

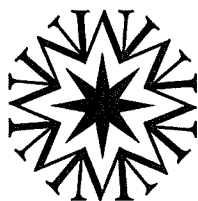
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# Degree Credit Caps:

## Report to the Legislature

Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

October, 2011



**Minnesota**  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

## Report Summary

- 94 % of the degree programs in the System are now in compliance with Minnesota Statute and Chancellor's policy and procedures.
- Twenty-five waiver applications have been submitted over the past two years. Twelve applications have been approved, one was subsequently withdrawn, and twelve are still under review.

## Overview of System Academic Programs

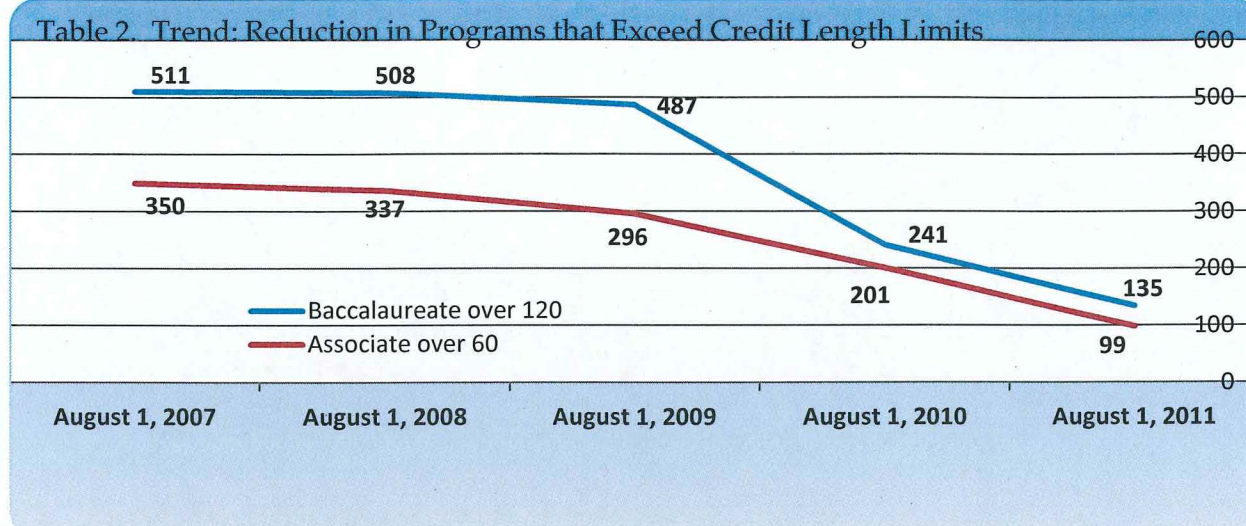
Table 1 shows, as of August 1, 2011, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offered a total of 4,248 academic programs. For the system, 4014 programs (94 percent) are within credit limits set by either Chancellor's procedure or the legislated 60/120 credit limits. The remaining 234 system programs (6 percent) exceed credit limits but will come into compliance by June 29, 2012.

Table 1. Programs In Compliance with Chancellor's Procedures and 60/120 Legislation.			
Programs		In Compliance (ahead of the 2012 deadline)	Working Toward Compliance (will reduce credits or be granted a waiver by FY 2013)
Colleges	3,146	3047 (97%)	99 (3%)
Universities	1,102	967 (88%)	135 (12%)
Total	4,248	4014 (94%)	234 (6%)

## Academic Program Trends

Trend data indicate a significant reduction in the number of programs that exceed the 60/120 credit length limit. Table 2, below, summarizes the changes in the number of programs by type of award and credit length over time. From August, 2007 (when 60/120 legislation became effective), through August, 2011, the number of associate degree programs over 60 credits has been reduced to 99; baccalaureate degree programs over 120 credits have been reduced to 135. All programs over the limit will be in compliance by June 29, 2012, unless granted a waiver to exceed the degree credit cap.

Table 2. Trend: Reduction in Programs that Exceed Credit Length Limits



### Credit Length Waiver Applications

In order to exceed legislated credit limits, colleges and universities must submit single or group waiver applications. Single waiver applications are appropriate for programs that are “one of a kind” within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. Group waiver applications are appropriate when two or more colleges or universities offer programs with similar learning outcomes. Waiver applications must document the need to exceed the 60/120 credit length limits based on industry or professional standards.

