

Policy on ~~Institutional Degrees and~~ Credits Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year

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Background

~~The Accreditation Standard II and Eligibility Requirements 9 and 10~~ The Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Policies (hereafter referred to as the Commission's Standards) require institutions to meet generally accepted practices when awarding credit. These practices require evidence of:

1. academic study of sufficient content, breadth, and length;
2. levels of rigor appropriate to the programs and/or degrees, including baccalaureate degrees offered;
3. statements of expected student learning outcomes relevant to the disciplines; and
4. assessment results which provide sufficient evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes.

This policy incorporates federal requirements regarding credit hour and defines credit hour applicable to a degree or certificate awarded by an accredited institution, as well as adopts the federal definitions of terms related to institutional degrees and credits.

Policy

An accredited institution conforms to a commonly accepted minimum program length of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours awarded for achievement of student learning for an associate degree and 120 semester credit hours or 180 quarter credit hours for a bachelor's degree. Any exception to this minimum must be explained and justified.

An accredited institution must have in place written policies and procedures for determining a credit hour that generally meet commonly accepted academic expectations and it must apply the policies and procedures consistently to its courses and programs.

~~At the time of a comprehensive review, the Commission will review the institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hours for its courses and programs and how these policies and procedures are applied. The Commission will as part of this review assess whether the institution implements the clock to credit hour conversion formula. The Commission will make a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hour conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education using sampling and other methods. If, following the review, the Commission finds systematic non-compliance with this policy or significant non-compliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, it must take appropriate action and promptly notify the U.S. Secretary of Education.²~~

¹34 C.F.R. § 602.24(f).

²34 C.F.R. § 602.24(f)(1),(2); § 668.8(i)(2).

Federal Definitions¹

~~Credit hour: An amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutional established equivalence that reasonably approximates not less than:~~

~~Except as provided in 34 CFR § 668.8(k) and (l), a credit hour is an amount of student work defined by an institution, as approved by the institution's accrediting agency or State approval agency, that is consistent with commonly accepted practice in postsecondary education and that—~~

~~1) Reasonably approximates not less than—~~

- ~~(i) 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~~
- ~~(ii) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1)(i) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, or other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.~~

~~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.~~

~~There is no requirement that a credit hour exactly duplicate the amount of work in paragraph (1) of the definition, as is highlighted by the provisions in paragraph (2). The requirement is that a credit hour reasonably approximates that minimum amount of work in paragraph (1).⁴~~

Clock hour:

1) A clock hour is a period of time consisting of—

- (i) A 50- to 60-minute class, lecture, or recitation in a 60-minute period;
- (ii) A 50- to 60-minute faculty-supervised laboratory, shop training, or internship in a 60-minute period;
- (iii) Sixty minutes of preparation in a correspondence course; or
- (iv) In distance education, 50 to 60 minutes in a 60-minute period of attendance in—
 - a. A synchronous or asynchronous class, lecture, or recitation where there is opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students; or
 - b. An asynchronous learning activity involving academic engagement in which the student interacts with technology that can monitor and document the amount of time that the student participates in the activity.

2) A clock hour in a distance education program does not meet the requirements of this definition if it does not meet all accrediting agency and State requirements or if it exceeds an agency's or State's restrictions on the number of clock hours in a program that may be offered through distance education.

¹ 34 C.F.R. § 600.2

- 3) An institution must be capable of monitoring a student's attendance in 50 out of 60 minutes for each clock hour under this definition.

