

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**  
**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**COMMITTEE:** Academic Affairs

**NO.:** AAC 13-47

**COMMITTEE DATE:** June 11, 2013

**BOARD DATE:** June 18, 2013

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**VALOR ACT ACADEMIC CREDIT EVALUATION POLICY**

**MOVED:** The Board hereby approves the VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy.

**Authority:** G.L. c. 15A, §42; Chapter 108 of the Acts of 2012 (Senate Bill 2254).

**Contact:** Dr. Shelley Tinkham, Assistant Commissioner for Academic, P-16 and Veterans Policy

## **VALOR ACT ACADEMIC CREDIT EVALUATION POLICY**

### **Background**

On May 31, 2012, Governor Deval Patrick signed Senate Bill 2254, "An Act Relative to Veterans' Access, Livelihood, Opportunity, and Resources", also known as the VALOR Act. Chapter 108 of the Acts of 2012. Among other provisions, the VALOR Act amended the Board of Higher Education's (BHE) enabling legislation and added a statutory requirement that the BHE develop a policy requiring each public institution of higher education to develop a set of policies and procedures governing the evaluation of a student's military occupation(s), military training, coursework, and experience, in order to determine whether academic credit shall be awarded for such experience, training, and coursework. G.L. c. 15A, § 42. Furthermore, the Act requires institutions to designate a single point of contact for student veterans to contact about the policy and who will also make determinations concerning the award of academic credit for prior military occupation(s), military training, coursework, and experience. To the greatest extent possible, the Act shall provide for consistent application across the system of public higher education in the Commonwealth.

### **Guiding Philosophy**

The guiding philosophy behind the Board of Higher Education's VALOR Act's Academic Credit Evaluation Policy is as follows:

1. The Board of Higher Education encourages and expects public higher education institutions to award academic credit for students' previous military occupation, military training, coursework and experiences towards degrees and certificates.
2. The determination of academic credit shall be determined by the receiving institution.
3. Academic credit shall be awarded based upon each institution's admission standards and shall be consistent with the mission of the Commonwealth's system of higher education.
4. It should be clear to prospective students how military occupation, experience, training and coursework credits may be awarded by any Massachusetts public higher education institution.
5. The policy shall to the greatest extent possible provide for consistent application by all Massachusetts public higher education institutions.

### **The VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy**

The Board of Higher Education requires each public higher education institution to develop a VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy regarding the evaluation of a student's military occupation(s), military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit, subject to the following guidelines:

1. Academic credit shall be granted to students with military occupation, training, experience or coursework per the evaluation of the receiving Massachusetts public institution.
2. Public institutions of higher education in Massachusetts may use multiple methods for evaluating military occupation, training, experience and coursework for academic credit, including the ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services<sup>1</sup>, CLEP<sup>2</sup>, DANTES Subject Standardized Tests<sup>3</sup> and other methods as deemed appropriate by the institution, such as portfolio review.
3. Academic credits earned through the evaluation of military occupation, training, experience and coursework are transferrable within the public higher education system in accordance with the Mass Transfer agreement.
4. Each institution shall designate an individual to be the single point of contact for student veterans to contact for guidance on the Valor Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy. This individual's contact information shall be publicized and made readily available to students.
5. Eligible students shall receive accurate and complete academic counseling in regards to the policy when they are admitted.
6. Each institution shall display its Valor Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy on its website and within its catalog.
7. Each institution will be required to forward its Valor Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy to the Department of Higher Education and other supporting information for evaluation on a regular basis as deemed by the Department of Higher Education.

## **Timeline**

Institutions shall be informed of the policy in July 2013 and required to submit their individual VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policies to the Department for review

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<sup>1</sup> ACE collaborates with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to review military training and experiences and recommend appropriate college credit for members of the Armed Forces. All recommendations are based on ACE reviews conducted by college and university faculty members who are actively teaching in the areas they review.

<sup>2</sup> CLEP is a group of standardized tests that assess college-level knowledge in several subject areas that are administered and created by the College Board. Each institution awards credit to students who meet the college's minimum qualifying score for that exam. The tests are useful for students who have obtained knowledge outside the classroom, such as through independent study, job experience, or military training.

