



May 22, 2017

President Kevin Boys
Southern State Community College
100 Hobart Drive
Hillsboro, OH 45133

Dear President Boys:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. A staff analysis of the report is enclosed.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on credit hours and student learning outcomes.

An interim report on assessment and student retention, persistence and completion is due 11/30/2017.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2019 – 2020. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2025 – 2026.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Stephh Brzuzy (sbrzuzy@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 106.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: May 22, 2017

STAFF LIAISON: Steph Brzuzy

REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

INSTITUTION: Southern State Community College, Hillsboro, OH

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Kevin Boys, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 2/28/2017 on credit hours and student learning outcomes.

The interim report was submitted in response to the HLC Action Letter of February 12, 2016, which reflected the recommendations of the Team Report from the institution's 2015 Comprehensive Evaluation.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The report is written clearly and organized effectively, with relevant supporting detail provided in the appendices.

REPORT SUMMARY: The report is presented in three main sections: I) Policies and Practices Supporting the Integrity of the Credit Hour; II) Aligning the Credit Hour and Learning Outcomes; and III) Continuous Improvement. These are preceded by an introduction that offers institutional background information and describes the process the College has undertaken in addressing concerns with respect to the credit hour.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): Federal Compliance regarding credit hour designation and link to student learning outcomes.

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.

Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.

Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.

Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

REPORT ANALYSIS: Evidence presented in the Southern State Community College interim report shows that the institution has given appropriate attention to concerns regarding its credit hour policies and alignment with learning outcomes.

The report presents a clear picture of the procedures undertaken by the institution in reviewing its current policies, researching alternatives, and developing new standards. According to the report, the institution's review has also extended beyond the more specific topic of credit hours and into areas such as syllabi consistency, faculty professional development, and teaching and learning excellence.

During the process of revising its credit hour policy, the institution acknowledged that the current policy, though serviceable in most ways, could be improved significantly by stating more specifically the relationship of "*demonstrated learning*" and the credit hour—and in particular within alternative delivery formats. The current College credit hour definition states this: "*A credit hour is the academic unit received for taking a subject for one hour a week for one semester (laboratory sessions may be included or separate, depending on the course). In reference to college courses, the term "hour" is applied to all such credits.*"

In the development of a revised policy, the institution relied substantially on a comparison survey of selected two-year colleges, private four-year colleges and "*the three top transfer public universities in Ohio.*" (The policies of these institutions are supplied in the report appendices.) Based on its research, the College developed a new definition of the credit hour, which is currently in proposal form and scheduled to be reviewed by the institution's Curriculum Committee in March 2017. Pending approval, the policy would take effect in Summer 2017.

The proposed SSCC policy defines a credit hour as "*an equivalency that reasonably approximates one of the following:*"

1. A minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of classroom or direct faculty instruction complemented by two hours of out of class student work each week, for approximately fifteen weeks, or an arrangement that yields the same ratio, in terms of credit to instruction and/or out of class work time.

a. Such arrangements include online, hybrid, and accelerated courses in which the completion of an equivalent amount of instruction and student work is required, as stipulated in (1), but may occur over a different amount of time.

2. At least an equivalent amount of work, in terms of time spent, as required in (1) for other academic activities such as laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, or other academic work leading to the award of credit-hours.

3. In the case of courses that are delivered in independent study format, a credit hour is approximated by the demonstration of learning—as measured by performance on assignments and assessments—that is expected in the traditional in person or online delivery of the course.

The tables below provide a comparison of the current and proposed definitions in terms of the degree to which the respective policies meet state and federal requirements.

Current Definition		
	<i>State Requirements</i>	<i>Federal Requirements</i>
Classroom or direct faculty instruction	✓	✓
Out of class student work	✗	✗
Other course delivery formats	✗	✗
Alternative academic experiences	?	?
Proposed Definition		
Classroom or direct faculty instruction	✓	✓
Out of class student work	✓	✓
Other course delivery formats	✓	✓
Alternative academic experiences	✓	✓

✓ Direct Application

✗ No direct application

? Inferred application

What the report refers to as a “*second stage initiative*” of the credit hour policy development focuses on the means by which the policy applies to a range of course types and instructional modes. Here again, the institution has begun substantive research into the practices of other colleges and universities, citing examples from Northern Kentucky University and Loyola University Maryland.

