



Three-Year Postsecondary Education Degrees

Landscape

- International
- Accrediting Bodies
- State Policies
- Individual Institutions of Higher Education





International Landscape

The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process

- Pact of 49 countries (mostly European) intended to “harmonize” higher education policies intended to create comparable credit structures and degrees, facilitate mobility among nations, and assure quality.
- Standard is:
 - 3 year “bachelor” degree
 - 1-2 year “masters” degree
 - No fixed length “doctorate” degree
- Quality assurance agencies (think accreditors) align to cross-nation European Standards and Guidelines

Sample Bologna Countries

- Austria
- Belgium
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom
(England, Wales,
& N. Ireland)

Additional Sample Countries Where Three-Year Degrees are Common

- New Zealand
- India
- Pakistan
- Bangladesh
- Ethiopia
- Uganda
- Zimbabwe
- Australia
- Zambia
- Nepal
- Hong Kong
- Lebanon

3-Year Degrees in the Recent Past in America

- Three-year bachelor's degrees have long existed in the United States, but reduced credit baccalaureates (degrees that require less than 120 credit hours are) are a more recent phenomenon.
- In Massachusetts, three-year degrees have a minimum requirement of 120 credit hours.

Accreditation

- 55 U.S. Department of Education recognized voluntary associations of colleges and universities that determine whether individual members meet minimum educational quality standards (37 recognized for federal financial aid eligibility purposes)
 - National
 - Regional (Historically)
 - Specialty



Accreditation Agencies Have Approved Three-Year and Reduced Credit Degree Programs

1. Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
2. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
3. New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE)
4. Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

- No set specific program length required for degree programs
- No prior approval necessary for 3-year degree programs
- Standards are the same for 3- and 4-year degree programs
- Merely requires colleges demonstrate that student learning experiences are characterized by “rigor and coherence”
- Rigor and coherence indicators include that educational programs are of “sufficient content, depth, and program length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or credential”

Northwest Commission on Higher Education

- No set minimum number of credit hours or seat-time requirement
- Evaluation centers on whether students in an accelerated program achieve learning outcomes equivalent to or comparable with traditional degrees.
- Must demonstrate that students acquire the necessary knowledge and competencies expected of graduates
- Must align with institution mission and strategic goals
- Must monitor employment outcomes as well as student learning outcomes

New England Commission on Higher Education

- Clearly distinguished name (e.g. an “Applied Bachelor’s Degree”)
- Consumer notification of varying graduate program & employer acceptance
- Tracking of student attainment & achievement outcomes
- Curricular requirements –
 - At least 90 credits
 - At least 30 credits in major
 - An “appropriate mix” of general education, major coursework, and limited electives
 - A “stackable” pathway four-year degree

Higher Learning Commission

- Must justify how the reduced-credit program still meets quality expectations, including academic depth & quality comparable to traditional four-year programs.
- Must offer evidence of curriculum, assessment plans, faculty qualifications, and student support services that facilitate meaningful student learning.
- Description of the implications of the reduced-credit format — such as how transfer, licensure, employment, and graduate-school admission may be affected.
- Must have ongoing assessment strategies showing students complete the program with the intended general education AND major subject area learning competencies.



State Action on Three-Year Degrees

Sample State Policies

State	Policy	Requirements
Indiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every public college & university <u>must</u> offer at least one 3-year degree program• Every public college & university <u>must</u> review all 4-year programs to see if a 3-year option can be created	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Required Academic Coaching* Work-Based Learning Opportunity with Credit Offered to All 3-Year Program Participants
Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every public college & university <u>must</u> offer at least one 3-year degree program by 2027-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Align to an “in demand” career area, including health, IT, business, & liberal arts
New Hampshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3-year degrees authorized on stand-alone basis• 3+3- year bachelor plus professional degree (e.g. law) programs authorized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Align with NECHE standards* Authorized by the State Higher Education Commissioner
North Dakota	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3-year “Bachelor of Applied Science” degree authorized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* CTE Programs Only* Required Academic Counseling* Four-Year Pilot Period
Utah	3-year “Bachelor of Applied Studies” authorized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Aligned with Institution Mission* In-Demand Industry Fields

Institutions of Higher Education with Three-Year Degrees



Sample of Institutions Offering Three-Year Degree Programs

Institution	Programs	Institution	Programs
Plymouth State (NH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Business Administration * Cybersecurity * Outdoor Leadership * Police Studies * Robotics * Automation Engineering 	University of Maine (ME)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 3+3 Bachelor's to JD law degree
Johnson & Wales University (RI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Computer Science * Criminal Justice * Design * Hospitality Management 	Thomas College (ME)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Business * Criminal Justice * Computer Science * Cybersecurity * Applied Mathematics * Education * Sports Management
Rivier University (NH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Artificial Intelligence * Business Management * Criminal Justice 	Weber State University (UT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Politics * Philosophy * Economics