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BOARD OF ADMISSIONS AND RELATIONS WITH SCHOOLS (BOARS)

David Volz, Chair
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June 5, 2026

Divisional Admissions Committee Chairs

RE: Policy on the Use of International Baccalaureate (IB) Standard Level (SL)
Exams for Admissions Eligibility and College Credit

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of UC's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), I am writing to inform the Divisions about a revision to BOARS' policy on the use of International Baccalaureate (IB) Standard Level (SL) Exams for admissions eligibility and college credit. BOARS' existing policy prohibits the use of SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit even though SL exams are currently accepted for admissions eligibility and college credit by many peer institutions across the United States. However, as articulated in the attached policy, BOARS is proposing, effective immediately, to allow SL exams to be submitted by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) and considered by the UC for admissions eligibility and credit towards UC degrees. Additional details about the background, BOARS' existing policy, and the proposed revision to BOARS' policy can be found within the attached document accompanying this memo. Since exams are reviewed by BOARS, the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) and the University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) for systemwide admissions eligibility, college credit, and placement decisions, respectively, UCEP and UCOPE have also reviewed and provided input to the final attached policy.

Thank you for your assistance in conveying this information to the appropriate faculty and administrators at your campuses.

Sincerely,

David Volz, Chair
BOARS

cc: Associate Vice Provost Yoon-Wu
UCEP Chair Sugar
UCOPE Chair Queen
Divisional Senate Chairs
Divisional Admissions Committee Analysts
Senate Division Executive Directors



Policy on the Use of International Baccalaureate (IB) Standard Level (SL) Exams for Admissions Eligibility and College Credit

Background: The UC Academic Senate’s Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP), and University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) govern systemwide policies specific to undergraduate admissions, academic programs, and student preparation, respectively. Therefore, awarding credit by exam overlaps with the jurisdiction of all three committees, as it allows students to 1) fulfill A-G subject requirements for first-year admissions (BOARS); 2) fulfill general education (GE) requirements for transfer admissions (BOARS); 3) fulfill GE and specific subject requirements for UC degrees (UCEP); and/or 4) guides systemwide and campus-specific placement decisions in subjects such as English and math (UCOPE).

Exams are reviewed by BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE for systemwide admissions eligibility, college credit, and placement decisions, respectively; if exams are approved, BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE provide recommended minimum passing (“cut”) scores at the systemwide level. Currently approved programs offering exams include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Advanced Level (A Level) (General Certificate of Education, or GCE, and Singapore-Cambridge GCE) exams. If approved with passing scores, AP exams can be used to fulfill systemwide admissions requirements, receive college credit, establish English proficiency, and meet UC’s Entry Level Writing Requirement, or ELWR; IB Higher Level (HL) exams can be used to fulfill systemwide admissions requirements, obtain college credit, establish English proficiency, and meet the ELWR; IB Standard Level (SL) exams can only be used to establish English proficiency and meet the ELWR; and A Level exams can only be used to fulfill systemwide admissions requirements and obtain college credit. Importantly, for college credit, [Senate Regulation 620](#) states that “[c]redit by examination may be earned only in accordance with general policies established by the appropriate committee on courses in each Division” and that “[t]he deans of the several schools and colleges shall have the power to approve or reject any application for the examination.” Therefore, the Committee on Courses and schools/colleges at the Divisional-level will, per Senate Regulation 620, continue to have the autonomy and authority to establish more stringent (higher) cut scores even if exams and minimum cut scores are approved at the systemwide-level.

BOARS’ Existing Policy: Per [Senate Bylaw 145](#) and [Senate Regulation 621](#), BOARS is responsible for determining, in collaboration with UCEP and UCOPE, whether exams are sufficient for systemwide admissions eligibility, college credit, and/or fulfilling English proficiency/ELWR requirements, respectively, and, if so, recommendations for minimum cut scores at the systemwide-level. Based on BOARS’ existing policy from 23 years ago, high school students within IB programs are permitted to use approved HL exams – but not SL exams – with passing scores for admissions eligibility and college credit. Therefore, BOARS’ existing policy prohibits the use of SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit even though SL exams are currently accepted for admissions eligibility and college credit by many peer institutions across the United States. Based on a recent review of

BOARS' archived minutes and files, BOARS decided, in 2003, not to award admissions eligibility and college credit for SL exams because 1) it would require a significant amount of time and investment for UC to review SL exams and 2) SL exams were assumed to be similar to lower Ordinary (or O) Level exams within the British GCE.