With respect to the alignment of the credit hour and student learning outcomes, the institution acknowledges that, previously, course syllabi were frequently substandard in this regard. To address this, the institution undertook an additional internal review that included evaluating a random sample of course syllabi from AY2016-2017; these represented eight academic areas and a “*contrasting methodology*.” The evaluation of these syllabi revealed a greater need for the link between course outcomes and course assignments and, in some cases, inconsistencies between the course and master syllabi.

To address concerns regarding syllabi development, the institution focused on two areas: 1) the development of policy regarding syllabi development and 2) faculty training with respect to the crafting of master and course syllabi. One step in the system was to implement a “course syllabus collection process,” which is monitored by the Dean of Instructional Operations and employs a Share Point site, where syllabi are collected and

maintained for review. Although early results were disappointing, by the Spring 2017 Semester, 92% of full-time faculty members had submitted syllabi to the site.

Page one of the new Course Syllabus Policy is shown below:

Appendix B | Policy on Course Syllabi



Policy on Course Syllabi

Policy Information	
Responsible Unit	Academic Affairs
Reviewing Body	Curriculum Committee
Review Cycle	Annual / November Meeting
Effective Date	March 2017
Last Revised Date	
Type of Policy	Academic Operations

Policy Overview

The distribution of course information (course syllabus) is required for all Southern State Community College courses and should be delivered to students during the first week of class. The course syllabus is the summary of topics, course structure, course policies, and other specific information that a faculty member will deliver and/or require in a particular course. The College's Curriculum Committee is charged with approving the master syllabus for courses offered by Southern State Community College. It is expected that all teaching faculty will use the master, approved syllabi only as a starting point for syllabi construction and exercise their academic freedom in shaping how the course objectives (also referred to as learning outcomes) will be mastered by the student. This policy relates to information that must appear in common on all course syllabi, discretionary information, as well as the processes required for continuous improvement.

A. Syllabus Construction:

The master syllabi or "approved curriculum" is available on the College's website at <https://www.sccc.edu/facultystaff/index.shtml>. The master syllabus is the Curriculum Committee's approved course and includes pre-defined and required components as well as discretionary sections. It is the framework from which teaching faculty can use in the development of a syllabus for their individual course section. The underlying principle guiding course syllabus construction is that students have an increased likelihood for success when they know what is expected of them in the greatest detail possible. Additionally, the consistency in the use and application of pre-defined components strengthens academic integrity across the institution.

Location: Policies/Standards/Procedures | Syllabus Policy | Effective March 2017 | Page Two of Two | 2/2

In support of the new policy, the following procedures have been adopted:

1. *Collection of Course Syllabi (Established Fall 2016)*
2. *Selection Review – Led by the Dean of Instructional Operations, an ad-hoc committee will sample 10% of courses offered during the term. Using a rubric adapted from Columbia University's Center for Teaching Excellence, syllabi will be evaluated from the perspective of "beginning," "emerging," and "exemplary."*
3. *Report for Continuous Improvement – The ad-hoc review committee will compile findings and report to the Curriculum Committee any observable, yet not personally identifiable, trends that promote continuous improvement.*
4. *Timeline for Implementation – The early adoption of a course syllabus collection process has prepared the College for immediate implementation of the syllabus review process.*

Summary Comment: The Southern State Community College interim report provides sufficient evidence to show that the institution has made satisfactory efforts in addressing concerns pertaining to its credit hour definition and the alignment of the

credit hour with student learning outcomes. However, much of the College's work in these areas is newly designed and enacted and must continue to receive institutional attention.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on credit hours and student learning outcomes. An interim report on assessment and student retention, persistence and completion is due 11/30/2017.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2019 – 2020. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2025 – 2026.