

Credit Hour Policy

Background

Federal Mandate

Academic credit hours are a common metric for measuring enrollment status and degree completion but there is no commonly accepted, national definition for a credit hour. Additionally, credit hours are used to define programs eligible for Title IV funding and the amount of financial aid for which a student may be eligible.

The United States Department of Education requires, as part of the program integrity initiative, that each institution define a credit hour according to the guidelines provided by its accrediting agency and by the state authorizing the institution.

New York State Regulations

Semester hour means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of this Subchapter. This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year. . (http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/title_8_chapter_ii_regulations_o.htm#Â§%2050.1%20Definitions)

Middle States Accreditation Requirements

The Middle States Verification of Compliance Report, which must be completed at least once every five years, requires evidence that credit hours are strictly defined and monitored.

Additional Considerations

Changes in instructional technology, delivery format and other pedagogical considerations require a definition that moves beyond the traditional seat-time definition. Institutionally, credit hours are used to define faculty workloads, student credit loads and student grade point averages.

Policy

The credit hour is the basic unit of academic credit granted by St. Bonaventure University. It reflects the Carnegie unit which has served as the traditional unit of measure in higher education. One semester credit is equivalent to one hour (50 minutes) of faculty instruction time per week for 15 weeks (for a total of no less than 750 minutes or 12.5 hours per credit hour), and a minimum of two hours of student preparation time outside of the classroom each week per credit hour. An equivalent amount of work is required for lectures, laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours. Departments may determine contact time over the minimum requirements as needed.

The measure of this instructional contact time may be adjusted to reflect different formats of study or lengths of academic sessions. These adjustments are reflective of the intended student outcomes and established equivalencies of the semester credit hour set by St. Bonaventure University and reasonably reflect the requirements established by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in its "Credit Hour Policy" and the U.S. Department of Education definition of "credit hour."

Credit Hour Standards by Instructional Method

Direct Faculty Instruction—courses with multiple students that meet to engage students in various forms of group instruction. A typical 3-credit hour course will meet 2,250 minutes.

Examples: Credit hours contact time required

Number of semester credit hours awarded	Minimum instructional time per week for 15 weeks	Total minimum instructional time per semester
1 credit hour	50 contact minutes	750 contact minutes
2 credit hours	100 contact minutes	1500 contact minutes
3 credit hours	150 contact minutes	2250 contact minutes
4 credit hours	200 contact minutes	3000 contact minutes

Lecture/lab—courses with multiple students consisting mainly of various forms of group instruction but with a separate component regularly devoted to lab/activity experience. Through scheduling of classes and/or syllabi, academic departments must demonstrate that the proportion of lecture in the course meets the minimum contact time required as well as the minimum ratio of 2:1 of lab/activity experiences contact minutes to lecture contact minutes. For example, a 4-hour course that meets for 2 lecture credit hours and 2 lab/activity experiences credit hours would calculate the meeting time as follows:

2 lecture credit hours require 1500 contact minutes

2 lab/activity experiences credit hours require 3000 contact minutes (because the lab/activity experiences ratio must be 2:1 to the lecture time required).

Examples: Lab/activity and Studio credit hours contact time required

Number of semester credit hours awarded	Lecture minimum instructional time per week	Lecture minimum instructional time per semester	Lab/activity studio minimum instructional time per week	Lab/activity studio minimum instructional time per semester
1	50	750	100	1500
2	100	1500	200	3000
3	150	2250	300	4500
4	200	3000	400	6000

Independent Studies/Tutorials—courses of study given instructor guidance followed by regularly scheduled conferences with the instructor and with periodic and final evaluation by the instructor. Minimum credit hour requirements are determined based on lecture contact minutes or the ratio of lab/activity of 2:1 lab contact minutes to lecture contact minutes.

Lab—courses where the major focus is on experiential activities to support student learning. Minimum contact time is based on two times the amount of contact time of a lecture (2:1 ratio). One semester credit hour is awarded for a minimum of 1500 minutes of lab time.

Studio—courses taught as applied study on a private or semi-private basis with a minimum of 2:1 ratio (see chart).

Internships, Practicum/field experience—courses developed for independent learning or experience involving self-directed and often off-site learning. These courses are taught on a minimum 2:1 ratio (see chart).

Courses fewer than 15 weeks in length—courses offered in terms of length less than a traditional 15-week semester. These courses offer the same semester credit hours as traditional semester-length classes. Within the shortened time frame, these courses must meet the minimum contact hour requirements of the lecture format or of any of the other categories of study involving applied study at a 2:1 ratio.

Online—courses offered entirely online and without any required face-to-face class meetings. A week of instructional time is any given seven-day period in which at least one session of regularly scheduled instruction or examination occurs. Students are expected to be academically engaged through means which could include, but are not limited to, submitting an academic assignment; taking an exam, an interactive tutorial, or computer-assisted instruction; attending a virtual study group assigned by the instructor; contributing to an academic online discussion; and engaging in contact with the faculty member and class peers related to the academic subject of the course. Departments must document through scheduling of classes or syllabi that they are meeting the minimum semester credit hour requirement for the credit awarded. (U.S. DOE, CH-A5, 2.22.2013)

Hybrid—courses offered in a blended format with one or more required face-to-face class sessions and with one or more required online sessions. Departments must document through scheduling of classes or syllabi that they are meeting the minimum semester credit hour requirement for the credit awarded.

Review

The Registrar's Office regularly audits scheduled course offerings to ensure compliance with credit hour requirements through its processes for scheduling each semester. This review is conducted across all schools, disciplines, and course levels, and modes of instruction. The Registrar's Office maintains an historical record of its review of each semester.

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[Adapted from Duquesne University's Credit Hour Definitions Policy and the Review Policy for Compliance with MSCHE Credit Hour Requirements]