

Credit By Examination

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June 29, 2026 | 2026-R-0002

Issue

This report provides an overview of credit by examination.

Summary

Credit by examination (CBE) is a way to earn college credits by passing a standardized test that demonstrates mastery of the topic's content without taking an accredited college class. There are several nationwide CBE programs, but colleges and universities may also offer institution-specific exams for their students to earn college credit.

In Connecticut, each higher education institution is responsible for setting its own policies and procedures regarding CBE, subject to the state's regulation. These policies and procedures may include what types of CBE are accepted, the passing score required, the number of credits that may be awarded, and how these credits are applied to certain degree programs.

This report (1) discusses state regulations regarding CBEs and (2) provides an overview of four well-established and currently available CBE opportunities (Advanced Placement (AP), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST), and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme), along with a brief introduction to institution-specific CBEs. For each of the four well-established CBEs, the report includes information on the program's general process, cost, scoring structure, and credit system.

Because these policies and procedures vary by institution, those seeking to earn credit through CBE should consult with the institutions they are interested in for any institution-specific CBE requirements.

State Regulation

State regulations allow awarding college credit for prior experiential learning acquired through work or life experience and noncollegiate sponsored instruction. Institutions that plan to award credit for this learning must (1) verify it was equivalent in level and nature of approved college programs and (2) have written policies and procedures that meet certain standards. These policies and procedures must include:

1. acceptable assessment methods such as (a) standardized tests; (b) nationally recognized evaluations for credit recommendations accepted by the Board of Governors for Higher Education; (c) individualized, faculty-administered and -designed written or oral tests; or (d) portfolio reviews;
2. portfolio review policies and procedures;
3. a prohibition that students cannot receive more than half of the total credits needed for a degree from prior experimental learning; and
4. requirements for maintaining comprehensive records of evaluations and credit decisions.

These records must specify the (1) experience for which credit was given, (2) assessment methods, (3) names and titles of faculty and administrators who recommend credit approval, and (4) number of credits awarded. Enough information must be provided in a student's transcript, or attached to it, so that registrars at other institutions or employers can understand the basis for awarding credit ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 10a-34-16](#)).

Credit By Examination Options

There are four well-established CBEs that are generally accepted nationwide: (1) Advanced Placement, (2) College Level Examination Program, (3) DANTES Subject Standardized Tests, and (4) International Baccalaureate. Many colleges and universities also offer institution-specific CBEs for awarding credit toward a degree at that institution.

Advanced Placement (AP)

Process. College Board (the organization that administers the SATs) first started administering AP exams in the 1955-56 school year after a successful pilot program that began in 1952. Currently, there are [42 different AP exams](#) administered each May. To prepare students for these exams, high schools (including both public and private) offer AP courses; however, each high school determines what courses, if any, it offers.

Most exams are a combination of multiple-choice and free-response (open-ended) questions. However, a few exams include or consist of performance evaluations, such as portfolios and projects, that are completed over an extended period rather than in a timed testing format (courses with performance evaluations include AP Computer Science Principles, AP Research, and the AP Art and Design exams).

Cost. As of 2026, College Board generally charges [a \\$99 fee per AP exam](#), although schools may charge a higher amount to a student in order to cover its own proctoring and administrative costs or, alternatively, may cover this fee themselves. Students may also qualify for a lower \$37 fee if they demonstrate significant financial need.

Scoring. AP exams are graded as described in the table below:

Table 1: AP Exam Scoring

AP Exam Score	Recommendation	College Course Grade Equivalent
5	Extremely well qualified	A+ or A
4	Very well qualified	A-, B+, or B
3	Qualified	B-, C+, or C
2	Possibly qualified	----
1	No recommendation	----

This scoring system provides, at each score, (1) a recommendation as to how qualified a student is to receive college credit and (2) the equivalent college course grade. College Board recommends that higher education institutions award credit for a score of 3 or higher. A few courses have special scoring structures, such as [AP Calculus BC](#) and [AP Music Theory](#).

To determine a student's score, the exam is submitted back to the AP Program for grading. The multiple-choice section is graded by a computer, while the free response portion is scored by specially appointed professors and experienced AP teachers during the AP Reading event held annually in June ([see here](#) for more information on becoming an AP Reader). These two scores are combined to form a composite score and generally are translated onto the five-point scale noted above using statistical methods to ensure consistency from year to year. A few courses have a different scoring process, including those with performance evaluations such as AP 2-D Art and Design where exam portfolios are assessed by at least four highly experienced studio art educators.

Credit. Each higher education institution [sets its own policy](#) on how many credits it will award for AP exam completion and what is considered a passing score. The American Council on Education

(ACE) and College Board [provide recommendations](#) on the number of credits an institution should award, which is generally between three to six credits depending on the course. However, it is recommended that students passing foreign language and culture exams receive between 6 to 20 credits depending on their score.

College Level Examination Program (CLEP)

Process. CLEP exams were created in 1965 and are managed by College Board. There are [34 different CLEP exams](#), but CLEP differs from AP in that there are no specific courses that lead up to the exam. Instead, students may study their own resources at their own pace and take the exam whenever they are ready. Exams may be scheduled at hundreds of [testing centers](#) across the country (including 13 centers in Connecticut) or may be taken at home through [remote proctoring](#) through College Board.

