

GRADUATION HANDBOOK

NEW VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

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Introduction

A student's education at New Vista is divided into two stages. Students entering New Vista High School are in Stage I. During this stage they work with their advisors to select classes and educational experiences that help identify their unique areas of interest, curiosity, strengths, and weaknesses. During Stage I students begin taking courses which will meet the **Common Learning** requirements. All these experiences are the basis for identifying an **Individual Student Path** during the transition to Stage II.

All learning experiences are intended to balance student interest and passion with growth and exploration and the attainment of genuine competence across a range of knowledge. Questions that focus a student's planning during Stage I include: "What is of interest to me? Where might I be going and what might I be doing after high school? What are my goals now and in the future? What are my strengths and where do I need improvement? What do I need to learn?" This first stage of exploration ends with a commitment to the requirements of Stage II, which lead directly toward graduation.

Graduation from New Vista involves much more than merely acquiring a certain number of credits. It requires each student to actively commit to an Individual Student Path and to meet Common Learning requirements. Each student works with his or her advisor to write a **Graduation Proposal** and identify a **Graduation Committee**. The process also includes a **Culminating Project**, which reflects a student's ability to carry out self-directed, rigorous work in an area of strong interest.

Stage II is characterized by greater focus and specific preparation for accomplishing the goals of the Individual Student Path and completing Common Learning requirements. With the support of the Graduation Committee and the guidance of the approved Graduation Proposal, the student and advisor select and identify courses, community experiences, mentors, a Culminating Project and other learning experiences that help meet all graduation requirements.

In order to earn a diploma from New Vista, a student must successfully complete:

- the Graduation Proposal;
- the required Common Learning Units;
- the Individual Student Path credits; and
- the Culminating Project.

The Basics: Learning Units

Learning Units provide a way for students to measure the progress they are making toward fulfilling their graduation requirements. Each Learning Unit is the equivalent of 60 hours of class time. This is directly equivalent to 1/2 of a Carnegie Unit (the standard measure applied to high school work nationwide) and to 5 Boulder Valley School District high school credits. Thus, a one-Learning-Unit course at New Vista is the equivalent of a semester course in a conventional high school.

The system of Learning Units applies to all learning experiences students pursue in and out of school. The number of Learning Units required for graduation is:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Common Learnings | 28 Learning Units |
| 2. Individual Student Path | 24 Learning Units |

Total: 52 Units

In addition every graduating senior complete a culminating project that takes a minimum of 120 hours and earns 2 credits.

Common Learnings

New Vista requires students to earn a total of 28 **Common Learning Units** across nine different disciplines which are listed below. The skills and knowledge students gain by successfully completing the school's Common Learning requirements create a base on which students may construct post-high school options and build needed skills for pursuing their Individual Student Paths.

Common Learnings provide meaningful exposure to a broad range of learning that is valuable in its own right and important as students prepare for living in the world during and after high school. Common Learnings were identified through application of District and State curriculum standards and what is known about preparing all students to be successful in the world beyond high school.

Common Learnings requirements may only be satisfied by courses/experiences in which a student earns a grade of B- or above.

Required Common Learning Areas for Graduation

<u>Learning Area</u>	<u>Required Units</u>	<u>Specific Requirements (if any)</u>
Applied Technology	2	
Arts	2	
Inter-personal Skills	3	Pro-rated for transfer students
Intra-personal Skills	3	Pro-rated for transfer students
Language Arts	4	Reading, Culture and Literature (2) Writing course(s) at the level of Foundations or above (1.0)
Mathematics	4	Equations IA, IB, II <u>or</u> III; Figures, Shapes and Patterns I <u>or</u> II and Statistics
Science	4	Life Sciences (2); Physical Sciences (2)
Social Studies	4	World Geog. (1); Civics (.5); US History (1); and World History (1)
World Language	2	Two units in the same language.

The Individual Student Path

Although people have much in common, every person's life follows a unique path. Stage I is the time for exploring and identifying potential paths. During this time the student and advisor identify courses, community experiences and other learning experiences that might help the student find and pursue these paths. Students design and revise their educational choices in an ongoing process guided by their advisors and involving consultation with family members and other members of the community.

Stage I Path Exploration:

- Take courses on campus or in other settings;
- Participate in Workshops or Community Experiences;
- Confer with the advisor to reflect on these experiences and identify one's Individual Student Path.