Six single waiver applications were submitted to the Office of the Chancellor in FY 2010. As shown in Table 3, Winona State University submitted an application for the Composite Engineering program. Minnesota State University – Mankato submitted applications for Civil Engineering, Automotive Engineering Technology, Computer Engineering Technology, Electrical Engineering Technology, and Manufacturing Engineering Technology.

The applications were reviewed for completeness by the Office of the Chancellor staff prior to being posted to the Waiver Listserv<sup>1</sup> for a 30-day review and comment period. No objections to the engineering program waivers were submitted and the applications were subsequently approved. Waiver application files are available for review upon request.

Table 3 also lists the nineteen Single waiver applications and six Group waiver applications submitted in 2011. MSU, Mankato and St. Cloud State University submitted Group Waiver applications for Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. MSU, Mankato submitted a Single Waiver application along with a new program application for General Engineering. St. Cloud State University submitted a Single Waiver application for their Manufacturing Engineering program.

<sup>1</sup> Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Student and Faculty Associations

Table 3. Disposition of Waiver Applications

**FY 2010 Single Applications**

College/University	Program	Disposition
Winona	BS, Composite Engineering	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Mankato	BS, Civil Engineering	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Mankato	BS, Automotive Engineering Technology	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Mankato	BS, Computer Engineering Technology	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Mankato	BS, Electrical Engineering Technology	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Mankato	BS, Manufacturing Engineering Technology	Granted waiver - 128 credits
North Hennepin Community College	AS, Graphic Design	Reduced to 60 credits.

Table 3 cont.

**FY 2011 Single and Group Applications**

College/University	Program	Credits	Disposition
Normandale CC	Dental Hygiene	90	Considering request for reduction of Gen Ed from 38 to 30 credits.
MSU, Mankato St. Cloud State U	BS, Computer Engineering	128	Granted waiver - 128 credits
MSU, Mankato St. Cloud State U	BS, Electrical Engineering	128	Granted waiver - 128 credits
MSU, Mankato	BS, General Engineering	New	Granted waiver - 128 credits
MSU, Mankato St. Cloud State U	BS, Mechanical Engineering	128	Granted waiver - 128 credits
St. Cloud State U	BS, Manufacturing Engineering	128	Granted waiver - 128 credits
Winona State U	BS, Physical Science/Chemistry Teaching	128	Granted waiver - 128 credits

**Pending Applications**

Minneapolis Community & Technical College	Addiction Counseling	68	Under review
	Cinematography	64	Under review
	Directing and Producing	64	Under review
	Editing and Post Production	64	Under review
	Screenwriting	64	Under review
	Sound Arts	64	Under review
Inver Hills	Emergency Medical Services	65	Requested an extension until 10/31/11



MSU Moorhead	Elementary Inclusive Education	128	Under review
Group Application	Law Enforcement	64	Application is incomplete. Office of the Chancellor is working with the group.
Group Application	Music Education	136	Requested an extension until 11/11/11
Group Application	Nursing	64	Two separate applications were submitted. Office of the Chancellor is working with the group.

### **2011-2012 Single Waiver Applications:**

Inver Hills Community College and Rochester Community and Technical College submitted a Group Waiver application for their Associate in Science (AS) Emergency Medical Services, Intensive Paramedic programs. Rochester subsequently made the decision to close their program. Inver Hills requested an extension until the end of October to prepare and submit a Single Waiver application for their Emergency Medical Services program.

Minneapolis Community and Technical College: MCTC submitted Single Waiver applications for the following programs: 1) Addiction Counseling; 2) Cinematography; 3) Directing and Producing; 4) Editing and Post Production; 5) Screenwriting; and 6) Sound Arts. They are also parties to two Group Waiver applications, Law Enforcement and Nursing.

Normandale Community College: There are five Associate in Applied Science Dental Hygiene degree programs in the System, but only one Associate in Science (AS) degree program at Normandale Community College. The Associate in Applied Science (AAS) programs range from 83 – 88 credits. Normandale submitted a Single Waiver application request to remain at 90 credits.

Winona State University: The University submitted a Single Waiver application for their Physical Science and Chemistry Teaching degree program. Graduates of the program can be credentialed in both Physical Science and Chemistry by the Board of Teaching.

