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SP Grading – Huge Win for Noncredit

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On September 20, 2016, the Board of Governors approved a change to §55023 of Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations to include SP as an official grading designation. This evaluative symbol is defined as “Satisfactory Progress towards completion of the course (used for noncredit courses only and is not supplanted by any other symbol).” The adoption of this new grading designation was preceded by a substantial vetting process that was initiated in 2009 when the effort of establishing a grading system for all noncredit providers began. The SP designation completes the list of noncredit progress indicators, which already includes P (passing) and NP (no pass). These two grade indicators have been in existence but were insufficient on their own because the progress of noncredit students cannot be divided into passing and non-passing cohorts without losing track of efforts made towards attendance and course completion by students who, for a variety of reasons, cannot complete their courses in a single academic term.

Noncredit apportionment is based on positive attendance, which means that noncredit institutions are reimbursed by the state only for students who are attending classes. Because of the open entry – open exit system of attendance instituted at a majority of noncredit institutions, but not all, students are free to come and go from the class of their choosing. Students with the fewest hours of attendance earn an NP grade because they are not able to achieve the course outcomes in the limited time they attend. Students with P grades normally attend school more consistently and are able to achieve the course outcomes. The SP designation shows that students are progressing and have acquired some of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve course outcomes but still have work to do; they are worthy of the state reimbursement. The SP designation is therefore a reflection of student progress and success.

Noncredit practitioners have been waiting for recognition of the SP for a long time, and its official recognition is a welcome component of efforts designed to keep noncredit programs accountable while also equipping them with adequate tools to reflect their success. The SP indicator is a means of tracking the efforts of countless noncredit students who progress through academic programs in an open-entry system with stops and starts along the way. The SP designation is meant for noncredit faculty to document the effort of their students, to encourage the students to pursue their education, and, ultimately, to be used as a measure of noncredit student success. The noncredit field, just like its credit counterpart, is under growing pressure to standardize itself through systems that will allow for more effective transition of students in and through academic programs into technical or vocational training and an eventual career or employment opportunity. The SP grade accomplishes all of these goals by informing students that while their road to success may be winding, their efforts and progress cannot be denied. In an effort to make noncredit more transparent, standardized, and consistent across the field, institutions offering noncredit programs have been granted an effective tool to accurately reflect on their students' success.