

To: Shared Governance Council

From: Dr. John B. Cook, President

Action: **Approval – Policy on Credit for Prior Learning (Operational)**

Date: January 16, 2025

Next Steps: To be shared with STCC Board of Trustees on January 27, 2025

In accordance with formal enabling by vote of the STCC Board of Trustees (June 27, 2022) regarding shared governance, including clarification of a process by which “high-level” recommendations regarding institutional and operational policy are reviewed, the Shared Governance Council (SGC) has reached consensus regarding codification of a policy specific to Credit for Prior Learning (CPL).

I am pleased to provide endorsement of this policy, which was submitted for SGC review after diligence by the All-Unit Congress. The formalization of this operational policy is approved; no action is needed by Trustees, and implementation will occur starting Fall Semester 2025.

The approved policy entails the following:

Policy Statement

Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) recognizes that students may possess knowledge and skills acquired through various learning experiences outside of our academic programs, including but not limited to work experience, professional training, military training, and other educational domains. As part of our commitment to supporting diverse learning pathways and facilitating student success, STCC offers opportunities for students to earn academic credit (“Credit for Prior Learning” or CPL) through various options [which are defined in an *Alternative Sources of Credit* resource that includes, but is not limited to, Advanced Placement, Portfolio and Military Experience]. Qualified faculty in each discipline will define the course criteria and assess fulfillment to determine the credit awarded, with final approval by the appropriate Division Dean as the representative of the Division of Academic Affairs.

Credit Limitation

Students may earn a maximum of 30 credits through CPL towards their Associate degree at STCC; no more than 25% of credits required for a Certificate program may be earned.

Transfer Disclaimer

The transferability of CPL credits awarded at STCC to other institutions is not guaranteed. Acceptance of CPL credits is subject to the policies and requirements of the receiving institution; it is the student's responsibility to consult with their intended transfer institutions regarding the acceptance and applicability of CPL credits. Students pursuing CPL are strongly encouraged to complete their Associate degree or Certificate program at STCC.

Background:

With appreciation for committee work and diligence conducted by the All-Unit Congress, which included review and revision by the Academic Standing Committee in collaboration with Academic Affairs leadership, a dedicated effort was made to formalize a policy on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL). Initially considered by the Shared Governance Council in May 2024, final consideration by the SGC occurred in December 2024. Between these meetings, multiple conversations and iteration between All-Unit Congress leaders and Academic Affairs administrators, took place. It is understood with this policy, that CLEP, AP and Challenge Credit, along with Valor Act Academic Credit Evaluation, will now fall under this broadly encompassing policy.

Benefits, which were again described in the proposal, include the opportunity to recognize professional experience, accelerate completion, offer cost-efficiency, leverage relevance with career goals, support engagement, and extend avenues of equity for students historically marginalized in higher education.

In Fiscal Year 2018, a statewide study of CPL activity at each of the 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges indicated that STCC was in the “middle of the pack” with respect to the volume of students (208) to whom it awarded credit for prior learning. In the year under consideration, Advanced Placement credit represented 37% of the 1,134 credits awarded via CPL, followed by departmental challenge exams (21%), with about 18% of credits awarded via articulation with high schools. Comparative data showed that other community colleges were leveraging prior learning assessment, not solely CPL, including local evaluation of student learning outcomes, and portfolio assessments. While 13% of the 2018 STCC graduating class had earned some CPL (it was 12% for the Class of 2023), in some cases, sister community colleges saw upwards of 23% of their graduates complete with CPL credits. Demographically, there remains a need to understand trends by race/ethnicity as well as gender, and their relationship to the types of CPL awarded.

To summarize, and as described in the policy recommendation, Credit for Prior Learning allows students to earn academic credits for knowledge and skills acquired outside of traditional classroom settings. This can include work experience, military training, professional certifications, and other non-formal educational experiences. Through CPL policies, students can demonstrate their proficiency in specific subject areas and potentially receive credits that count toward their degree requirements. As such, they play a crucial role in offering a flexible and equitable pathway through higher education by recognizing and rewarding the knowledge and skills that students acquire outside of traditional academic settings.

Such a policy supports accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity, and empowers students to achieve their educational and career goals more efficiently and effectively. Credit for Prior Learning policies are also strategic in their appeal to adult learners, which is advantageous as a technical institution like STCC.

This policy is aligned to the STCC Strategic Plan, and in particular the priority of elevating our technical mission.