



Course Substitution Policy

Office of Academic Affairs

1. Purpose

A course substitution allows an approved course to satisfy a specific degree or certificate requirement in place of the course ordinarily required. Substitutions serve students well when they are used sparingly and for sound academic reasons, such as a documented scheduling conflict, a course no longer offered, or coursework whose content closely parallels the required course.

Course substitutions are approved only for extenuating circumstances and are granted on a case-by-case basis. Each request is evaluated on its own merits, considering the student's specific situation and the academic rationale for the substitution. Approval of a previous substitution, whether for the same student or another, does not establish a precedent and does not imply that additional substitutions will be approved. Assumptions should not be made that a past approval guarantees a similar outcome for a future request.

This policy establishes a uniform, university-wide limit on the number of substitutions permitted in any single program of study. Its purpose is to preserve the academic integrity of each degree, ensure that students complete the body of coursework that defines their program, and provide a consistent and transparent process across all colleges and departments. By capping substitutions and documenting each decision, the university protects the alignment between its published curricula and its stated program learning outcomes and supports accurate degree audits and regulatory reporting.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree and certificate programs offered by the university and to all course substitutions against major, minor, concentration, and program-specific requirements.

Distinction from transfer credit and waivers. A substitution replaces one course requirement with a different course of comparable content and rigor. It is distinct from the evaluation of transfer credit and from a requirement waiver, each of which is governed by its own policy. Where a single course is being evaluated both as transfer credit and as a substitution, both policies apply.

Exclusions. This policy does not govern academic accommodations approved through the Office of Equal Opportunity, which are handled under a separate process. It also does not apply to free or open elective credit, where no specific course is required.



3. Policy Statement: The 25% Limit

Substituted courses may satisfy no more than twenty-five percent (25%) of the total credit hours required for a student's program of study. The limit is calculated against the total credit hours required to complete the program, as published in the university catalog in effect for the student's catalog year.

3.1 Calculating the limit

To determine the maximum credit hours eligible for substitution in a given program, multiply the total required program credit hours by 0.25 and round down to the nearest whole credit. The examples below are illustrative:

- **Example A.** A program requiring 36 credit hours permits a maximum of 9 substituted credit hours ($36 \times 0.25 = 9$).
- **Example B.** A program requiring 30 credit hours permits a maximum of 7 substituted credit hours ($30 \times 0.25 = 7.5$, rounded down to 7).
- **Example C.** A program requiring 120 credit hours permits a maximum of 30 substituted credit hours, subject to the protected-course restrictions in Section 4.

Programmatic discretion to set a lower limit. A program governed by specialized or professional accreditation, or by licensure requirements, may adopt a substitution limit below 25% where its accreditor or licensing body requires it. A program may not adopt a limit above 25%. Any program-specific lower limit must be published in the catalog alongside the program's requirements.

4. Protected Courses and Eligibility

Some courses are central to a program's identity and learning outcomes and may not be substituted even when a student remains within the 25% except under the documented exception process in Section 6. The following restrictions apply:

Protected Courses:

- **Core or foundational courses.** Courses designated by a department as core or foundational to the major
- **Capstone and culminating experiences.** Capstones, theses, dissertations, practica, internships, co-ops and other culminating experiences

Eligibility:

- **Comparable content and rigor.** A substituted course must be of comparable academic content, level, and credit value to the required course, and must support the **same program learning outcomes**.



- **Level integrity.** A lower-division course may not substitute for an upper-division requirement, and substitution does not change the course level recorded for degree audit purposes.
- **Minimum grade.** A substituted course must be completed with a grade that meets or exceeds the minimum grade the program requires for the course being replaced.

5. Approval Procedure

All substitution requests follow the sequence below. A request is not effective until it is recorded by the Office of the Registrar. Approved course substitutions must be recorded in the university's degree audit system before the substituted coursework can count toward satisfying a degree requirement for institutional or federal reporting purposes, including financial aid eligibility. To ensure this, the substitution and its approval must be received and processed by the Office of the Registrar prior to the end of the first week of the semester.

1. **Initiation.** The student submits a Course Substitution Request, including the course syllabus or catalog description and a written rationale, to the academic advisor.
2. **Departmental review.** The department chair or program director evaluates academic equivalency and alignment with program learning outcomes and approves or denies the request.
3. **Dean's Office review.** The Dean's Office (Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, or Dean) reviews the request and verifies the request is necessary and is within published limits. Any request that would exceed the 25% limit or involve a protected course is referred to the college/school Dean under Section 6.
4. **Recording.** The Office of the Registrar verifies the calculation, records the approved substitution in the degree audit system, and retains all documentation in the student's academic record.

Effect on the transcript. A student's official transcript lists the courses taken and grades earned at the university. It does not record course substitutions. An approved substitution allows a course to satisfy a degree or certificate requirement, but the transcript continues to show the course title, number, and grade exactly as taken, not the requirement it was approved to satisfy.

A change of program or a break in enrollment may invalidate a prior approval, in which case a new request is required for the new program.

6. Exceptions

Requests that exceed the 25% limit or that involve a protected course are not granted as a matter of routine. Such a request may be considered only where the student demonstrates extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control, and only with the written approval of the college/school



Dean. Failure to enroll in a required course when it was available does not constitute an extenuating circumstance.

Each exception must be substantiated with academic reasons that become a permanent part of the student's academic record. The dean's decision is documented in writing and reported to the Office of the Registrar, which tracks the volume and basis of exceptions for periodic review by the Federal Compliance Committee.

7. Documentation and Review

The Office of the Registrar maintains a record of every approved substitution and exception. These records support degree audit accuracy, internal program review, and institutional reporting to the Higher Learning Commission and to specialized accreditors. The Federal Compliance Committee reviews this policy on a defined cycle, and at least once every three years, to confirm that the limit and procedure continue to serve students and protect program integrity.

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