### **2011-2012 Group Waiver Applications:**

Law Enforcement: The Law Enforcement Group Waiver application is still under review. The group is working to resolve some inconsistencies across the System in how the programs are meeting the Peace Officer Standards and Training Board learning outcomes.

Music Education: The deadline for the Music Education Group Waiver application has been extended to November, 2011, to allow time for the remaining programs to join the application.

Nursing: The Nursing Group Waiver application is still under review. Two Nursing Group Waiver applications, one requesting a credit length waiver for 64 credits and the other requesting a credit length waiver for 73 credits were submitted. Additionally, there are three Associate in Science nursing programs that comply with the 60 credit cap mandated by the Legislature. In order to better understand the credit length needs of all system nursing

programs, an analysis of general education and technical credits in nursing programs is underway with the nursing program directors and the Minnesota Board of Nursing.

All waiver application decisions will be made by the end of December, 2011. If an application is not approved, the college or university may appeal the decision to the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.

#### **Plans for FY 2012**

Over the coming year, colleges and universities with degree programs that do not comply with the 60/120 legislation or Chancellor's procedures will be:

1. Completing work on pending waiver applications; and
2. Redesigning programs to reduce the credit length to 60/120 by June 29, 2012.

## APPENDICES A – E

### APPENDIX A: LEGISLATION

Session laws in 2007, 2008 and 2009 affect the credit length of selected degree programs. Session law in 2007<sup>2</sup> directs the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees to set the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate degree at 120 credits, and for an associate degree at 60 credits. The law permits the Board of Trustees to grant waivers for specific degree programs in which industry or professional accreditation standards require a greater number of credits. In January 2009 the Board of Trustees adopted policy and the Chancellor approved procedure to guide the system's response to this legislation.

Legislation in 2008, below, requires the Board of Trustees to annually report to the house and senate higher education committees regarding waivers that have been requested and granted.

#### MAXIMUM CREDIT FOR GRADUATION; WAIVER REPORTING.

*The board must annually by October 1 report to the chairs of the house of representatives and senate committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education policy on the board's current policy setting the maximum number of semester credits required for a baccalaureate and an associate of arts degree at 120 and 60 semester credits or their equivalent, respectively, as required by Laws 2007, chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b). The report must specifically identify requests in the previous academic year for waivers from the policy and the requests granted. The specific identification must include, among other things, the program and the campus for which a request was made and for which a waiver was granted. EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective January 1, 2009.<sup>3</sup>*

Session law in 2009, below, modifies the 2007 legislation by (a) directing that, until July 2, 2012, associate of applied science degree programs be exempt from the 60 credit length limit set by Board of Trustees policy and (b) permitting additional waiver review criteria for emerging or innovative programs.

#### MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES DEGREE REQUIREMENTS.

*Until July 2, 2012, an associate of applied science degree offered by a college in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system is exempt from the 60-semester credit length limit for an associate degree specified in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board Policy number 3.36, part 3, subpart C. The chancellor may consider criteria for waiving the credit length limits under this board policy for emerging or innovative programs. By January 2, 2012, the Minnesota State College Faculty and the Minnesota State College Student Association must present a joint report to the house of representatives and senate committees with jurisdiction over higher education policy on process for reviewing the credit requirements for an associate of applied science degree. EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective the day following final enactment and applies to associate of applied science degrees whether first offered before, on, or after that date.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2007 Chapter 144, article 1, section 4, subdivision 3, paragraph (b)

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Statute, 136F.301

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Session Laws 2009, Chapter 95, article 2, section 44

## **APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND**

Prior to January 2009, chancellor's procedure set academic program credit lengths with the following limits: associate degrees could range from 60 to 64 credits except for associate in applied science degrees that could be up to 72 credits and baccalaureate degrees could range from 120 to 128 credits. The procedures allowed individual academic programs to exceed these limits when criteria were met. (There was no expectation that similar programs at different colleges and universities would adopt a standard credit length.)

The motivation to set lower credit length limits for associate and baccalaureate degrees did not emanate from an academic policy initiative. Rather, the impetus came from student concern about debt load variations based on their observation that credit lengths of seemingly similar programs varied across colleges and universities.

Legislation, cited above, resulted in revised Board of Trustees policy and Chancellor's procedure. These revisions, which considered recommendations from a statewide taskforce, were approved in January 2009.