Clock-to-Credit-Hour Conversion Formula

Federal Formula²:

~~(1) — Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this section, below, for purposes of determining the number of credit hours in that educational program with regard to Title IV, Higher Education Act program:~~

- ~~(i) — a semester hour must include at least 37.5 clock hours of instruction;~~
~~(ii) — a trimester hour must include at least 37.5 clock hours of instruction; and~~
~~(iii) — a quarter hour must include at least 25 clock hours of instruction.~~

~~(2) — The institution's conversions to establish a minimum number of clock hours of instruction per credit may be less than those specified in paragraph (1) of this section, if the institution's designated accrediting agency⁵, or recognized State agency for the approval of public postsecondary vocational institutions for participation in the Title IV, Higher Education Act programs, has not identified any deficiencies with the institution's policies or procedures, or their implementation, so long as~~

~~(i) — The institution's student work outside of class combined with the clock hours of instruction meet or exceed the numeric requirements in paragraph (1) of this section~~

~~For purposes of determining whether a program described in paragraph (h) of this section satisfies the requirements contained in paragraph (c)(3) or (d) of this section, and the number of credit hours in that educational program for the purposes of the meets requirements set forth in Title IV, HEA programs—~~

- ~~(A)1) — a semester hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction;~~
~~(B)2) a trimester hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction; and~~
~~(C)3) a quarter hour must include at least 20 clock hours of instruction.~~⁶

³ 34 C.F.R. § 600.2.

⁴ See U.S. Department of Education, Guidance to Institutions and Accrediting Agencies Regarding a Credit Hour as Defined in the Final Regulations published on October 29, 2010, published March 2011.⁵ In the context of this policy, the ACCJC.

⁶ 34 C.F.R. § 668.8 (l)(1),(2).

² 34 C.F.R. § 668.8 (l)(1)(2)

~~**Quarter credit hour or quarter hour:** quarter credit hours represent proportionately less work than semester hours due to shorter terms; this equates to about two-thirds of a semester credit hour. See USNEL.⁷~~

~~**Contact hour or clock hour:** a unit of measure which represents an hour of scheduled instruction given to a student. See IPEDS.⁸~~

Academic Year:³ for the purposes of Federal student assistance programs, an academic year has a minimum of 30 weeks of instructional time for a course of study that measures its program length in credit hours or a minimum of 26 weeks of instructional time for a course of study that measures its program length in clock hours. A full time student is expected to complete at least 24 semester credit hours or 36 quarter credit hours in an academic year.⁹

An academic year in a direct assessment program is a period of instructional time that consists of a minimum of 30 weeks of instructional time during which a full time student is expected to complete the equivalent of at least 24 semester credit hours, 36 quarter hours or 900 clock hours.¹⁰

A week of instructional time is any week in which—

- (i) At least one day of regularly scheduled instruction or examinations occurs, or, after the last scheduled day of classes for a term or payment period, at least one day of study for final examinations occurs; or
- (ii) (A) In a program offered using asynchronous coursework through distance education or correspondence courses, the institution makes available the instructional materials, other resources, and instructor support necessary for academic engagement and completion of course objectives; and
(B) In a program using asynchronous coursework through distance education, the institution expects enrolled students to perform educational activities demonstrating academic engagement during the week; and

Instructional time does not include any scheduled breaks and activities not included in the definition of “academic engagement” in 34 CFR 600.2, or periods of orientation or counseling.

~~**Program:** a combination of courses and related activities organized for the attainment of broad educational objectives described by the institution. These may include:~~

~~**Certificate:** a formal award certifying the satisfactory completion of a postsecondary education program, generally focused on a pre-baccalaureate career or technical education program of study that is less than two years of full-time equivalent college work; or~~

~~**Associate degree:** an award that requires completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level below the baccalaureate degree which is at least 2 but less than 4 years of full-time equivalent college work. See IPEDS.³~~

~~**Baccalaureate degree:** an award that requires completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level which normally requires at least 4 years but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college work. See IPEDS.³~~

³ 34 C.F.R. § 668.3

See Policy on Competency Based Education for guidance on outcomes based approaches to earning a degree or credential, including direct assessment programs.

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⁷ U.S. Network for Education Information
(http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/edlite_index.html)

⁸ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>)

⁹ 20 U.S.C. § 1088.

¹⁰ 34 C.F.R. § 668.10.