When they are ready to make the transition from Stage I to Stage II, students work with their advisors to focus their ideas into a specific Graduation Proposal, which is described in the next section. Central to this proposal is the identification of the Path the student will follow after graduation and how the student will prepare for this Path during his/her last year of high school.

Pursuit of the Individual Student Path is rigorous and important work for each student at New Vista; "Path work" makes up nearly half of the requirements for graduation. Successful completion of the Path portion of the graduation requirements usually involves Community Experience, significant course work at New Vista, and learning outside the school (for example: at the Technical Education Center (TEC), CU, FRCC, abroad, or with community mentors). Pursuing particular paths helps students use and extend many of the Common Learning areas that are also required for graduation.

Serious pursuit of an Individual Student Path involves careful consideration of all the related knowledge and skills it might take to be successful on that path and in life in general. As students identify potential paths, they work to find concrete information about what a person needs to do in order to pursue those paths. What are the requirements for a job as a Nordic ski instructor, and what other areas of study are relevant to this path? How do you get to Nicaragua, and what might you need to know to live there? Where do you get an application for the Rhode Island School of Design, Stanford, or Colorado State University, and what are the entrance requirements? How much money does one need to start a small business, and what business skills are necessary to be successful in running one?

You are ready for the transition to Stage II when:

- You have demonstrated exploration of interests in a variety of areas;
- You have had at least one successful off-campus learning experience (Community Experience, Learning Unit Contract, Technical Education Center, concurrent enrollment, etc.);
- You have demonstrated the ability to consistently earn grades of A and B in Common Learning Areas;
- You can articulate your Individual Student Path and identify your proposed educational experiences for Stage II.

The Graduation Proposal (Which Moves You Into Stage II)

Cover Sheet:

Student Name:
Advisor:

Date:
Year in School:

Members of the Graduation Committee

Position/Role	Name/Position
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Advisor:
Community Expert:
Significant Adult:
Stage II Student:
Stage I Student Observer:
Ad Hoc Resource Person (optional):

Questions to be answered in Graduation Proposal

(To be completed by the student, reviewed by the Advisor, and sent to members of the Graduation Committee prior to the first meeting.)

- A. Please explain in detail who you are as a student and learner at this point in your high school career. Include your strengths, interests, and areas for growth.
- B. What is your proposed Individual Student Path after high school? Describe it in as much detail as possible, including goals, the types of activities you see yourself engaged in, your intended lifestyle after high school, and the intended source of your income. Provide a brief summary of your Stage I experiences and how they have brought you to this path.
- C. What are areas for improvement and growth during Stage II and how will you pursue that growth?

Expectations:

- The proposal must be in very good shape, in terms of content and presentation, before it is submitted to the committee.
- The committee members must receive the proposal prior to the meeting, with enough time for it to be reviewed.
- It is the job of committees to help students improve their proposals. Expect feedback and criticism and use it to improve your thinking and writing.
- The proposal is both a personal and public document and should be written with that in mind.

You become a Stage II Student at least FOUR QUARTERS before graduation, when your Graduation Proposal is approved at a meeting of your Graduation Committee.

The Graduation Committee

The Graduation Committee is a group of adults and peers who are selected by the student to help refine and implement a Graduation Proposal. This Committee identifies skills the student needs to attain in order to meaningfully pursue the Individual Student Path, recommends courses and other learning experiences that support the goals of the Individual Student Path, assesses the movement of the student toward accomplishing the Individual Student Path, and provides a constant source of guidance and support to the student as the student moves toward graduation.

The Committee also has responsibility for assisting in the design of a Culminating Project, accepting the Culminating Project proposal and assessing the quality of the completed project against the proposal.

The Graduation Committee includes 5-6 members:

The student's advisor who provides long-term support and knowledge about the student and his/her life at New Vista. The advisor may ask a second NVHS staff member to join the committee to provide additional support for the student and the advisor.

A community expert who is knowledgeable about the Individual Student Path the student is planning to pursue and/or the Culminating Project the student is planning on carrying out. This person can provide specific guidance for what someone on that path does and needs to know.

A student who is also in Stage II who provides a source of peer support and is also able to view his or her own graduation process from another perspective. This peer should be prepared to act as a critical friend who pushes the student to do his or her best work.

