



Testimony of Dr. Kara Laskowski
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(APSCUF)
Before the Senate Education Committee on “Reduced Credit Degrees in Pennsylvania”
Tuesday, October 20, 2026
Room 8E-A East Wing Capitol Building

Chairwoman Culver, Chairwoman Williams and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about this extremely important issue. My name is Dr. Kara Laskowski, and I am the vice president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF). APSCUF represents about 5,000 faculty and coaches who work at Pennsylvania’s state-owned universities.

First, I would like to thank the committee for bringing up this issue as it has moved quickly across the country. We appreciate the committee taking the time to hear about the real issues and concerns around this change vs rushing into a legislative change. Now is the time for a thoughtful and in-depth discussion around a 90-credit degree. As other states rush to be the first to allow these types of degrees, we think a measured approach rooted in facts, details, and data is the best path forward.

While we welcome the conversation around degree levels and time to completion we do have the following questions and concerns -

1. This idea is still new and without solid data to indicate if this concept works. As some universities try 90-credit degrees, we haven't had enough time to get data back on how students and employers are reacting to this new degree. We are also unsure of when this data will be fully available but do not believe we will have a full data set before the end of 2026.
2. Unclear employer impacts - we have not heard if businesses/employers will view a 90-credit degree the same as a 120-credit one.
3. Workforce preparedness - eliminating electives and general-education courses could lead to a workforce less prepared and with diminished skills.
4. This proposal increases inequality - this proposal would hurt low-income and first-generation students the most as it would create a two-tiered system forcing those who can't afford a 120-credit degree into a degree that could be looked at differently by employers.
5. This proposal doesn't actually address time to completion - under this scenario a student could still pay for 4 or 5 years and only get a 90 credit degree. We all know things happen in a student's life that may cause them to drop a class or two. These new proposals do not have safeguards that could or would ever guarantee 3-year completion.

6. Our PASSHE universities have staffing issues that would impact this type of degree. We hear from students constantly who are struggling to schedule their required courses due to layoffs, not filling open positions, and consolidation or elimination of programs. A new degree program wouldn't eliminate these scheduling concerns and could end up delaying a student from receiving the 90-credit degree in three years.

7. Consumer protection concerns - we do not yet know how these degrees would be advertised or presented to students. If not done correctly it opens the door for lawsuits from students and families who will rightly feel tricked into paying for something that is less than a traditional 120 baccalaureate degree.

8. Artificial intelligence concerns - by cutting 30 credits from a student's curriculum this could cause students to lose out on valuable learning that could help them in the age of AI. With a 90-credit degree that is only focused on a singular subject it hurts the possibility of graduates being equipped to be lifelong learners who can navigate the world of AI and not be replaced by it.

9. Creating lifelong learners prepared not only with educational experience. Potentially cutting a full year out of a student's college experience has the potential to negatively impact the things that employers are on record saying they are looking for: core skills and adaptive learners. Missing out on a full year could hurt students' skills not only in the learning space but with time management, interpersonal skills, and many other important areas of growth that occur both in and out of the classroom.

10. The ability of students to change degree paths under these degree programs is very concerning. We know that a large number of students at our universities change their majors at least once, and many of them several times. How much further behind will those students be?

11. There's been no (reported) attempt to coordinate with disciplinary accrediting and state licensing bodies, which means students who feel forced into 90 credit degrees will be steered away from considering fields, from engineering to social work and teacher education, that have externally mandated requirements and where we already have critical workforce shortages.

These are just a few of the concerns we have at the current time. We would encourage the committee to stay engaged in this issue and follow the State Board of Higher Education's new task force on this issue and their work leading up to the final report. We also encourage the committee to engage with impacted universities, faculty, students, and staff to understand the real-life impacts a proposal like this may have.

In June of 2026 the Kansas Board of Regents approved a pilot program for 90-credit degrees. Under this proposal, universities would have to go to the board for approval of the programs. The proposal also mandated that universities follow their state system's general curriculum and that alternative degrees do not conflict with accreditation standards. The new programs must also comply with federal financial aid regulations.

These guardrails are a strong start that Pennsylvania should consider under any policy or changes they may consider. There should also be a strong and rigorous approval process and the program changes should not just fall under the whims of any one individual who may face outside pressures.

