

University Senate
May 7, 2012

“What is a Credit Hour?” for Different Meeting Patterns

Recommendation from the Senate Council: that a new Senate Rule be established to state that course proposals shall use the Senate-approved policy [link here to meeting pattern grid] for determining meeting times and number of credit hours for each course. Exceptions, based on academic merit, may be made by the University Senate upon the recommendation of the appropriate academic council. Equivalencies on the grid will be reviewed annually by the University Senate.

Student Credit Hour Definition

The University of Kentucky is required by the U.S. Department of Education and our accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, to define for the institution how credit is awarded for its curriculum. The responsibility for curriculum lies with the faculty, and so it is required that the University Senate determine how such credit is to be awarded.

The Senate's Admissions and Academic Standards Committee has proposed the following definitions of a credit hour for different types of instruction, to be codified in the Senate Rules. They used, in part, the "Carnegie Unit" as a guide to determine how much contact time and other effort should be used to determine the equivalent of one credit hour. Drawing on the traditional lecture or discussion, in a traditional 3 hour course, they determined that the current traditional definition is c. 800 minutes per credit hour (15-16 weeks x 3 x 50 minutes/ 3 = 750-800 minutes). Using c. 800 minutes, as the marker, they then requested information from colleges about how other meeting patterns should be measured, based upon workload, discipline, and in some cases standards of accrediting agencies.

The 800 minute marker, while cumbersome, allows instructors to measure contact hours and other effort for sessions of different lengths of time other than traditional semesters.

The result is divided here into direct contact with the instructor, with notes on how that direct contact expresses itself. "Other effort" is comprised of courses such as internships, studio, clinical hours, and clerkships. The explanation gives more information about the source of the assigned hours.

Meeting Pattern	Description	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Direct Contact	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Other Effort	Explanation	Process for Standard Semester
Clerkship (medical)	An assignment to physician clinical practice for medical students	1 week clerkship = 1 credit		The accrediting body for medical schools, the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME), uses the metric of a minimum number of weeks of instruction for accreditation (130 weeks is the minimum), not a certain number of credit hours.	
Clinical	A course activity in which students, under the supervision of a faculty member, are involved with direct treatment or observation of patients/clients.		2400 - 3200	May vary for undergraduate and graduate.	
Colloquium	A course activity in which students attend a series of lectures delivered by experts in the field, but arranged by faculty.	800		These courses are typically 1 "hour"/week, therefore 1 credit.	Hours of weekly course meetings equal # of credit hours
Discussion	A course activity (generally associated with a lecture course) in which small groups of students, under the direction of a faculty member, are encouraged to interact and study various aspects of the subject through oral and written communications.	800		Just the same as lecture, because the faculty member is present.	Hours of weekly course meetings equal # of credit hours
Distance Learning	A course using electronic media which have the same learning objectives of traditional face-to-face course types. The delivery is 50% or more via electronic media when the instructor and student are at different locations. The delivery may be synchronous or asynchronous.	800 for direct or asynchronous online/electronic contact, lecture, colloquium, guided independent study and instructor designed projects, discussion, and recitation	800-3200 for clinical, studio, (virtual) laboratory, research, and practicum	E-coursework is comprised of highly structured ongoing, monitored activities designed by the instructor.	To determine a direct contact credit hour, tally student engaged learning time (excluding homework) by adding number of minutes devoted to instruction, online tutorials, discussion, student presentations, and other methods. Divide by 800. Clinical, studio, laboratory research and practicum credits vary by discipline. In scheduling classes, the Registrar should note that distance learning and hybrid courses do not always have the "seat-time" hours of traditional coursework.

Meeting Pattern	Description	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Direct Contact	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Other Effort	Explanation	Process for Standard Semester
Independent Study	A course in which students learn independently, meeting periodically with a faculty member to discuss and report progress; provides the opportunity to study material not normally covered or offered in the regular curriculum or course offerings.	800	800	Typically 1 contact "hour"/week, 2 independent "hours," therefore 3 credits.	
Laboratory	A course activity in which students test, analyze, or demonstrate the applications of ideas, theories, techniques, and/or methods.		1600 - 2400	Hours may vary depending on laboratory requirements.	Divide weekly lab hours by 2 or 3 to calculate credit hours
Lecture	A course activity in which an instructor presents information, typically in oral format, for most of the contact period, with limited to moderate interaction with students in the classroom.	800		Standard lecture pattern	Hours of weekly course meetings equal # of credit hours
Practicum	A required course activity designed to help students integrate classroom learning with actual work experience emphasizing the practical applications of theory; includes non-clinical internships/externships and specifically includes student teaching.	800	1600	The classroom learning is at the 800 rate, and outside work such as teaching is 1600. So a course that meets weekly for 1 "hour" and students work for 4 "hours" counts for 3 credits.	
Recitation	A course activity in which students test, analyze, or demonstrate the applications of ideas, theories, techniques, and/or methods.	800		Typically 1 "hour"/week, therefore 1 credit	
Research	A course in which the principal student activity is to conduct independent investigation under the supervision of a faculty member (pre-qualifying only)	800	800	Same as independent study. If the student meets for one "hour"/week with the faculty member, the student must add 2 "hours" to get 3 credits	

Meeting Pattern	Description	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Direct Contact	Number of Minutes per Semester to Count for One Credit, Other Effort	Explanation	Process for Standard Semester
Residency	A course offered exclusively to provide residence credit for a graduate or professional degree.		1600	The student might meet with advisor or not, but is expected to work at least 4 "hours"/week on thesis (for course XX767). The number of credits is stipulated by the course description and is independent of contact hours.	
Seminar	A course activity (generally offered as an independent course) in which small groups of students, under the direction of a faculty member, engage in the advanced, intensive study of a selected topic(s) through oral and written communications.	800		Typically 1 "hour"/week, therefore 1 credit	
Studio	A course normally associated with visual/creative arts activities that require specialized facilities beyond those of a normal classroom/lab and emphasize individual development through expressive media.	1600	800-1600	In most cases, studio courses require at least two hours of contact with the instructor per credit hour, and an additional 1 to 2 hours of in-studio work by the student.	