Generally, these tests include 90-100 multiple-choice questions, although some are shorter or have a written component, such as the foreign language exams.

Cost. College Board generally charges [a \\$97 fee per CLEP exam](#). Additionally, students are responsible for the proctoring fee (usually around \$20-\$50) charged by the testing center.

Scoring. Generally, students receive an instant score after completing a CLEP exam (unless there is a component that requires manual grading, such as a written essay). The computer processes the student's responses and provides a scaled score [between 20-80](#) (with 20 being the lowest and 80 the highest). ACE recommends [a score of 50](#) or above to be considered passing, but an institution can set their own passing threshold.

Credit. Each institution [sets its own policy](#) on how many college credits it will award and what is considered a passing score. ACE and College Board [provide recommendations](#), which is generally between three to six credits depending on the course. However, it is recommended that students passing foreign language exams receive between 6 to 12 credits, depending on their score.

DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)

Process. DSST exams were created in 1974 by the Department of Defense and were offered to military service members seeking to earn academic credit. These exams were opened to civilians in 2006.

There are currently [37 different DSST exams](#) students may take. DSST is like CLEP in that there are no specific courses that lead up to the exam. Instead, students may study their own resources at

their own pace and take the exam whenever they are ready. Exams may be scheduled at hundreds of [testing centers](#) across the world (including nine publicly-accessible locations in Connecticut) or may be taken at home through [remote proctoring](#) through ProProctor.

Generally, these tests are 100-question multiple-choice exams, although some have an additional component, such as Principles of Public Speaking, which requires a recorded impromptu speech.

Cost. Prometric generally charges [a \\$100 fee per DSST exam](#). Additionally, students are responsible for any administrative fees charged by the testing center.

Scoring. Generally, students receive an instant score after completing a DSST exam (unless there is a component that requires manual grading, such as the impromptu speech). The computer processes the student's responses and provides a scaled score [between 200-500](#) (with 200 being the lowest and 500 the highest). A score of 400 is generally considered passing, but an institution can set their own passing threshold.

Credit. Each institution sets its own policy on how many college credits it will award and what is a passing score. [ACE and DSST recommend](#) that students receive three credits per DSST exam they pass.

International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme

Process. Established in 1968, the IB Diploma Programme (DP) is an assessed program for students aged 16 to 19 offered by IB-accredited schools. Currently, there are [11 schools in Connecticut](#) that offer this program.

Students complete the DP Core (an extended essay; a creative, activity, service module; and a theory of knowledge module) as well as generally a subject from six different groups: (1) studies in language and literature, (2) language acquisition, (3) sciences, (4) individuals and societies, (5) math, and (6) arts. Most IB classes come in two forms: Higher Level and Standard Level. Some colleges only give credit for Higher Level classes.

For each of those six core classes, students must pass an IB exam. These exams have two parts: an external assessment and an internal assessment. The external assessment (typically worth about 70-80%) is the more traditional exam portion and consists of two or three "papers" typically done on the same day or a few days in a row. A paper usually has some combination of multiple-choice, short-answer, extended-response, and data- or case-study questions. The internal assessments

(worth 20-30%) are done by the teacher and can include oral presentations, practical work (such as a written lab report), or other written work.

To receive a DP diploma, a student must receive at least 24 points out of a possible 45 (six exams each worth up to seven points each plus up to three points for the theory of knowledge and extended essay components). A student must also meet minimum score requirements over the entire exam portfolio (for example, have scored at least all 2s) and received authenticated participation in the creativity, activity, and service component.

Cost. Students take examinations (usually in May) for the courses they completed. Exams generally cost around \$125, but it varies depending on the institution administering the exam. Students may also be responsible for an administrative fee charged by the school.

Scoring. The external assessments are graded by independent examiners, like AP exams, who are appointed by the IB organization. These scores are combined with the internal assessments based on specific weightings for each subject. Students receive a grade between 1 and 7, with 7 being the highest. Institutions generally require at least a score of 4 to receive credit, although many require a 5 or 6 to receive credit.

Credit. Each institution sets its own policy on how many college credits it will award for an IB exam (although some institutions only accept credit if the entire DP is completed and do not award credit for individual exams). IB works with institutions to establish credit policies and currently [17 CT institutions](#) accept IB credits, 16 of which have an official IB credit policy. [ACE also recently made recommendations](#) for students to receive credit for many SL exams if they score 4 or higher.

Institution-Specific CBEs

Many institutions award credit for CBEs they create and administer, often called “challenge exams,” including [Brigham Young University](#), [Charter Oak State College](#), [Colorado State University](#), [New York University](#), [South Dakota State University](#), [Thomas Edison State University](#), [University of Nebraska Omaha](#), and [University of Wyoming](#). Students may generally take these exams after registering with their institution and paying the required fee. Each institution sets its own challenge exam policy, and if credits are awarded, they often cannot be transferred to another institution.

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