

Issue Paper 1

Program Integrity and Improvement Issues

Issue: Clock to Credit Hour Conversion

Statutory Cites: None

Regulatory Cites: §668.8(k)

Summary of issue: Should we clarify and simplify the clock to credit hour conversion regulations?

Interface with State and Federal requirements

Since the publication of the 2010 Program Integrity regulations, the Department has received many questions and comments regarding the clock to credit hour conversion rule. Historically, the main goal of this rule was to ensure that, when institutions with programs that have traditionally measured their academic instruction and progress in clock hours convert those measurements to credit hours, they do not increase the amount of Federal Title IV aid students would qualify for while attending those programs. Section 668.8(1) prescribes the formula that institutions must use to convert affected programs from clock hours to credit hours for the purpose of awarding Title IV funding to students.

The 2010 Program Integrity regulations expanded on that goal in several ways, the first of which was to require that certain programs that have converted to credit hours (in accordance with our conversion formula) nevertheless continue to be treated as clock hour programs for Title IV purposes because of State or Federal approval or licensure rules.

Section 668.8(k)(2)(i) requires that a program measure progress in clock hours for Title IV purposes if State or Federal laws premise program approval or licensure or the authorization to practice the occupation that the student is intending to pursue on measuring the student's progress in clock hours.

Prohibition on conversion based on attendance requirements

The 2010 Program Integrity regulations also expanded on the goal of the clock to credit hour conversion rule by tying attendance requirements to the issue of whether a program should be a clock hour program. Section 668.8(k)(2)(iii) requires a program to be a clock hour program if the institution does not offer all the underlying clock hours for a converted program or if the institution "requires attendance in the clock hours that are the basis for the credit hours." Since implementation of the Program Integrity regulations, this part of the regulations has created a fair amount of confusion and many program participants have questioned the need for it.

Compliance with the definition of a credit hour

The 2010 Program Integrity regulations (in §668.8(k)(2)(ii)) also require that a program that has been converted from clock hours to credit hours nevertheless be considered to be a clock hour program if the resulting credit hours are not in compliance with the definition of a credit hour in 34 CFR 600.2. And, with respect to the conversion formula, §668.8(1)(2) of those regulations specifies that the institution can use a slightly lesser number of hours of instruction in its

conversion formula (than would normally be required) under certain circumstances if the institution's accrediting agency or State agency has not identified any deficiencies with the institution's procedures for determination of credit hours. The regulation specifies that, for this purpose, the definition of a credit hour in 34 CFR 600.2 is to be used.

Comments and questions:

Interface with State and Federal requirements

- Should we modify or delete §668.8(k)(2)(i), which requires that a program measure progress in clock hours for Title IV purposes if clock hours are required for State or Federal approval or if completion of clock hours is required to practice the occupation that the student is intending to pursue? (If so, should §668.8 (k)(3) also be modified or deleted as a conforming change?)
- Is use of clock hours for licensing or other governmental approvals or authorizations relevant to determining whether a program may be offered in credit hours for Title IV purposes?

Prohibitions on conversion based on attendance requirements

- Should we delete the requirements in §668.8(k)(2)(iii) for a program to be treated as a clock hour program, notwithstanding that it has converted to a credit hour program, based on an institutional requirement that students attend certain hours of the program? Should the balance of §668.8(k)(2)(iii) be deleted as well, since it is redundant of the requirements of §668.8(l)?
- Should we put the institution and its accrediting agency generally in charge of determining whether a program is measured in clock or credit hours – as long as clock to credit conversions are numerically correct and that the results are used appropriately in the awarding of Title IV aid to students, i.e., as long as the institution complies with our formula in §668.8(l) for converting clock hours to credit hours?

Compliance with the definition of a credit hour

- Should we delete §668.8(k)(2)(ii)? That is, since we establish the formula that institutions must use when they convert a program from clock hours to credit hours (i.e., we specify the maximum number of credit hours that the program can have based on the number of clock hours the institution provides) and, since the definition of a credit hour in 34 CFR 600.2 references our formula when there is a conversion, should we continue to consider a converted program to nevertheless be a clock hour program on the ground that the credit hours in the program are not in compliance with the credit hour definition in 34 CFR 600.2?
- Given our clock hour to credit hour formula and our incorporation of that formula into the definition of a credit hour in 34 CFR 600.2, do we need to continue to reference an accrediting agency's or State agency's findings with respect to possible deficiencies in an institution's determination of the number of credit hours in its converted programs in those instances where an institution uses §668.8(l)(2) to convert clock hours to credit hours?