### **Statewide Taskforce**

A taskforce on Degree Credit Caps was established in the fall of 2007 by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, with representatives from the Academic and Student Affairs Leadership Council, college and university academic administrators, Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF), Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA), Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA), Administrative and Service Faculty (ASF, formerly MSUAASF), and the Office of the Chancellor.

The taskforce charge was to recommend policy and procedure related to statutory requirements for credit limitations on associate and baccalaureate degree programs within the system. The final report included recommendations on (1) applicability to degree program categories, (2) program waiver processes, (3) program-length waiver criteria for all awards, (4) timelines, and (5) policy language. The full report<sup>5</sup> is available on the Web.

### **Examples from Other States**

Several other states have implemented credit length caps: Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin. The CUNY system in New York and the California State University System have also implemented policies addressing credit length limits and degree program comparability.

In 1995 the state of Florida undertook a national survey of 75 universities regarding common practices in baccalaureate programs.<sup>6</sup> The study found that programs clustered in three groups: disciplines with low credit hour requirements, 120-124 credits; disciplines of moderate length, 124-126; and disciplines at 128 credits and a few exceeding 128. Florida subsequently reduced 506 of 614 baccalaureate programs to 120 credit hours.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> Hours to Graduation: A National Survey of Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degrees, 1995.



A California State University system report noted that "... three-fourths of the programs now require 120 total semester units. About 85% have lowered their total unit requirement." At the College of DuPage (the largest community college in Illinois), most associate of applied science programs are 64 credits (consistent with the Illinois Community College System policy). Florida's community college system has established a formal list of approved program credit lengths. Programs may not exceed the approved limits.

### **Revenues and Expenditures**

Reducing the credit length of programs affects revenues and expenditures of colleges and universities. The impact on revenue is easier to estimate than it is for expenditures.

Revenue from student tuition, which accounts for approximately half of system revenue, will decline in proportion to the full year equivalent student enrollment eliminated as a result of course credits being dropped from academic programs. Some academic programs will be granted a waiver to exceed the 60 or 120 credit length limits, which would lessen revenue losses.

Colleges and universities have several options for reducing expenditures. Expenditures may be reduced when courses or course-sections in the major are no longer offered. Workloads may be adjusted and reductions in other budget categories may occur. Expenditures on new courses, sections or programs may lessen the impact of reduced tuition revenue.

### **Timeframe**

Listed below are key dates and activities related to system response for the degree credit cap legislation. Overall, development and implementation processes will take about three and one-half years, that is, from January 2009 when policy and procedure were approved until July 2012. By the fall of 2012, degree programs should be reduced to 60 or 120 credits or be granted a waiver for a longer credit length.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
2007	Session law on degree credit caps.
2008 – March	Taskforce report completed
2008	Statute requires annual reporting
2008 – Nov	Proposed policy and procedure: First reading November 2008
2009 – Jan	Approved policy and procedure: Second reading January 2009
2009 – Jun	Deadline for notice of intent to file a waiver application
2009 – Oct	First report to the legislature
2009 to 2011	Development and submission of waiver applications
2011 – Dec	Waiver disposition deadline
2012 – July	Implementation

## **APPENDIX C: WAIVER APPLICATION CRITERIA AND PROCESS**

Program credit lengths may exceed limits set in procedure only with approval of the Office of Chancellor. Revised policy 3.36 and chancellor's procedures 3.36.1, approved in January of 2009, are being implemented.

Applications for program credit length waivers are initiated on college and university campuses using their agreed upon curriculum review processes. After systemwide review, waiver applications are confirmed by colleges and universities and then submitted to the office of the chancellor.

Guidelines have been developed to assist with the preparation of a waiver requests.

### **Waiver Criteria**

Credit length waivers may be granted when determined necessary to ensure that the degree provided meets industry or professional standards. Program advisory committee recommendations that support the standards may be submitted with the waiver request.

Proposed waiver criteria include:

1. Industry standards
  - a. National or international program certification
  - b. National or international standards, including skill standards
  - c. Standards recommended by a primary employer or from multiple employers within a program service area
2. Professional standards
  - a. National specialized program accreditation
  - b. State licensure requirements
  - c. National practices or standards

### **Waiver Rationale and Evidence**

Colleges and universities must provide supportive documentation which demonstrates that the proposed program credit length is justified by externally established standards or guidelines. Documentation may include specific credit length requirements established by accrediting or certification bodies, evidence of state licensure requirements, research literature which supports industry skill standards or national practices, and letters of support from employers attesting to the need for specific skills requiring longer programs.