A significant adult in the student's life who knows the student well and who can serve as a trusted support person for the student. In support of this important transition to independence we strongly recommend that parents not serve in this role. If they wish to be involved they may request permission to attend one of the early meetings, be present at the final presentation of the Culminating Project to the Committee, and provide at-home support.

A Stage I student observer, generally a 9th or 10th grader in the same Advisory, who learns about the graduation requirements by participating in the work of the Graduation Committee. This peer should see his or her role as that of a critical friend who has high expectations for the student.

An "ad hoc" resource person (optional), such as a teacher at New Vista, another community person or expert, or other adult, who knows about and can support the demands and goals of the Individual Student Path.

Initial Meeting of Graduation Committee

Revise, refine and clarify the Graduation Proposal submitted prior to the meeting.

During the meeting discuss the following (and keep a written record of decisions):

- A detailed list of the specific skills this student should develop and demonstrate in order to successfully pursue the intended path. Clarify where and when these skills will be learned and how much credit will be earned while learning them.
- A list of the learning experiences the committee recommends in order for the student to pursue his/her path.
- How the Graduation Committee will identify the evidence (e.g., grades in courses or projects successfully completed) which will demonstrate attainment of these goals.

Subsequent Committee Meetings

The following tasks and questions should be addressed by the Graduation Committee at each meeting prior to approval of the student for graduation. Written notes should be kept of each meeting.

- Review, revise, and extend the goals as necessary.
- Monitor progress of Culminating Project (see below).
- Continue identifying learning experiences the student should pursue at New Vista, at TEC, CU or Front Range or in the community to accomplish the goals of the Graduation Proposal.
- Ask questions such as "what is your backup if you change your plans? What life skills do you need to live on your own after high school?"
- Ensure that graduation deadlines are known and met.
- Ensure that identified skills are being attained and demonstrated.

Final Approval of the Committee

It is the responsibility of the Graduation Committee to certify that the student has completed all the activities identified in the Graduation Proposal and subsequent amendments to it. Particular attention should be paid to activities that were approved but were not part of the Culminating Project and to those activities designed to remedy areas for growth and improvement identified in Section C of the Graduation Proposal.

Frequently Asked Questions about Graduation Committees

When should I form my Graduation Committee?

Students form their Graduation Committees when they have made the commitment to meet the requirements for graduation and make the transition from Stage I to Stage II. (See p. 34 - "You are ready for transition to Stage II when...") It is the student's responsibility, with advice from the advisor, to contact the members of the committee and set meeting times and places. The student must first complete a strong draft of the Graduation Proposal, which is provided to members of the committee prior to the first meeting. A student can identify a Graduation Committee at any time after the student's first year at New Vista. Compliance with graduation deadlines is necessary to guarantee participation in graduation ceremonies.

How often do Graduation Committees meet?

The committee should meet at least three times to approve the Graduation Proposal, the Culminating Project proposal and the final version of the Culminating Project. Details of the committee's work are outlined above. It is the student's responsibility to contact committee members and to arrange all meetings.

How many people need to be present?

It is often difficult to arrange for the significant adult and the community expert to be present at all meetings. However, it is very important that these people be part of the process or else the committee simply becomes another meeting of the student and the advisor. Every effort needs to be made to have everyone present. The advisor has the discretion of canceling any meetings that do not include these other adults and at least one of the other student members. The Culminating Project proposal and the project itself cannot be approved without the presence of the community expert.

What happens to my Graduation Committee if I change my Individual Student Path or my Culminating Project?

The graduation requirements at New Vista support flexibility in pursuing Individual Student Paths so that each path truly reflects student interests, abilities and passions. If the student's path or Culminating Project changes to the point that the membership of the existing Graduation Committee needs to be changed, it is the responsibility of the student to contact those committee members who should no longer serve on the committee. It is also the student's responsibility to contact new members and to convene a meeting of the new committee in order to follow the steps outlined above.

The Culminating Project

Every student must undertake a Culminating Project during the Stage II process in order to graduate. This project must be approved by student's Graduation Committee following the committee's acceptance of the student's Graduation Proposal. After the Graduation Committee has accepted the Culminating Project proposal, the project may only be revised with the approval of the Graduation Committee. Details about this process are described below.

