing a formal written agreement that identifies courses (or sequences of courses) offered at a community college that are comparable to, or acceptable in lieu of, specific course requirements at a four-year institution. The articulation process is designed to help students advance from one course, program or educational level to the next and to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same or essentially similar course content. Napa Valley College is a "sending" institution for many courses and programs for baccalaureate institutions. California articulation is facilitated by United States regionally accredited postsecondary institutions or Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates (ICAS) approved accreditors.

Articulation involves faculty review and evaluation to determine whether coursework completed at one institution will meet requirements for transfer credit, general education and/or major preparation at another institution. Successful completion of an articulated course assures the student and the faculty that the student has taken the appropriate course, received the necessary instruction and preparation, and that similar outcomes can be assured.

Articulation facilitates the process of enrolling students from high school to Napa Valley College and from Napa Valley College to four-year institutions.

Napa Valley College maintains various formal articulation agreements with regionally accredited public and private institutions, including those within the University of California and California State University systems, as well as agreements related to transfer degrees. These include General Education (Cal-GETC), major preparation, and course-to-course agreements (ASSIST). Course-to-course agreements include both CSU baccalaureate level courses (CSU Baccalaureate Level Course List or BCL) and UC transferable courses (UC Transfer Course Agreement or UC-TCA).

5.5 Degrees and Certificates

Napa Valley College awards the Associate of Arts (AA), Associate of Science (AS) and Associate Degree for transfer (AA-T or AS-T) consistent with the standards set forth in title 5 §55061 of the California Code of Regulations under the authority of the Board of Trustees. In addition, Napa Valley College offers defined courses of study that lead to certificates of achievement, local and skills certificates (which are not transcriptable).

All new or revised programs leading to a degree or certificate of achievement, as well as their program narratives and any supporting document are submitted to the Chancellor's Office. (Narrative and documentation requirements are explained in more detail in the *Program and Course Approval Handbook*.)

5.5.1 Associate in Arts and Associate in Science Degrees

At Napa Valley College, the AS degree is typically earned in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, or in career technical programs (as defined in the California Community College Taxonomy of Programs). The AA degree is typically earned in all other academic areas. The associate degree is composed of three parts: general education, a major or area of emphasis of 18 units or more, and additional graduation requirements or electives, if necessary, to bring the total units to a minimum of 60 semester units

5.5.2 Associate Degrees for Transfer

The associate degrees for transfer (AA-T and AS-T) are earned in programs designed for transfer preparation to specific majors in the California State University system. The AA-T and AS-T degrees are aligned with transfer model curricula developed jointly by the Academic Senates and discipline faculty in the California Community College and California State University systems. These degrees provide students a clear pathway to a CSU major and baccalaureate degree. These degrees must align with the structure of an inter-segmentally developed Transfer Model Curriculum (TMC) that defines the major or area of emphasis. The Transfer Model Curricula outline the rationale for transfer degree requirements and can be found on the official Course Identification Numbering System (CID) website. Approved Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) submission forms are located on the Chancellor's Office Academic Affairs Division website.

Community colleges are required to create an associate degree for transfer when they offer a degree in the same discipline (under the same TOP Code) as an existing TMC, according to California Education Code §66746.

Faculty interested in developing an associate degree for transfer should consult with the Articulation Officer.

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Community colleges are required to create an associate degree for transfer when they offer a degree in the same discipline (under the same TOP Code) as an existing TMC, according to California Education Code §66746.

Faculty interested in developing an associate degree for transfer should consult with the Articulation Officer.

5.5.4 Baccalaureate Degree

Baccalaureate degrees offered by California Community Colleges provide students with an opportunity to complete a bachelor's degree in specialized fields that meet workforce and educational needs. These degrees are developed in accordance with California Community College regulations and must meet all requirements established by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

Community college baccalaureate degrees require the completion of a minimum of 120 semester units, including lower division and upper division coursework, general education, and major preparation requirements. Students must complete a minimum of 36 semester units of general education coursework, including applicable lower division general education requirements and required upper division general education coursework. Students who complete the California General Education Transfer Curriculum (Cal-GETC) are considered to have fulfilled the lower division general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree.

Courses designated as upper division major requirements must be completed with a minimum grade of “C” (or “P”). Students must also complete at least 12 semester units of upper division coursework within the awarding district and complete all degree-applicable coursework with a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0.

Coursework completed within California public higher education systems or other institutionally accredited institutions may be applied toward baccalaureate degree requirements when the coursework meets district standards. Students may also receive credit toward degree completion through approved Credit for Prior Learning processes. Students who have already earned a bachelor’s degree from an institutionally accredited institution shall be considered to have fulfilled the general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree.

