

Credit Hour Policy

Academic credit has provided the basis to measure the amount of engaged learning time expected of a student enrolled in traditional classroom settings, laboratories, studios, internships, independent studies, and distance education programs. Credit hours are a commonly accepted means of measuring student engagement for multiple purposes, including the transfer of students from one institution to another and the award of financial aid. While this credit hour policy is intended to provide guidance to institutions and peer reviewers with expectations for compliance, the Commission is open to innovative ways to measure student learning and academic engagement.

Definition of Credit Hour

The Commission defines credit hour as an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that

1. Approximates not less than:
 - a. 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 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
 - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph 1.a. 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; and
2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines and degree levels. Institutions have the flexibility to award a greater number of credits for courses that they can show require more student work.

Review of an Institution's Credit Hour Policy and Procedures

Commission peer review teams will evaluate, as part of all seeking accreditation and comprehensive reviews for reaffirmation of accreditation, the extent to which institutions meet the Commission's definition of a credit hour, by examining:

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, reliable, and consistently applied.
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, teams will use the [Credit Hour and Program Length Form](#) to review

institutional documentation:

- The institution's policy on credit hour including expectations at each degree level;
- An explanation of the institution's process for periodic review of the application of this policy;
- Evidence of the implementation of institutional review processes to assure the reliability and accuracy of credit hour assignments in all courses and programs; for example, as part of program review, process for new course approval, or periodic audits; and
- Evidence that the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education, through sampling a variety of course syllabi based on degree level, academic discipline, delivery modes, and types of academic activities.

In addition, the substantive change committee process includes a review of credit hour assignments and validation of an institution's credit hour policy. Additional protocols for implementation of this policy may be developed to assist institutions and teams in conducting reviews under this policy.

Approved by the Commission, November 2011

Revised, November 2020