What is a Culminating Project?

The Culminating Project is an opportunity to undertake a major piece of rigorous, original work in an area of great interest and personal relevance to the student. It may involve work directly connected to the student's intended Path. It may involve exploration of Path alternatives. Or it may be a personal passion unconnected to the student's stated path. Culminating Projects are self-motivating experiences that the student is interested in, even passionate about. The student chooses the project, designs it with input from the Graduation Committee, and is solely responsible for its execution. The project is culminating in the sense that it brings together the student's skills and knowledge in carrying out a significant piece of self-directed learning.

When is the Culminating Project done?

A Stage II student may begin work on the project at any time after it has been approved by his/her Graduation Committee. Typically, students are within a year or two of graduation when they transition to Stage II and begin this project.

Where is the Culminating Project done?

As the projects vary, so can the places. Restrictions for off-campus projects are related to credits and legal factors by which the school is bound. Students should work with their advisors to ensure that these restrictions do not impede their project. Though most projects have taken place in Boulder, some have occurred in locations all over the world. (Note: The costs of travel-related projects, like the costs of any Culminating Project, must be borne by students and their families.) In general, students are encouraged to create inexpensive projects.

How do you get started?

The shape of a Culminating Project evolves through a series of conversations. The first conversations take place between the student and advisor. These lead to an idea that can be put down on paper for the Graduation Committee. This proposal is taken to a committee meeting and is discussed at length. Over the course of one or more meetings the proposal is refined and the various aspects of it clarified. This process of clarification should result in a revised Culminating Project Proposal. This written summary of the committee's deliberations becomes the "contract" for the project and provides the basis for the project's evaluation by the committee.

What should the first Culminating Project Proposal include?

- What is the purpose and rationale of the project? How is it related to the student's post-secondary plans? If it is not, why was it chosen?
- How will the project benefit the student in the transition from high school to what comes next?
- What work, if any, needs to be done (or has been done) to prepare for this project? Show evidence of skills, knowledge or experience needed to complete the project. This is especially true for projects such as creating a video, or a performance, or leading a wilderness trip.
- How will the student spend the 120 hours of time devoted to the project? Where will it take place? Who will be involved? What resources will be used or are needed to carry it out?
- What specific products will demonstrate expected activity regarding the project?
- What is the timeline for all the components of the project?
- What form will the presentation of the project to the school take?

Committee conversations about the project will result in the following clarifications which will be fully documented:

- Listing of all the components of the project with identification of the exact parts that are to be evaluated.
- Listing the responsibilities of each committee member, especially with regard to evaluation.
- Clarifying what is to be evaluated including both specific products/performances/experiences and the expectations (the indicators that show acceptable completion of the project for each).
- A system to document the hours.
- A timeline that meets all deadlines for graduation and meets all members' needs to complete their responsibilities (i.e. time for feedback and revisions before deadlines).
- Time for next meeting/s and the potential number of meetings still to come.

Each member should be aware of all the agreements outlined in this clarification process. Once the project is started, the need for meetings varies, depending on the type of project. Final meetings are planned to formally accept the project, go over and/or rehearse the project presentation, and do whatever final closure is needed.

Students may change their Culminating Projects, but only by submitting a new proposal that addresses all these issues. The whole Committee must approve this new proposal.

How will the Culminating Project be evaluated?

The committee members evaluate the project based on the expectations clarified and documented in committee meetings. They give feedback for revisions and for the final evaluation and grade that is given. These evaluations are best done in writing. At the very least, a written record should be maintained of what was said.

The approved project must receive at least a grade of B. The final grade is assigned by the Advisor with input from Committee members.

The project must be presented to the school on an Exhibition Day. Students must follow all deadlines for signing up for Exhibition Day and attend all mandated rehearsals. The final grade of the Culminating Project will be affected by the quality of this presentation. Therefore, it is expected that all students will rehearse their presentations prior to participation in Exhibition Day activities.

Summary of Stage II Requirements needed for graduation

- Successfully meet all graduation related deadlines.
- Organize at least three Graduation Committee meetings.
- Successfully complete (or have plans to complete) credit requirements for Common Learnings and Path work verified in a credit count with the principal.
- Earn grades of A or B in all coursework or Learning Unit Contracts following the Graduation Committee's acceptance of the Graduation Proposal. This requirement must include the four quarters prior to graduation.
- Complete the Culminating Project with the approval of *all* members of the Graduation Committee and earn at least a grade of B.
- Complete any additional tasks, activities, or projects required by the Graduation Committee.
- Present the Culminating Project to members of the school community at an Exhibition Day or Community Gathering.

