

# University of Alabama

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

## Credit Hour Definition/Policy

[As of: 4/25/2013]

### **Purpose.**

The purpose of this policy is to guide the determination of credit hours to be awarded for course work in all University of Alabama degree programs in accordance with the Federal Definition of a Credit Hour and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Credit Hours Policy Statement. For a detailed description of the Federal Definition of a Credit Hour and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Credit Hours Policy, please see Appendix #1.

### **Implementation Date.**

06/01/2013

### **Policy.**

The University of Alabama will normally grant one semester hour of credit for the learning outcomes expected upon the satisfactory completion of approximately fifteen 50 minute sessions of direct faculty instruction /examination or equivalent form of assessment in the typical fall and spring semesters.

Colleges may award credit for the any of the following reasons:

1. Experiencing one hour [50 minutes] of class attendance/faculty instruction/examination or equivalent form of assessment per week.
2. Performing the equivalent amount of work over a different period of time.
3. Demonstrating evidence of achievement, represented in intended learning outcomes, that is equal to the amount of work that is equivalent to experiencing one hour of class attendance or faculty instruction per week, for 15 weeks, etc.

Instruction may take place in a variety of modes appropriate to the discipline. This basic measure may be adjusted proportionately to reflect modified academic calendars, standard calendar variations from one term to another, formats of study, and exigencies, e.g., severe weather, etc.

Underlying this statement is the assumption that each 50 minute session requires the average student to spend twice as much time outside of class reviewing the material presented in class, preparing for upcoming classes, completing homework assignments,

studying for quizzes and exams, and other tasks which verify evidence of student achievement and mastery of the course materials. More specifically,

1. A 1-credit hour class will *approximate* 750 minutes of instruction/examination per semester.
2. A 2-credit hour class will *approximate* 1,500 minutes of instruction/examination per semester.
3. A 3-credit hour class will *approximate* 2,250 minutes of instruction/examination per semester.
4. A 4-credit hour course will *approximate* 3,000 minutes of instruction/ examination per semester.

### **Other Instructional Modes**

One semester credit hour may be granted for manifold modes of instruction:

1. Activity supervised as a group (laboratory, field trip, practicum, workshop, and group studio). The semester credit hours awarded vary depending on the amount of outside work required. When substantial outside work is required for each two hour block of laboratory per week, one semester hour of credit is awarded. Group activity requiring little outside work may require three or four hours of laboratory each week for each semester credit hour awarded.
2. Supervised individual activity (independent study, individual studio, tutorial).
3. Full-time independent study (student teaching, practicum, internship).  
If a student's academic activity is essentially full-time (as in student teaching), one semester credit hour may be awarded for each week of work.
4. Experiential learning. One semester hour of credit may be awarded for each 40-45 hour week of activity that provides the learning considered necessary to the program of study.
5. Credit by examination. Semester credit hours may be awarded for mastery demonstrated through examination.
6. Short sessions (Interim Terms, Summer Terms (five and ten week), Weekend College, etc.). When credit hours are awarded for courses taught during a Part-of-Term, the learning outcomes expected must be the same as are expected for the same course taught during the fall or spring semester.

### **Online and Hybrid Instruction (Asynchronous).**

1. Courses offered using alternative forms of delivery [online, intensive, or a hybrid] shall be planned to enable students to achieve the equivalent student learning outcomes as courses offered in the traditional instructor led format in classrooms on main campus.
2. For each credit hour awarded, students should be spending approximately one hour (50 minutes) in contact with the instructor and two hours (100 minutes) of course

work outside of class per week over the equivalent of a 15-week semester [including examinations or equivalent forms of assessment].

3. “Hours outside of class” include advance/daily readings, writing, participation in online discussions, studying, reflection projects, final papers, etc... **Caution:** Intensive classes typically meet for four, five, or eight hours per day, five days a week. Consequently, for students in a an intensive course, depending on the length of the instructional day, students cannot be expected to spend 10+ hours per day studying outside of class.
4. For these courses the credit hour definition does not emphasize the concept of “seat time” as the primary metric for determining the amount of student work.
  - a. Credit hours may be assigned for an amount of work represented by verifiable student documentation of the amount of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified amount of academically engaged time,
  - b. Or on the basis of documented student learning calibrated to that amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.

### **Out-of-Class Coursework.**

In order to be successful, the average student will be expected to prepare for each class by engaging in a minimum of two hours of out-of-class work / week for each credit hour earned. Toward this end, students are expected to have completed the required assignments and reviewed previous lecture material in addition to completing any of the alternative forms of out-of-class work deemed appropriate by the instructor (term paper, lab work, problem sets, discussion questions, interviews, etc.).

### **Equivalent Coursework.**

Consistent with the federal definition of a credit hour, it is acceptable to replace sessions of equivalent instruction and- /-or examination with alternative forms of coursework (e.g., laboratory work, practicums, out-of-class assignments and projects, assigned readings, problem sets, discussion questions, service learning experiences, a “capstone” project, etc.).

### **Procedures for Implementation.**

#### **Designated Personnel Responsible for Implementation.**

The primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with the UA Credit Hour Policy is the faculty, Academic Department Chairs, and designated Assistant/Associate Deans within each college or school under the supervision of the respective academic dean. When a course is first proposed or a change to an existing course is submitted, via the Course Inventory Management Process, the Department Chair reviews the course syllabus and affirms that the appropriate credit hours have been assigned for the work to be completed both in class and outside of class. The syllabus should be descriptive enough that it may serve as evidentiary confirmation the course meets the UA Credit Hour Definition/Policy.

The syllabus is subsequently submitted to the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs for undergraduate courses and the Graduate School for graduate courses for final approval. This review process will affirm that the course is planned to be in compliance with the credit hour definition/policy.

“Active” courses in the on-line course inventory are expected to be in compliance with the credit hour definition/policy. These will be reviewed on a continuing five year schedule.

Each year each academic department, using the University’s on-line planning and assessment tool, will include an outcome for the assessment of their respective faculty’s compliance of this Credit Hour Definition/Policy. For Fall and Spring terms of the academic year, each academic department Chair will randomly select one course in each Program of Study for a comprehensive, compliance determination.

**Means By Which Institutional Constituents Are Informed Of The Policy and Procedures It Entails.**

The Dean will distribute copies of the policy and procedures to their chairs and faculty within their schools and colleges and discuss and answer related questions.

**Process of Amending and Approving the Credit Hour Policy Or Implementation Procedures.**

The Council of Deans in consultation with the Faculty Senate will consider and approve changes in the policy and its implementation.

**Is Compliance with Procedures Mandatory? Yes.**

## APPENDIX #1

The Federal Definition of a credit hour is:

*“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.”*

According to the federal guidelines, each 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. It is important to note that there is no requirement that a credit hour exactly duplicate the amount of work cited in the definition above. Rather, the requirement is that a credit hour reasonably approximates the minimum amount of work. This 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, measures of student work, academic calendars disciplines and degree levels. (Reference: Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter issuing Guidance to Institutions and Accrediting Agencies Regarding a Credit Hour as Defined in the Final Regulations Published on October 29, 2010).

The federal credit hour definition does not emphasize the concept of “seat time” (time in class) as the primary metric for determining the amount of student work for federal purposes. Institutions may assign credit hours to courses for an amount of work represented by verifiable student achievement of institutionally established learning outcomes. 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 the amount of academically engaged time for the typical student. (Reference: Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter issuing Guidance to Institutions and Accrediting Agencies Regarding a Credit Hour as Defined in the Final Regulations Published on October 29, 2010).