

USA Credit Hour Policy

Effective Date: 7/27/2026

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 an approximately 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.

- **Structured Instructional Activities:** Faculty-designed and facilitated activities that provide instruction, introduce concepts, demonstrate skills, or guide student learning. These activities may occur in person, online, synchronously, or asynchronously.
Examples: Lectures, live webinars, recorded instructional modules, demonstrations, lessons, instructional videos, guided tutorials.
- **Interactive and Applied Learning Activities:** Activities that require students to actively engage with content, peers, instructors, patients, clients, or community partners to apply knowledge and develop skills.
Examples: Laboratories, small-group discussions, discussion boards, team-based learning, studio activities, simulations, standardized patient experiences, recitations, field experiences, service-learning, internships, clinical experiences, practicum experiences
- **Assessment Activities:** Activities designed to evaluate, measure, and provide feedback on student learning, knowledge, skills, competencies, and achievement of course outcomes.
Examples: Quizzes, examinations, presentations, projects, papers, written reflections, portfolios, peer review activities, graded assignments.

- Independent Learning Activities: Faculty-assigned activities completed independently by students to prepare for, reinforce, extend, or demonstrate learning.
Examples: Reading, studying, reviewing course materials, research, homework, practice exercises, skill drills, projects, preparation for assessments, AI-assisted tutoring or practice activities

Credit hours are based on the total amount of student academic engagement required to achieve the stated learning outcomes of a course. Academic engagement may occur through structured instructional activities, interactive and applied learning activities, assessment activities, and independent learning activities. The combination of these activities should be consistent with federal regulations, accreditation expectations, disciplinary standards, and the achievement of course learning outcomes.

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

Accreditation requirements and federal regulations require that the University establish credit hour policies and procedures for all course formats. The credit hour review process below addresses those requirements for new courses and for existing courses being offered in a different format.

New course

Any new course offered for the first time should use the Credit Hour Estimate (CHE) form to determine credit hour estimates. The Credit Hour Estimate form should be uploaded as a part of a new course proposal in Courseleaf CIM. Courseleaf CIM includes a designated location to upload the CHE, as well as a location for the course syllabus. The CHE and syllabus must reflect the proposed format for the course.

- The normal review process for new courses is then followed once the new course proposal is submitted to workflow in Courseleaf CIM.
- Requests to add multiple different modalities for a new course (e.g., adding both Campus Hybrid and Remote Independent) should include a separate CHE and syllabus for each requested modality. In preparing the Credit Hour Estimate form, be mindful that some modalities have restrictions as indicated in the Policy on Course Formats. For example, Campus Hybrid courses can have at most 49% online content.
- Approved proposals are 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., Remote Independent) for the first time should use the Credit Hour Estimate form to determine credit hour distributions, and attach the form as part of a substantive change request for the course in Courseleaf CIM. In addition to the CHE, the request should include a new syllabus that reflects how the course will be taught in the proposed course format.

- Requests to add multiple different modalities for an existing course (e.g., adding both Campus Hybrid and Remote Independent) should include a separate CHE and syllabus for each requested modality. In preparing the Credit Hour Estimate form, be mindful that some modalities have restrictions as indicated in the Course Modalities Policy. For example, campus hybrid courses can have at most 49% online content.
- Approved change requests are processed through Academic Affairs and the Registrar.