Students must meet all the deadlines associated with the Graduation Proposal and Culminating Project in order to participate in the school's graduation ceremony.

Other Questions about Culminating Projects

Can a student get Culminating Project credit for Paid Work

This can happen in only two cases:

- 1) The student's path is such that holding a job, meeting expectations about that job, and reflecting on the work experience is the proper culminating project.
- 2) If a student needs to earn money for either a post-graduate experience or the actual Culminating Project, they may earn a maximum of .5 Learning Units out of the 2 awarded for the Culminating Project. In keeping with district policies, work time credit is counted at the ratio of 120 hours of work time = one Learning Unit. That means that in order to earn .5 learning units from work, a student must accrue 60 hours of work time.

How early can you "do" your culminating project?

A Culminating Project has to be approved by a Graduation Committee that includes the student, the advisor, other students, the significant adult and a community expert. First, the committee must accept the Graduation Proposal and then discuss the Culminating Project. There are no specific time requirements except that we want students to be at New Vista for at least one year before this process begins.

Can you earn more than two Learning Units for a culminating project?

Culminating Projects are designed to have integrity and coherence. They should have clearly defined beginnings, middles and ends. It is not uncommon for Culminating Projects to take up far more than the 120 hours specified for them. Some students, once they realize that this is happening, want to take out Learning Unit Contracts to earn additional credit. Nevertheless, once the project has been conceived, refined and approved by the committee, no parts of it should be severed off and turned into a Learning Unit Contract. LUCs related to the Culminating Project may be identified at the time of project approval or as the project develops and new opportunities unfold. Under no circumstances should an LUC "take over" pieces of the approved Culminating Project.

Time Line for Seniors Wishing to Graduate in June (January Graduation Time Line in Parentheses)

During the third quarter of their junior year, all students will do a thorough credit check with their advisor to determine the possible date of graduation and consider other options, if necessary.

Third Friday in September (Fourth Friday if there are five in the month)
(Second Friday in February)

First Graduation Committee meeting has been held. Earlier is better. Previous quarter is best.

First Friday After Thanksgiving
(First Friday in May)

Culminating Project proposal must have been approved by full Graduation Committee.

End of January
(Week before school is out in June)

Credit check and meeting with Rona must have been held.

Last Friday in April
(Friday before Winter Break)

By this date, full drafts of Culminating Projects must have been submitted to, reviewed by, and commented on by Graduation Committees. Experiences that are part of the project may take place after this date with the approval of the committee and Rona, but must be completed and approved by the end of May.

Monday before Memorial Day Weekend
(First Friday back from Winter Break)

By this date, all work for all educational experiences, except grades for all educational experiences, LUCs and other experiences (except classes at NVHS) have been completed and reviewed and accepted by Graduation Committees. Students are only awaiting final grades in New Vista courses.

Tuesday before Graduation
(Tuesday before Second Quarter Exhibition Day)

All senior work for New Vista classes must have been turned in.

Graduating seniors must satisfy the steps and deadlines of the Stage II process. The consequence for not meeting these deadlines is loss of the opportunity to walk across the stage at Graduation to receive a diploma.

Why have we chosen this consequence? Graduation from New Vista is a complex undertaking that, in and of itself, helps prepare students for the independence that awaits them after graduation. We have intentionally structured the process to be demanding, both in its content and in its procedures. We feel it is appropriate to give it a “real world” finality as our seniors stand on the threshold of independence. In addition, the process is extremely demanding for advisors. They are always dealing with several graduates and do not have the time to make special accommodations. With these two concerns in mind, we decided to impose stiff consequences for not complying with the process and/or not meeting deadlines.

The consequence of not being able to walk across the stage at graduation is both very big and not so very big. Graduation from high school is a significant rite of passage in our society. Students feel this deeply and want to

be part of the communal experience. The fear of missing that experience is sometimes the extra added motivator necessary to get them to take care of business. On the other hand, students who miss deadlines still get to graduate from high school and, if all their work is done by the week before graduation, they can still receive their diploma on graduation day. What they cannot do, if they have missed earlier deadlines or not complied with the process, is participate in the ceremony.