### **Program Analysis Guidelines**

An in-depth program analysis is required for all programs seeking a waiver request, except when industry or professional standards set a specific minimum program credit length above 60/120 and the program meets those standards or is designed to be consistent with those standards.

A detailed program analysis must discuss how the program meets industry or professional standards and how it compares in credit length to similar programs within the system. A program analysis covering the following must be included in a group waiver application.

- a. Description (catalog description)
- b. Design (major, emphases, general education, etc.)
- c. Objectives or purposes
- d. Learning outcomes
- e. Curriculum (course listing with course number, name, description and credits)
- f. Comparison to other programs
- g. Other factors, e.g., task analysis

Programs determined to be similar will have the same program credit length. Program similarity is based on the extent to which there are similar program learning outcomes. Curriculum design and course requirements can be different.

### **Articulation Agreements**

Where applicable, articulation agreements must be revised and submitted as part of the waiver request. Colleges and universities complete an articulation agreement table<sup>7</sup> that is reviewed to confirm that all courses in the associate degree program transfer and count toward completion of a specific baccalaureate degree program.

### **Waiver Process**

The process for requesting a waiver to exceed approved credit lengths is described below. The process, which begins on college and university campuses and follows the institution's academic curriculum approval process, has six steps. The quick steps are followed by a flowchart that graphically displays this six step sequence.

#### ***STEP 1. Decide to reduce program credit length OR seek a waiver***

Faculty members initiate the decision-making through their college or university academic curriculum approval process.

A decision is made to A) reduce program credit lengths to 60 or 120 credits; or B) submit a Notice of Intent to file a waiver application.

All forms and instructions can be found at the Academic Programs website<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***STEP 2. Complete an appropriate application for each degree program***

- A. Reduce to 60/120 Credits. If the college or university decides to reduce credit lengths to 60 or 120 credits, complete the REDESIGN: Change Program and/or Emphasis Credit Length form and submit it to the Office of the Chancellor by December 31, 2011. No further action will be necessary unless the program becomes involved in a statewide group waiver application. The

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/index.html>

Office of the Chancellor will use the Degree Credit Caps<sup>9</sup> Web site to inform colleges and universities of programs that have been reduced to 60 or 120 credits.

— Or —

B. Seek a Waiver. Complete a Notice of Intent: 60/120 Credit Waiver form and submit electronically (subject: WAIVER INTENT) to Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu by June 30, 2009. The Office of the Chancellor will post the Notice of Intent to the Waiver Listserv as an information item. Notices of Intent will be used for statewide planning.

### ***STEP 3. Assess for Similarity and Complete a Waiver Application***

Prior to completing any waiver application, colleges and universities assess whether their program is similar to other programs in the state. Colleges and universities can begin the process of comparing programs by reviewing the system program inventory<sup>10</sup> and finding other programs that are grouped in the same CIP code<sup>11</sup>. A comparison of catalog descriptions of program requirements may also be helpful. Other comparisons might include data from national or state studies.

- A. Single Waiver Application. If the program does not appear to be similar to other programs, consult with the Office of the Chancellor and then, if appropriate, complete the SINGLE: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER application and submit it electronically (subject: SINGLE WAIVER) to Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu by December 31, 2009. The Office of the Chancellor determines if a single application is appropriate or if the program should be considered as part of a group application.
- B. Group Waiver Application. If similarity is likely, faculty should begin communicating with faculty at other institutions. Consult with the Office of the Chancellor and then, if appropriate, complete the GROUP: 60/120 CREDIT WAIVER application and submit it electronically (subject: GROUP WAIVER) to Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu by December 31, 2011. The Office of the Chancellor determines if the group application is appropriate.

