

Credit Hour Policy

Under federal regulations effective July 1, 2011, both institutions and accrediting agencies are required to come into compliance with regulations regarding the definition and assignment of credit hours under 34 CFR 600.2 and 34 CFR 602.24.

All candidate and accredited institutions are required to comply with the definition of the credit hour.

Definition of a Credit Hour: "Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), 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 not less than— (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of 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 in paragraph (1) of this definition 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."

As required by 34 CFR 602.24, the Commission will evaluate as part of all seeking accreditation and comprehensive reviews the extent to which institutions meet the federal definition of a credit hour, by reviewing:

1. The adoption of a policy on credit hour for all courses and programs at the institution.
2. The processes the institution employs to review periodically the application of its policy on credit hour across the institution to assure that credit hour assignments are accurate and reliable.
3. Any variations in the assignment of credit hours to assure that they conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education.

In implementing this policy, Commission evaluation teams will review institutional documentation including the institution's policy on credit hour and expectations at each degree level, evidence of the implementation of institutional review processes to assure the reliability and accuracy of credit hour assignments in all courses and programs, and through sampling, a variety of course credit assignments based on degree level, academic discipline, delivery modes, and types of academic activities.

Evaluation team findings will be included in reports to the Commission and where deficiencies are found, they shall be so noted, and the Commission will act to assure that these deficiencies are addressed through follow up reporting and additional monitoring. If the Commission finds significant noncompliance with this policy regarding one or more programs at the institution, the Commission will promptly notify the Secretary of Education in addition to any follow up mandated by the Commission.

In addition, credit hour assignments shall be included as part of the review process conducted by the substantive change committee. Additional protocols for implementation of this policy may be developed to assist institutions and teams in conducting reviews under this policy.