

Guidelines for Validating Instructor Credentials to Teach

SACS Requirements and University Expectations

These guidelines apply to all instructional faculty, including graduate teaching assistants, who are instructors of record at Texas A&M University and its two branch campuses, Texas A&M University at Galveston and Texas A&M University at Qatar.

In its Faculty Credentials Guidelines, the Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) provides the following guidance regarding qualifications of individuals serving as instructors of record:

“When an institution defines faculty qualifications using faculty credentials, institutions should use the following as credential guidelines:

- a) Faculty teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level: doctorate or master’s degree in the teaching discipline or master’s degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).
- b) Faculty teaching associate degree courses designed for transfer to a baccalaureate degree: doctorate or master’s degree in the teaching discipline or master’s degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).
- c) Faculty teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree: bachelor’s degree in the teaching discipline, or associate’s degree and demonstrated competencies in the teaching discipline.
- d) Faculty teaching baccalaureate courses: doctorate or master’s degree in the teaching discipline or master’s degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).
- e) Faculty teaching graduate and post-baccalaureate course work: earned doctorate/terminal degree in the teaching discipline or a related discipline.
- f) Graduate teaching assistants: master’s in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations.”

SACSCOC standards on faculty qualifications also state:

“The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes.”

At Texas A&M University, its branch campuses in Galveston and Qatar and the McAllen Higher Education Center, the primary indicator used to determine instructors’ qualifications to teach is a terminal degree in the discipline of instruction. In some cases, faculty members are considered qualified for instruction based on factors other than an in-discipline terminal degree, such as:

- Terminal degree in a closely related field
- A master’s degree or at least 18 semester credit hours of graduate-level coursework in the same or a closely related field

- Professional licensure or certification in a related field or profession
- Significant professional, research, or teaching experience in the same or closely related field

If any of the bulleted items above apply, the department is responsible for describing such qualifications for each instructor of record. Note that length of time alone is not enough justification and a detailed description of qualifications is needed.

Semester-based Credentialing Process

The Office of the Dean of Faculties (DOF) assumes responsibility for verifying the teaching qualifications for faculty. Colleges and departments are responsible for overseeing the hiring of graduate assistants who serve as instructors of record.

We use the federal Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes to determine whether an instructor's educational background is in the same discipline as courses they teach. The CIP codes for courses are maintained in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's course inventory for Texas A&M University. The CIP code of each instructor's highest earned degree is maintained in the Office of the Dean of Faculties faculty database. Because faculty members sometimes teach courses that are closely related to, but not in the exact same discipline as their highest-earned degree, the Office of the Dean of Faculties worked with deans and department heads to establish a cross-walk that documents similar disciplines. The use of this cross-walk is described below.

Prior to the first day of classes, the DOF Credentialing Portal compares the CIP code for each instructor's earned degrees to the CIP code for course sections the instructor is assigned to teach. If degrees, master's and/or doctoral depending on the course level being taught, and course CIP codes are not an exact match (four digits), the Office of the Dean of Faculties checks the cross-walk to determine whether or not the instructor is qualified to teach the course because the disciplines are similar. If the degree and course CIP codes still do not match, the department/college must provide a detailed justification that relates the instructor's education (including certificates) and professional experience to the course content in order to verify and document the instructor's qualifications to teach each course.

Recommendations for Colleges and Departments

Courses—Course CIP codes that correspond to the subject matter of that course are assigned by the department or unit administering the course, typically when the course is first proposed. CIP codes reflect the content of the course and not the department in which the course is offered.

Course CIP codes for all Texas A&M University programs are included in an inventory maintained by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and may be downloaded from the Board's data server (<http://www.txhighereddata.org/interactive/UnivCourse>). We recommend departments periodically review CIP codes assigned to their courses to ensure alignment between the CIP code, course content, and degree program. Administrative units wishing to change CIP codes assigned to courses already listed on the THECB inventory should contact the Office of the Registrar for information regarding the request and approval process.

New Faculty—At the time of hire, in the DOF Electronic Hiring Portal, administrative units (departments or colleges) are required to complete credentialing information for the new faculty member: earned degrees (degrees are verified and transcripts requested), courses the individual is expected to teach,

and the individual's qualifications to teach assigned courses (if the CIP code of the qualifying degrees do not match or are included in the cross-walk). The process described above for Semester-based Credentialing is the same process followed to credential new faculty members.

Graduate Teaching Assistants — To meet SACS guidelines, all graduate students assigned as instructors of record should have satisfactorily completed a master's degree in the discipline or related discipline or at least 18 semester-based graduate credit hours in the same or a closely related discipline to that of instruction. The DOF Credentialing Portal captures the current number of graduate credit hours completed by the student. The Office of the Dean of Faculties verifies that the individual is teaching a course in the same program where they are getting their degree and for which they have completed 18 semester-based credit hours. If the program differs from the course subject, a detailed justification, provided by the department head or dean, is needed. Credits for which an "incomplete" has been assigned, such as research hours, should not be included in determining the number of graduate hours completed. Graduate student instructors of record should receive appropriate training prior to instruction. Training may include completion of the teaching assistant training provided by the Center for Teaching Excellence, auditing the course during the term prior to instruction, or in-department training. All graduate student instructors of record must be supervised by a faculty member holding teaching credentials appropriate to the course and should be regularly evaluated on their teaching performance.

Departments wishing to appoint as instructors of record faculty or graduate students with fewer than 18 completed graduate credit hours in the discipline assigned to teach, should maintain documentation demonstrating additional credentials that qualify the individual for instruction. In every case, the department should receive prior approval from the Office of the Dean of Faculties for these exceptions.

CIP Code References

Course Inventory, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

<http://www.txhighereddata.org/interactive/UnivCourse/>

Degree Program Inventory, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/apps/ProgramInventory/InvSearch.cfm>

CIP Code Tools, National Center for Education Statistics

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/Default.aspx?y=55>