### ***STEP 4. Completed applications posted to listserv for comment***

Applications will be posted to the Waiver Listserv for 30 business days. Members of the listserv (Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Student and Faculty Associations) will have an opportunity to review the application and submit comments to the listserv. Comments posted to the listserv, including applicants' responses, will be considered by the Office of the Chancellor when reviewing the application.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.programreview.project.mnscu.edu>

<sup>11</sup> CIP is the acronym for the national Classification of Instructional Programs

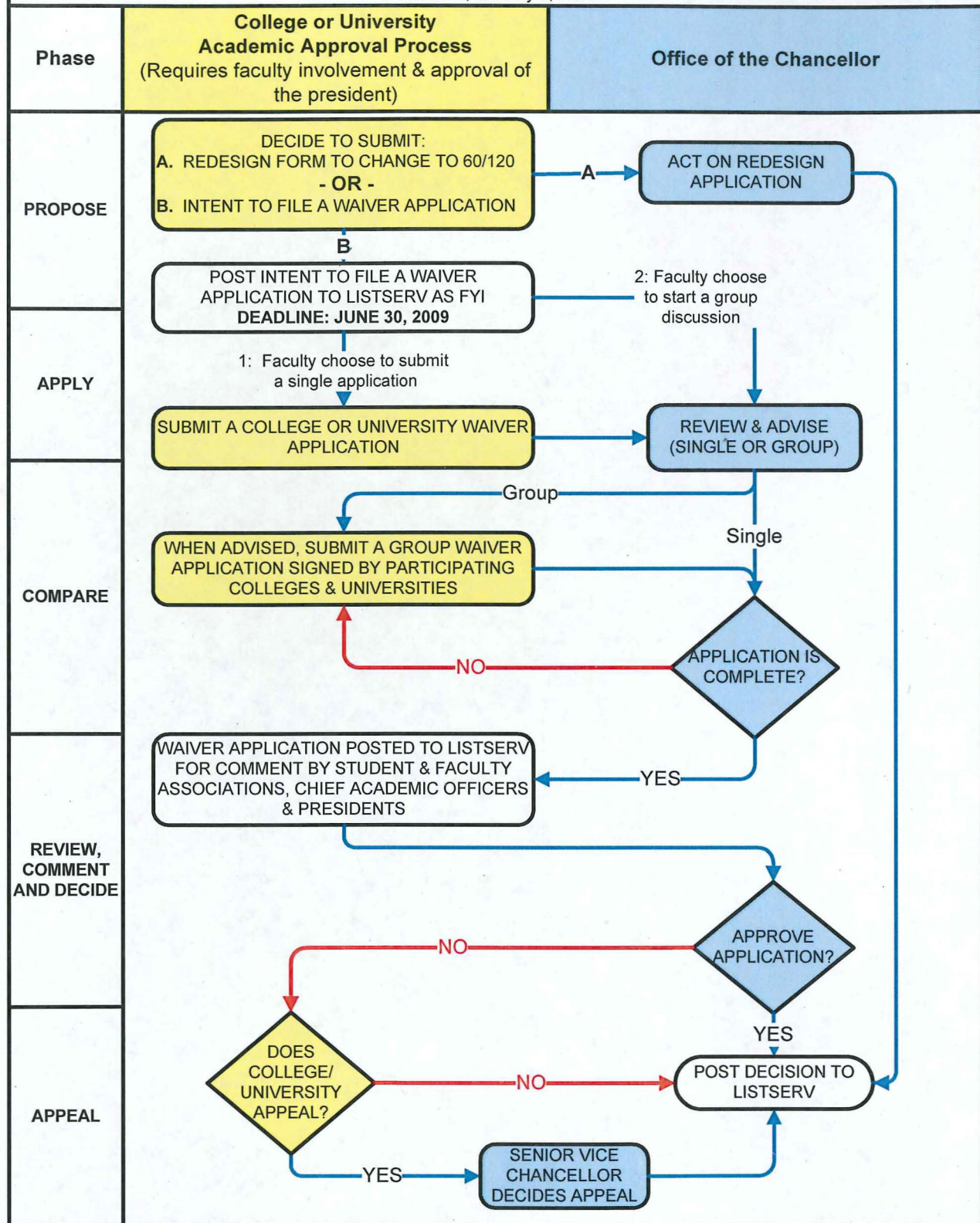
***STEP 5. Accept or reject waiver application***

Decisions will be posted to the listserv. Program credit length will be changed in the official program inventory for single and group waiver applications that have been approved.

***STEP 6. Appeal*** Waiver requests that are not approved may be appealed to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. Submit appeals in writing within 30 business days to [Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu](mailto:Margie.takash@so.mnscu.edu).

# 60/120 Degree Credit Length Review Process

Version 9, January 9, 2009





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ACADEMIC PROGRAMS  
OCTOBER, 2010

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