<sup>3</sup> DSST (formerly DANTES Subject Standardized Tests) are credit-by-examination tests originated by the United States Department of Defense's Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) program. The program is an extensive series of 38 examinations in college subject areas that are comparable to the final or end-of-course examinations in undergraduate college courses. DSST's are available for both upper and lower level credit.

by January 15, 2014. Campuses must be compliance with all aspects of the VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy by July 1, 2014.

The Department of Higher Education shall provide the Board of Higher Education with a report on the implementation of the VALOR Act Academic Credit Evaluation Policy, along with suggested revisions, within 18 to 24 months.

**Appendix:** *Relevant Section of Senate Bill 2254, "An Act Relative to Veterans' Access, Livelihood, Opportunity, and Resources."*

SECTION 5. Chapter 15A of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the following section:-

31           Section 42. (a) The council shall develop and adopt a written policy requiring each public  
32 institution of higher education to develop a set of policies and procedures governing the  
33 evaluation of a student's military occupation, military training, coursework and experience, to  
34 determine whether academic credit shall be awarded by the institution for the evaluated  
35 occupation, experience, training and coursework. The council's policy may require that the  
36 occupation or occupations, training, experience or courses meet the standards of the American  
37 Council on Education or equivalent standards for awarding academic credit. The council may  
38 also develop and adopt a written policy requiring each public institution of higher education to  
39 develop a set of policies and procedures to standardize credit-by-exam equivalencies for exams  
40 funded through the department of defense. The educational credit shall be awarded based upon  
41 each institution's admissions standards and shall be consistent with the mission of the  
42 commonwealth's system of public higher education, as defined by the council under section 1.  
43 Each public institution of higher education shall designate a single point of contact for a student  
44 who is enrolled in such an institution and who is also a veteran, as defined in clause Forty-third  
45 of section 7 of chapter 4 to conduct such an evaluation and determination.

46           (b) The council shall consult with the chief executive officers of each public institution of  
47 higher education in implementing the policy set forth in subsection (a) and the policy adopted by  
48 the council shall, to the greatest extent possible, provide for consistent application by all the  
49 commonwealth's public institutions of higher education and promote accurate and complete  
50 academic counseling.

51           SECTION 6. The General Laws are hereby amended by inserting after chapter 15D the  
52 following chapter:-



## Military Credit Policies at Massachusetts Public Higher Education Institutions

Status Report | 2013

### Background

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On May 31, 2012, Governor Deval Patrick signed Senate Bill 2254, *An Act Relative to Veterans' Access, Livelihood, Opportunity, and Resources*, also known as the VALOR Act. Among other provisions, the Valor Act calls for the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education to develop a policy (referred to as the Valor Act Military Credit Policy) requiring each public institution of higher education to develop a set of policies and procedures governing the evaluation of a student's military occupation(s), military training, coursework, and experience, in order to determine whether academic credit shall be awarded for these activities.

To the greatest extent possible, the Valor Act should provide for consistent application across all twenty-nine public campuses while also being consistent with each institution's admission standards and the mission of the Commonwealth's system of public higher education. The legislation also requires each public campus to designate a single point of contact for student veterans to contact about policies and procedures in regards to the evaluation of prior military experience, coursework, etc.

In response, the Department of Higher Education (DHE) circulated an online questionnaire in February 2012 to all Massachusetts public campuses seeking information on institutions' current policies and procedures regarding the evaluation of students' military experience and coursework for academic credit, campuses' opinions of common methods for evaluating military experience and coursework and other pertinent information. This report provides a summary of the information collected and communicates best practices as reported by the campuses.

### Questionnaire: Detailed Outcomes

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Of the twenty-nine public institutions in Massachusetts, 83 percent responded, a total of 24 institutions. This includes five University of Massachusetts campuses, eight state universities and eleven community colleges.

The results of the survey are divided by the topics listed below. Following each topic are pertinent open-ended remarks.

- I. **Current methods used for evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit;**
- II. **Preferred methods for evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit;**
- III. **Alternative methods for evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit; and**

**IV. Benefits and challenges in evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit.**

**I: Current methods** used in evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit

- Seventeen campuses identified themselves as current participating members of the American Council on Education (ACE).

**Table 1: ACE Membership**

	<b>ACE Membership</b>	<b>Not a member of ACE</b>
2 Year Institutions	9	2
4 Year Institutions	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>

The legislation requires each public campus to designate a single point of contact for student veterans to contact about policies and procedures in regards to the evaluation of prior military experience, coursework, etc.