5.5.5 Certificates of Achievement

Certificates of Achievement must be submitted to the Chancellor’s Office for chaptering and must consist of at least 8 units or more of degree-applicable course work. The certificate of achievement is designed to demonstrate that the student has completed coursework and developed capabilities relating to a career or general education. Certificates of achievement that consist solely of basic skills and/or ESL courses are not permitted. Additional criteria are listed in the *Program and Course Approval Handbook*.

5.6 Distance Education Definitions

Distance Education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology as defined in Title 5 §55200.

Local definitions of Distance Education modalities:

For all DE modalities, instruction involves regular and substantive online interaction supported by online materials and activities delivered through the college’s learning management system and through the use of other required materials.

Entirely Online: All approved instructional contact hours are delivered through online interactions. No in-person activities or assessments are required.

- Online asynchronous classes have no scheduled class meetings.
- Online synchronous classes have live meetings conducted through video conference on specific days and times, which are indicated in the schedule of classes.

Online with Proctored Exams: All approved instructional contact hours are conducted online with the exception of one or more exams. Exams are required to be taken with a proctor to guarantee the integrity of the exam and the authenticity of the student. Proctoring services will be provided by Napa Valley College, but students will be allowed to take exams wherever an instructor approved proctor is available.

Hybrid: Approved instructional contact hours are conducted partially through distance education and partially face-to-face. This includes courses where contact hours are conducted mostly face-to-face with an online component such as laboratory and courses where contact hours are conducted mostly online with a face-to-face requirement such as orientation, field trips, or laboratory. The schedule of classes indicates dates, times, and locations of the required in-person components.

5.7 Distance Education Standards

The following title 5 regulations relate to distance education curriculum design, approval, or maintenance.

Accessibility: Title 5 §55200 requires that courses provided through distance education must be accessible to students with disabilities. To assist faculty in designing courses that meet this standard, workshops and resources will be available through the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) on understanding accessibility and creating content, materials, and resources that are accessible to all students.

Quality Standards: Title 5 §55202 requires that courses provided through distance education be of equivalent quality to traditional classroom courses. This is accomplished by applying the same quality standards, such as those utilized in the curriculum approval process or the curriculum review portion of Program Review, to any portion of a distance education course as would be applied to a traditional classroom course.

Regular and Substantive Interaction between Students and the Instructor: Title 5 §55204 requires that courses conducted through distance education include regular and substantive interaction between the instructor(s) and students (and among students if described in the course outline of record).

Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations §600.2 requires that colleges and universities ensure distance education courses support regular and substantive interaction between the students and instructor and instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously, to qualify as an eligible institution of higher education under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

“Regular interaction” means:

- Providing the opportunity for substantive interaction with a student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course.
- Monitoring the student’s academic engagement and success and promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with a student when needed on the basis of such monitoring or upon request by the student.

“Substantive interaction” means engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

- Providing direct instruction
- Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
- Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course
- Other instructional activities approved by the college's or program's accrediting agency

Distance Education Review and Approval: Title 5 §55206 requires that for any new or existing course in which a portion of the instruction is provided through distance education the course outline of record address how the course outcomes will be achieved in a distance education mode and how the distance education portion meets the requirements for regular and substantive interaction and accessibility. To meet this requirement, Napa Valley College curriculum approval processes contain separate fields for distance education content and will ensure that all Curriculum Committee members reviewing courses receive training in these Distance Education requirements.

5.8 References and Resources

Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, *Effective Practices for Educational Program Development* (2018).

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55002](#) Standards and Criteria for Courses.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55002.5](#) Credit Hour Definition.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55023](#) Academic Record Symbols and Grade Point Average.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55040-55046](#) Course Repetition and Academic Renewal.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55090](#) District Baccalaureate Degree Policies.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55091](#) Baccalaureate Degree Upper Division Course Requirements.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55092](#) Conditions for Awarding the Baccalaureate Degree.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55151](#) Career Development and College Preparation.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §55200-55210](#) Distance Education.

California Code of Regulations, [title 5 §58161](#) Apportionment for Credit Course Enrollment

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) Submission Forms* (2025).

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Program and Course Approval Handbook*, 9th edition (2026).

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Transfer Model Curriculum Information* (2025).

California Education Code [§84757](#) Program-Based Funding for Noncredit Courses

Code of Federal Regulations, [Title 34 §600.2](#) Institutional Eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as Amended.

Napa Valley College, *Administrative Procedure 4025* Philosophy and Criteria for Associate Degree and General Education.

Napa Valley College, Administrative Procedure 4029 Hours and Units.
Napa Valley College, Administrative Procedure 4105 Distance Education.
Napa Valley College, Distance Education Plan (2022-2025).

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