

Policy On Free Electives in Programs Exceeding the University Minimum Credit Requirement

Background and Rationale

Degree requirements are intended to define the minimum academic work necessary for completion of a program. Illinois Institute of Technology establishes a minimum credit requirement for undergraduate degrees, which is currently 120 credit hours for a standard four-year bachelor's degree. Programs may exceed that minimum when additional coursework is required to meet disciplinary standards, accreditation requirements, or clearly defined program learning objectives.

A review of undergraduate curricula identified programs that require total credit hours above the applicable university minimum while also including required free electives. Free electives permit unrestricted student choice and are not aligned with specific program learning objectives.

While elective flexibility remains an important feature of undergraduate education, required credit hours above the university minimum should represent intentional curricular requirements tied to program outcomes or external standards. Requiring free electives in programs that already exceed the university minimum results in required credit hours that are not aligned with defined program learning objectives. In addition, required credits above the university minimum may limit students' ability to engage in internships, cooperative education, research, and other professional development or co-curricular opportunities within a standard four-year timeframe. Aligning program requirements with the university minimum can increase students' flexibility in how they allocate their academic and professional efforts and supports timely progress toward degree completion.

When programs require credit hours beyond the university minimum, those additional credit hours should reflect clearly articulated program learning objectives or externally mandated requirements.

For purposes of this policy, the university minimum refers to the formally approved minimum credit requirement for the applicable undergraduate degree category. A standard four-year bachelor's program is evaluated against the 120-credit minimum; a designated three-year bachelor's program is evaluated against the 90-credit minimum.

Policy

Programs may not require free electives if they require total credit hours in excess of the university minimum.

Programs that exceed the university minimum credit requirement should ensure that all required credit hours are clearly aligned with defined program learning objectives or externally mandated curricular standards.

Implementation

Programs currently exceeding the university minimum credit requirement and including required free electives should review their curricula and bring them into alignment with this policy through the normal curricular review process.

Programs may:

- Reduce total required credit hours to the university minimum while retaining free electives within that total; or
- Maintain total credit hours above the university minimum provided that all required credits are intentionally structured and aligned with program learning objectives.

Revisions should proceed through established governance and curricular processes.