Based on BOARS' reasoning at the time, UC only grants admissions eligibility and college credit for higher A Level exams under the British GCE – exams which were assumed to be similar to HL exams. While the A Level exam designation has not changed for many years, O Level exams in the English/British system were replaced with Advanced Subsidiary (or AS) Level exams in the late-1980s. Therefore, the current question is how SL and AS level exams compare in terms of content and rigor. If SL exams are similar to AS Level exams, then BOARS' existing policy to reject SL exams may be justified since, for the GCE, BOARS only allows A Level exams (and not AS Level exams) for admissions eligibility and college credit. However, if the content and rigor of SL exams exceed AS Level exams and are more comparable to A Level and AP exams, then BOARS' existing policy to prohibit SL exams from being considered for admissions eligibility and college credit may not be justified, especially since a passing score on A Level and AP exams is widely accepted for admissions eligibility and college credit across the UC.

Proposed Revision to BOARS' Policy: During BOARS' meeting on April 3rd, 2026, members reviewed in-depth analyses focused on a comparison of the content and skills assessed of SL exams relative to A Level and AP exams. The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) provided examples with English [[articulation summary](#) and [curriculum crosswalk](#) for IB English A: Language & Literature Standard Level (Lang & Lit SL) and IB English A: Literature Standard Level (Lit SL) exams] and Math [[articulation summary](#) and [curriculum crosswalk](#) for IB Mathematics: Analysis and Approaches Standard Level (AA SL) exams] to illustrate IBO's approach for comparing SL exams vs. AP and A Level exams as well as the type of analyses BOARS may expect to see with other SL exams. Based on BOARS' preliminary review of the analyses provided for the IB Lang & Lit SL, Lit SL, and AA SL exams, the IBO provided compelling evidence that 1) the content and skills assessed within these SL exams strongly align with comparable AP and A Level exams (see tables provided within curriculum crosswalks) and 2) in some cases, the content and skills assessed within IB Lang & Lit SL, Lit SL, and AA SL exams exceeds the content and skills assessed within AP exams, suggesting that 1) SL exams may be as rigorous – or in some cases even more rigorous – than comparable AP exams; and 2) SL exams are strongly aligned with comparable A Level exams. Therefore, BOARS' 2003 assumption that the SL exams are at a lower level is no longer justified.

BOARS also reviewed an IBO-provided [list](#) of U.S. colleges and universities that currently accept SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit. BOARS independently confirmed that numerous UC-comparable, research-intensive schools accept SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit based on their admissions websites. Therefore, in light of BOARS' preliminary review of IBO's analyses focused on IB Lang & Lit SL, Lit SL, and AA SL exams as case studies, BOARS' existing policy that prohibits all SL exams from being considered for admissions eligibility and college credit is not justified based on the current evidence. The inability of high school students to use SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit within the UC represents an unjustified barrier for

students and, based on prior IBO presentations to BOARS, is also one of several barriers for expansion of IB programs across California, as UC's lack of acceptance of SL exams for admissions eligibility and college credit may be a deterrent for students considering IB programs throughout the state. Moreover, BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE have consistently expressed strong support for IBO's philosophy and approach to teaching, learning, and assessment since it prepares students to be globally-minded, independent thinkers with strong communication, analytical, and writing skills and an interest in civic engagement – traits that are ultimately critical for success within a variety of undergraduate programs across the UC system.

Given the evidence provided above, BOARS is proposing, effective immediately, to allow SL exams to be submitted by the IBO and considered by the UC for admissions eligibility and credit towards UC degrees. Moving forward, SL exams will be reviewed for admissions eligibility and college credit using UC's identical process for reviewing new AP, HL, or A Level exams. SL exams submitted for review will not be automatically approved for admissions eligibility and college credit; this change in policy simply permits SL exams to be considered for admissions eligibility and college credit in addition to establish English proficiency and meet the ELWR. Moreover, this change in policy does not provide guidance on recommended cut scores for SL exams to receive admissions eligibility and college credit. Appropriate cut scores will be determined following a more detailed and comprehensive review by a BOARS-convened UC faculty workgroup consisting of SL exam-specific subject matter experts. If some SL exams are approved for admissions eligibility and college credit, this change in policy would be effective and only applied for students matriculating at the time of SL exam approval.