

**Pennsylvania State Senate Education Committee
Hearing on Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degrees
State Capitol, Harrisburg, PA**

20 October 2026

Testimony of Jonathan D. Green, President, Susquehanna University

Thank you to Chair Senator Culver and Minority Chair Senator Williams and the Senate Education Committee for considering of my thoughts on “Three-Year, Reduced Credit Hour Bachelor’s Degrees.”

I am concerned about this proposal for three fundamental reasons:

1. It is a misleading name.
2. The world of work is demanding more rigorous academic preparation. Reducing educational content will be a disservice to students and employers.
3. My greatest fear is that we would be sanctioning a second-class degree targeting our most economically disadvantaged students.

Misleading Name

It is important to distinguish the difference between a three-year program of study and a 90-credit degree. There are many institutions whose students can complete 120-credit bachelor’s degrees in three years.

There is nothing wrong with a 90-credit credential, but don’t call it a bachelor’s degree. Three quarts is not a gallon.

120 years ago, the Carnegie Foundation defined an American bachelor’s degree as an undergraduate credential representing a minimum of 120 credit hours. It means something. Since 1949, Pennsylvania Code has mandated that a baccalaureate degree granted in the Commonwealth must require the satisfactory completion of a minimum of 120 semester credit hours. At least 40 of those credits must be in general education.

Diminished Academic Preparation

Leadership on the Hill has consistently expressed concerns that students are arriving at college less and less well prepared, which is true, especially in the wake of COVID. At schools like mine, faculty work mightily to help our students close those learning deficits.

Those same voices have called on higher education to better prepare our graduates for the contemporary world of work. This requires expanded technical training and expertise and an enhanced focus on developing the soft skills employers are seeking. How can we be expected to add academic remediation, technical breadth, and professional development to an already full curriculum with only 75% of the coursework?

To meet the demands of most majors, any course reductions would likely be in the core, that minimum of 40 credits wisely adopted into Pennsylvania statute 77 years ago. This is where we teach communication, ethics, teamwork, reasoning, civics, and the skills of good citizenship. It is how we provide a framework for students to understand where their work fits into the big picture and why it matters.

“Poor person’s degree”

I am aware of members of the PA Senate saying that AICUP schools are only opposing this proposal because we fear it will put us out of business. It is true that it could lead to a 25% drop in revenue for the 5th largest sector of Pennsylvania’s economy, which would have a devastating impact on the communities surrounding the Commonwealth’s colleges and universities, independent and public, but...

Our driving concern is the deleterious impact it would have on our students, especially those at highest risk already. As an employer or a graduate school whom would you hire or enroll, the fully prepared candidate or the individual with three-quarters of the preparation? Would you want the nurse tending to your children’s health to have only 75% of the training?

My colleagues and I are profoundly concerned that our poorest students, those this proposal intends to help, will be the ones most harmed.

- They are the most likely to need remediation when they arrive on our campuses, which this proposal will necessarily truncate, leading to more low-income students dropping out without a degree, but with new debt.
- They are also more likely to choose the shorter, cheaper path without an understanding of the career implications of completing a significantly diminished degree program.
- The 90-credit bachelor’s degree will become the poor student’s alternative to a complete education.
- These will be the graduates who went to college to change their futures finding themselves still at the back of the line from which they hoped college would let them escape.

At Susquehanna University, about one third of our students are Pell eligible, receive financial support from PHEAA, and are the first in their families to attend college.

For these students, extended families and sometimes entire neighborhoods come to graduation to see the first members of their communities break out of the cycle of poverty. These graduates change the futures of their entire families and bring hope to their communities. Don't turn that into a hollow promise.

The students of our Commonwealth deserve the best education we can give them, not a credential that will merely move them to a slightly more comfortable corner of economic purgatory.

Instead of exploring diminished options for our students, we should be working to help more Pennsylvanians achieve the benefits of a true 120-credit bachelor's degree. That would be better for them, and it would be better for Pennsylvania.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours ever,
Jonathan D. Green, President
Susquehanna University