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CREDIT HOURS

- Policy -

As part of its review of an institution seeking initial or continuing accreditation, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) conducts reviews of an institution's assignment of credit hours. Academic credit has provided the basis for measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled not only in traditional classroom settings but also laboratories, studios, internships and other experiential learning, and distance and correspondence education. Students, institutions, employers, and others rely on the common currency of academic credit to support a wide range of activities, including the transfer of students from one institution to another. For several decades, the federal government has relied on credits as a measure of student academic engagement as a basis of awarding financial aid.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to institutions and evaluation committees on the Commission's expectations regarding credits and to set forth the federal regulations regarding the award of credit.

Federal Definition of the Credit Hour. For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time, or
2. At least an equivalent amount of work as required outlined in item 1 above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Guidelines for Flexibility in Interpretation. An institution is responsible for determining the credit hours awarded for coursework in its programs in accordance with the definition of a credit hour for Federal program purposes. The definition does provide some flexibility for institutions in determining the appropriate amount of credit hours for student coursework.

- The institution determines the amount of credit for student work.
- A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education.
- The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.
- The definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work.
- In determining the amount of work the institution's learning outcomes will entail, the institution may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.

- To the extent an institution believes that complying with the Federal definition of a credit hour would not be appropriate for academic and other institutional needs, it may adopt a separate measure for those purposes.
- Credits may be awarded on the basis of documentation of the amount of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified amount of academically engaged time, or on the basis of documented student learning calibrated to that amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.

The intent of the above flexibility as provided by Federal guidance is to recognize the differences across institutions, fields of study, types of coursework, and delivery methods, while providing a consistent measure of student work for purposes of Federal programs.

Commission Obligations in the Review of the Credit Hour. The Commission reviews the institution's (1) policies and procedures for determining credit hours, including clock to credit hour conversions, that the institution awards for coursework, and (2) the application of its policies and procedures to its programs and coursework. Following the evaluation, the Commission's Board of Trustees is obligated to make a reasonable determination regarding the institution's assignment of credit hours and whether it conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education. In doing so, the Commission may use sampling or other methods in its evaluation. As with the identification of non-compliance with other standards, the Board is obligated to take action in accord with that used in relation to other standards of non-compliance. If the Commission's Board finds systemic non-compliance with this policy or significant non-compliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, the Commission is required to notify the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Procedures

1. **Institutions preparing Compliance Certifications in anticipation of reaffirmation of accreditation (accredited institutions) or initial membership (candidate institutions).**
The institution will be required to document compliance with Federal Requirement 4.9 (Definition of Credit Hours) and Comprehensive Standard 3.13.1 (Policy Compliance) as relates to credit hours. If the Board imposes a public sanction or takes adverse action in part or in full for continuing non-compliance with FR 4.9 and CS 3.13.1 as applies to the credit hour, the Commission will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education. The institution will be informed of such action.
2. **Institutions undergoing substantive change review related to an academic program review in anticipation of continuing accreditation.**
The institution will be required to address Federal Requirement 4.9 (Definition of Credit Hours) as part of its prospectus (program expansion) or application (degree level change). Following review of the prospectus, Commission staff will refer the substantive change case to the Commission's Board of Trustees if there is evidence of non-compliance with FR 4.9. For substantive change cases involving level change, the application will automatically be forwarded to the Commission's Board of Trustees.

As a result of Board review that may include a site visit, if the Board imposes a public sanction or takes adverse action in part or in full for continuing non-compliance with FR 4.9 and CS 3.13.1 as applies to the credit hour, the Commission will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education. The institution will be informed of such action.
3. The Commission is not responsible for reviewing every course and related documentation of learning outcomes; rather, the Commission will review the policies and procedures that the institution uses to assign credit hours, with the application verified by a sampling of the institution's degrees and nondegree programs to include a variety of academic activities, disciplines, and delivery modes. The review process for sampling encompasses a varied sample of the institution's degree and nondegree programs in terms of academic discipline, level, delivery modes, and types of academic activities. In reviewing academic activities other than classroom or direct faculty instruction accompanied by out-of-class work, the Commission will determine whether an institution's processes and procedures result in the establishment of reasonable equivalencies for

the amount of academic work described in paragraph one of the credit hour definition within the framework of acceptable institutional practices at comparable institutions of higher education for similar programs.

4. The Commission will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education of its findings of systemic non-compliance with this policy or FR 4.9 or of significant non-compliance regarding one or more programs at the institution only after the Commission follows its review process that includes notification to the institution of non-compliance and a reasonable time period for the institution to respond to the citations and provide documentation of compliance.
5. Comprehensive Standard 3.4.6 reads as follows: “The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery.” It is to be reviewed in conjunction with FR 4.9.

Document History

Approved: Board of Trustees, June 2011