

USA Credit Hour Policy

Effective Date: 7/20/12

POLICY

The credit hour is defined as a unit of instruction that consists of one hour of classroom direct instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week of a 15 week semester or an equivalent amount of student work in a different instructional model.

A reasonably equivalent amount of work (three hours per week for a semester) must be represented for a credit hour in other academic activities such as online courses, blended courses, laboratory work, internships, practica, and studio work.

Courses offered in shorter timeframes must have a reasonably equivalent amount of work dedicated to instruction and student work as that spent in a 15 week semester-based class.

GUIDELINES

The following guidance indicates how this policy is applied to credit situations that are not taught in the standard 15-week format or are not classroom based learning experiences. The credit hour guidelines represent a minimum baseline. It is acceptable to exceed these levels.

A 3-credit hour course, for example, should require the reasonable equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction (3 hours) and student work (6 hours) per week for the equivalent of a 15-week semester. Given that the USA course hour¹ is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 135 course hours (or 112.5 clock hours) for the course. These hours may consist of course activities including, but not limited to, those listed below.

- Face-to-face course meetings
- Time to read/view assigned texts or other assigned materials
- Virtual course meetings or student-instructor and student-student interactions
- Experiential learning activities consistent with the learning objectives of the course
- Practicum placements
- Research with faculty
- Service learning projects
- Examinations or other learning assessments

Because the pace of reading, writing, and other activities varies widely, time spent in any of these areas will not be identical for all students. Assigned activities should reflect a reasonable expectation by the instructor of the time it would take to meet the learning objectives of the course or assignment.

¹ Federal guidance does not specify the number of minutes implied by "one hour" stating that "We believe it is unnecessary to define one hour as either 50 minutes or one clock hour because the primary purpose of...the definition is to provide institutions with a baseline, not an absolute value for determining reasonable equivalencies or approximations for the amount of academic activity defined" (Federal Register, Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66486).

Credit Hour Review Process

Recent accreditation requirements and federal regulations require that the University establish credit hour policies and procedures that particularly impact non-traditional course formats. The credit hour review process below addresses those requirements for new courses, existing courses being offered in a different format, or existing courses offered in a non-traditional format.

New course

Any new course offered for the first time should use the Credit Hour Estimate form to determine credit hour estimates, a Curriculum Action Form, and a new or revised syllabus that reflects the course format and instructional learning activities.

- The normal approval process for CAF forms is then followed within the college including a review of the Credit Hour Estimate Form to determine if the credit hours proposed address the University's Credit Hour Policy (posted on the Academic Affairs web site).
- The University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (Graduate Council for graduate classes) will next consider the CAF form and the attached documentation concerning credit hour equivalence for approval.
- Approved forms and documentation are then processed through Academic Affairs and the Registrar.

Existing course being offered in a different format

Any existing course being offered in a different format (e.g., online) for the first time should use the Credit Hour Estimate form to determine credit hour estimates, a Curriculum Action Form, and a new or revised syllabus that reflects the course format and instructional learning activities.

- The normal approval process for CAF forms is then followed within the college including a review of the Credit Hour Estimate Form to determine if the credit hours proposed are reasonably equivalent to the University's Credit Hour Policy.
- Approved forms and documentation are then processed through Academic Affairs and the Registrar. (Approval by the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee or Graduate Council is not required for change of format).

Existing course in non-traditional format¹

Any existing course that is NOT delivered in a classroom or direct faculty instruction accompanied by out-of-class work² should use the Credit Hour Estimate form to determine reasonable equivalents of credit hour estimates.

- Completed Credit Hour Estimate Forms and syllabi should be reviewed by the Department Chair or his or her representative(s). Both the completed Credit Hour Estimate Forms and syllabi should be on file at the Department for review by appropriate University or Accrediting representatives.
- Approval for syllabi and Credit Hour Estimate Forms must be completed no later than December 1, 2012.

¹ A non-traditional course format includes an online course (WO), blended course (WB), a practicum, an internship, but does not include laboratory courses.

² Not less than three hours of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of six hours out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for three semester hours of credit