- Twenty-two campuses responded that there is a specific staff member at their institution whose responsibilities include providing information to student veterans regarding the evaluation of prior military experience and coursework for college credit.

**Table 2: Institutional Staff Member Responsible for Evaluation of Prior Military Credit**

	<b>Specific Staff Identified</b>	<b>Staff not Identified</b>
2 Year Institutions	10	1
4 Year Institutions	12	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>

- A majority of campuses (13) responded that this specific position does not share in the responsibilities of the institution’s certifying official for veterans benefits.<sup>1</sup>

Campuses are employing a variety of methods in evaluating students’ military training and coursework to determine whether academic credit shall be awarded. Such methods include: ACE Credit Recommendations<sup>2</sup>, DANTES Subject Standardized Tests<sup>3</sup>, and College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)<sup>4</sup>. Twenty-two campuses, comprised of eleven community colleges and eleven four year institutions, identified using at least one of these methods to evaluate military training for college credit.

**Table 3: Current Methods Used to Evaluate Military Training**

	<b>ACE Credit Recommendations</b>	<b>DANTES</b>	<b>CLEP</b>
2 -Year Institutions	11	8	11
4 -Year Institutions	11	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>

- The vast majority of campuses use ACE Credit Recommendations as their primary method of evaluating military coursework and experience, followed by CLEP and DANTES.

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<sup>1</sup> A certifying official is the representative of an education or training establishment who is authorized to sign and submit documents to the Department of Veterans Affairs verifying a veteran’s enrollment, change in status, receipt of advance payment, and any other circumstances that affect the amount or duration of education assistance benefits.

<sup>2</sup> ACE collaborates with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to review military training and experiences and recommend appropriate college credit for members of the Armed Forces. All recommendations are based on ACE reviews conducted by college and university faculty members who are actively teaching in the areas they review.

<sup>3</sup> DSST (formerly DANTES Subject Standardized Tests) are credit-by-examination tests originated by the United States Department of Defense's Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) program. The program is an extensive series of 38 examinations in college subject areas that are comparable to the final or end-of-course examinations in undergraduate college courses. DSST's are available for both upper and lower level credit.

<sup>4</sup> CLEP is a group of standardized tests that assess college-level knowledge in several subject areas that are administered and created by the College Board. Each institution awards credit to students who meet the college’s minimum qualifying score for that exam. The tests are useful for students who have obtained knowledge outside the classroom, such as through independent study, job experience, or military training.

Although the majority of the campuses have established policies for the evaluation of military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit, it appears that only about 50% of these campuses are disclosing this information publicly.

- Eleven campuses reported that the current policy on the evaluation of military occupations, training, coursework, and experience for academic credit is published in the institution’s academic catalog.
- Thirteen campuses reported that the current policy on the evaluation of military occupations, training, coursework, and experience for academic credit is available on the institution’s website.

**II: Preferred methods used in evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit**

- Twenty-two campuses agreed that college credit should be granted to students with military experience or coursework that is recognized by the American Council on Education per the evaluation of the receiving Massachusetts public institution.

Campuses were asked to indicate their preferred method of evaluating a student’s prior military experience and coursework for academic credit. As illustrated in Table 4, ninety-two percent of campuses reported that preferred primary method to evaluate military training is ACE credit recommendations.

**Table 4: Preferred Primary Method to Evaluate Military Training**

	<b>ACE Credit Recommendations</b>	<b>DANTES Subject Standardized Tests</b>	<b>CLEP</b>
2-Year Institutions	10	0	1
4-Year Institutions	12	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

- Eighteen campuses also reported that Colleges and universities should use multiple methods (DANTES, CLEP, ACE, etc.) to determine the evaluation of military experience and coursework for college credit.

*Campus Comments:*

- “ACE credit recommendations should be accepted as transfer credit at the accepting institution. They have already been reviewed by subject matter specialists that consist of academic dean and professionals in the given field being evaluated. Accepting ACE as transfer credit would ease the military

members' transition back into an academic setting and speed up the transition into the workforce.”

**III: *Alternative methods used in evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit***

Although using ACE credit recommendations, DANTES Subject Standardized Tests and CLEP examinations are considered best practices for ensuring the academic success of student veterans, campuses have indicated several other alternative methods of evaluating student's prior military experience and coursework for academic credit for special circumstances.