Junior Year Deadlines

First Friday after Spring Break

First draft of Graduation Proposal has been turned in to Advisor.

Day before June Graduation

Detailed Graduation Proposal (ready for Committee) has been turned in to Advisor.

How to Earn Credits at New Vista

	<u>Per Quarter</u>	<u>Per Year</u>	<u>Four Years</u>
AM Block	1 Learning Unit	4	16
PM Block	1 Learning Unit	4	16
Seminar/Int.	.5 Learning Unit	2	8
Advisory	.3 Learning Unit	1.2	4.8
Comm. Exp.	.5 Learning Unit	2	8
(or Workshop)	(.25 Learning Unit)	(1)	(4)
4 Days in May		.4	1.6
Total	3.3 Learning Units	13.7	54.4

First Period credit varies from .5 Learning Unit per class to 1.0 Learning Unit per class.

Physical Education- If you play sports at another school, you may be eligible for a credit waiver. See your advisor.

Basic Metric 1 Learning Unit = 60 hours

Conventional High Schools

5 credits = 1.0 Learning Units

Vo -Tech

1 credit hour = .2 Learning Unit

A half-day class for one quarter earns 1.5 Learning Units

Carnegie Units

.5 Carnegie Units = 1.0 Learning Units

College Courses (CU and FRCC or other public institutions)

	A/B	C
3 credits	2.0 LU	1.0 LU
4 credits	2.6 LU	1.3 LU
5 credits	3.2 LU	1.6 LU

The "College Path" at New Vista

Students WILL NOT automatically fulfill college entrance requirements by fulfilling New Vista Common Learning requirements. Below is a comparison between what a student needs in order to graduate from New Vista and what a student typically needs to get into a typical, competitive four-year college.

SUBJECT AREA	NEW VISTA REQUIREMENT	COLLEGE REQUIREMENT	CCHE Requirements for a Four Year Colorado College
Language Arts	4 Learning Units	8 Learning Units	8 Learning Units Not acceptable: Business English, ESL, Yearbook, Drama and Journalism
Math	4 Learning Units (must include: Equations, Figures, Statistics and Probability)	6-8 Learning Units at the level of Algebra I or above	8 Learning Units, 6 of which must be at Algebra I or above
Science	4 Learning Units (must include: 2 Life Science, 2 Physical Science)	6 Learning Units	6 Learning Units Not acceptable: General Science, Outdoor Education, Environmental Science
Social Studies	4 Learning Units (must include: .5 Civics, 1.0 World History, 1.0 US History, .5 Geography)	6 Learning Units (US History, World History; World Geography and Civics)	6 Learning Units (US History, World History; World Geography and Civics)
World Language	2 Learning Units of the same language	4-6 Learning Units of the same language	2 Learning Units of the same Language

Transferring Credit From Other Institutions

How is credit from other high schools awarded to Common Learning Areas and Path?

Transfer Students from Other High Schools

- Public school students and those at accredited high schools: We will give Common Learning area credit for all classes in which a student earned a C or above. Courses with a grade of D will only count toward path.
- Unaccredited Private Schools or Home Schooling through a credit-granting organization: We will only award credit on a Pass/Fail basis with a maximum of 6 Learning Units per semester, subject to the discretion of the principal. This is in accordance with the policies followed at all BVSD high schools.

What about credit from Summer School?

Summer school classes taken while a student is at New Vista are treated the way all New Vista courses are treated in terms of how grades count toward graduation. A's and B's are needed for Common Learning Areas; C's go to path; D's do not count - it's as if the grade were F.

What about classes taken at TEC or other high schools?

Students taking a half-day course at the Technical Education Center earn 1.5 Learning Units each quarter, 3 Learning Units for each semester, and six Learning Units for a whole year. Once a student has enrolled at New Vista, he/she must carry an A or B in any course taken at another BVSD institution in order for the credit to be counted for Common Learnings or Stage II. (See above on Summer School.)

How do we count C's from college courses?

C's from college courses can count toward Common Learnings although for less credit than A's or B's. D's do not count. This applies to both Stage I and Stage II. See previous page for translation of college credit.