While we still oppose any such proposal as they are currently being discussed we feel like the following guardrails should be in place in Pennsylvania should this move forward -

1. Any 90-credit degree program change should be done legislatively or through state agency policy. We do not believe that PASSHE has the legal authority to make these changes, and we believe that authority should rest solely with the legislature or the state board of education.
2. Any change for a new program should have detailed and rigorous approval standards as well as reporting standards. We feel there need to be safeguards against rushed and unvetted pushes to have these programs without clear guidelines on what the programs will look like. Additionally reporting on how or if the programs are working would be vital.
3. Any offering of 90-credit degrees will need clear guidance on the advertising and recruitment to students and their families. The consumer protections aligned with these new programs need to be created via policy and institutions would need to be held accountable with how they present these degrees.
4. A policy would need to be created on degree and transcript presentation. Ignoring this important piece would leave the disclosures up to a student who would have no incentive to disclose this information. This creates a scenario where two students with similar degrees could be going to the same employer and the employer would not know which student had 120 credits and which had 90.
5. Any approved program should come with a sunset date. We feel it would be the wrong decision to open this door and then let multiple cohorts of students into an unknown. If this truly would be a pilot, the program should allow a three-year cohort through before additional students are admitted to a program that may not work.
6. Any approved program should require evidence of employer demand as well as clear learning outcomes data. This outcome data should include evidence that their 90 credit degree properly prepared them for those jobs.

We do believe that there are specific ways to address affordability and time to completion and we look forward to being involved in those types of conversations. Below are steps we feel could be taken to achieve both of these goals -

1. Pass the "PA Promise" [House Bill 2084](#). This bill passed with strong bipartisan support in the PA House in June of 2026. This legislation directly impacts college affordability and would allow students to attend our schools with low to no tuition. In turn many of these students could potentially work fewer jobs and could complete their baccalaureate degree in three or four years with 120 credits.
2. Work with institutions on articulation agreements. Strengthening these agreements and pathways would help students complete their degree on time and for a lesser cost.
3. Fully fund our State System universities. In 2025 and 2026 the State System saw flat funding. This forced the system to raise tuition in back to back years. This increase was over \$500 a year for students. That is an additional \$2,000 over four years that many students are taking loans out to pay and that will carry interest. This again will force students to work multiple jobs to pay off tuition and not have time to finish a 120 credit or even a 90-credit degree in three or four years.

Additionally, the System not being properly funding has led to the System canceling majors or areas of study and threatening to lay off or not hire new faculty. When funding is not available more cuts will occur and this will severely limit student class offers and time to completion.

4. Incentivize early completion. Universities should be looking at ways to partner with the state to provide students with stipends or financial incentives should they finish their degree in three or three and a half years. Additionally the state and universities should encourage more 3+1 and 4+1 offerings for students. All of which would require stronger investment by the state.

While we have yet to see any data on three-year degrees or their impacts, we do continue to see studies that show Pennsylvania is one of the most expensive states to go to public college and we have some of the worst state support in the nation. Just this month a new report was released that looked at affordability for low-income students. The study was truly shocking and we believe shows the priority shouldn't be to diminish a baccalaureate to 90 credits but rather to work to make college affordable. Because whether the baccalaureate is 90 credits, 120 credits, or some other number it won't truly matter if a student can't afford it.

This study found Pennsylvania has the sad distinction of being 1 of 12 states that had no affordable public four-year college. You can read the study [at TheCollegeInvestor.com](https://www.collegeinvestor.com/2018/06/12/affordable-public-college/). The study took a measure of federal aid for a student and what the difference or "affordability gap" existed when you subtract that aid from the overall cost of public attendance. Pennsylvania had the worst "affordability gap" in the country with the average gap being \$8,346. The harsh reality is no race to a three year 90 credit degree is going to fix this problem. The real and needed fix is the state supporting those schools it owns.

To be clear, our state system students deserve to have affordable and timely pathways to a degree. They deserve the same opportunities that any other student in our Commonwealth deserves. You all know the data but it is worth noting that many of our students are low-income, middle-income, and/or first-generation college students. And these students continue to be successful in the face of affordability challenges. We do not feel it is the best path to use our students or any other students as test cases for an unproven model. We cannot afford to throw their hopes, dreams, and dollars into a "pilot" that may or may not work for them.

We look forward to any questions or discussion items you may have and as always we stand ready to be a partner on higher education policy. Thank you.