*Campus Comments:*

- “Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) Special Operations Language Training (SOLT) Evaluation credit by assessment is reviewed by department content experts to determine alignment between skills necessary for military occupations and coursework. “
- “For some students, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) partnership is the best option. If a student is unable to obtain transfer credit through DANTES, ACE or pass a CLEP exam to earn credit for the learning they acquired through military experience, they may still qualify to earn credit for prior learning through CAEL.” Through the CAEL program, students consult with an advisor, enroll in a distance learning CAEL course, and submit a portfolio and paper on prior learning experiences for evaluation. The college reviews the portfolio and paper and if applicable, awards academic credit which is documented on the student's transcript.
- “We also allow all students, including student veterans, to challenge certain academic classes. If the student passes the challenge exam then they are awarded credit for the course without having to take the class.”

**IV: *Benefits and challenges in evaluating military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit.***

Massachusetts public institutions regard the evaluation of military training, coursework, and experience for academic credit as an important and beneficial policy to ensure student veteran's academic success. However, campuses also report a number of frustrations and concerns.

*Campus Comments:*

- “Corresponding class work compared to military training can be subjective. Students have received inconsistent credit evaluation.”

- “Faculty members and department chairs sometimes have a lack of understanding when it comes to ACE credit recommendations [and a] lack of understanding of military occupational specialties performed by members of the military.”
- “Credits don't line up with the college's credits, for example the college offers a three credit management course and many of the military course recommendations call for one credit in management.”
- “CLEP and DANTES incur additional fees by the student.”<sup>5</sup>

### Questionnaire Summary

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Campuses' current practices and opinions about evaluating military experiences for academic credit should facilitate the implementation of the Valor Act. Most campuses use ACE Credit Recommendations as their primary method for evaluating military experiences for academic credit and use other methods as well. Also, the majority of campuses have a point of contact for student veterans to seek guidance about academic evaluation concerns. There are challenges, however. Campuses report that evaluating prior learning can be difficult due to the nature of its subjective nature and a lack of staff familiarity with ACE recommendations. They identify a need for staff training. Furthermore, some campuses are not making information about prior military learning evaluation methods and procedures available to students.

### Lessons Learned from Other States and Moving Forward

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Other states have implemented policies similar to the VALOR Act from which the Department can learn best practices. In 2011, the Ohio Board of Regents approved a policy requiring that all Ohio public institutions of higher education use the *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Education Experiences in the Armed Services* when evaluating and awarding academic credit for military training, experience, and coursework. In December 2012, the Florida State Board of Education passed a similar measure requiring each Florida College System institution to adopt a policy of awarding academic credit to students with military training, experience, and coursework recognized by ACE, allowing for credit transfer when applicable. Florida's policy requires the institutions to note the evaluation on students' transcript and publish the policy in the institution's catalog and on its website. Florida is in process of developing procedures for implementing the policy and observes a great deal of subjectivity when applying *ACE Guide* recommendations to actual course offerings—similar to what Massachusetts campuses have reported—and will offer workshops for admissions directors and registrars across the state to share best practices. Eventually, Florida would like to develop common crosswalks between ACE recommendations and its common course numbering system, a process which is likely to be labor-intensive and time-consuming.

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<sup>5</sup> Each CLEP and DANTES examination is \$80. In addition, most test centers charge a nonrefundable administration fee, directly payable to the institution.

The DHE will consider the Ohio and Florida policies and procedures, as well as Massachusetts campuses' current and preferred methods for awarding academic credit for military experience, when drafting the Board's VALOR Act policy. Furthermore, the DHE recently submitted a query through the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) seeking information about other states' policies in regards to the evaluation of military experiences. In addition to Ohio and Florida, Hawaii, Virginia and Utah passed similar legislation in 2012 and 2013. Hawaii appears to be developing its own assessment for prior military learning and Utah may defer to Council of Adult and Experiential Learning evaluative materials. All of these states are in various stages of developing policies and procedures related to awarding credit for military experiences. New Hampshire has proposed similar legislation to the VALOR Act.

The DHE is planning to convene public higher education representatives at a statewide conference in summer or fall 2013 to discuss institutional strategies and best practices when evaluating prior military experiences for academic credit. Representatives from ACE, CLEP and DANTES will be invited to give workshops. This conference will also provide an opportunity to discuss the provisions of the VALOR Act.