

28. Policy on Credit Hour (approved for public comment 6/3/11)

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to DETC accredited degree-granting institutions and applicant institutions as to the definition and requirements for establishing and documenting credit hours. Institutions may define their programs in terms of credit hours and thereby adopt a common classification system which is understood and recognized by the higher education community.

Institutions are responsible and accountable for demonstrating that each course has the appropriate amount of student work for students to achieve the level of competency (i.e., learning outcomes) defined by institutionally established course objectives.

DETC will review and evaluate an institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hours that the institution awards and their application to an institution's courses and programs. In its review and evaluation, DETC will:

- (1) Make a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education as determined by showing a comparison with other appropriately accredited institutions;
- (2) Make use of its subject matter evaluator's reports or other methods as warranted to verify the institution's assignment of credit hours; and
- (3) Take such actions that it deems appropriate to address any deficiencies. DETC will consider all relevant factors to determine whether an institution's assignment of credit hours is appropriate with commonly accepted practices.

All standards for measuring satisfactory academic progress must include qualitative and quantitative standards by which student progress is evaluated. Action must be taken by the institution if students fail to meet the institution's minimum standards of progress. Please reference C.14. Policy on Student Achievement and Satisfaction for additional standards for measuring student progress.

Credit Hour Defined

DETC's definition of credit hour assigned to academic programs is:

Semester and quarter hours shall be equivalent to the commonly accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement in accredited institutions. Academic degree or academic credit-bearing distance learning courses are measured by the learning outcomes normally achieved through 45 hours of student work for one semester credit¹ or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit.² This formula is typically referred to as a Carnegie unit and is used by the American Council on Education in its Credit Recommendation Evaluative Criteria.

¹one credit/semester hour is 15 hours of academic engagement and 30 hours of preparation

²one quarter hour credit is 10 hours of academic engagement and 20 hours of preparation

Student work includes direct or indirect faculty instruction. *Academic engagement* may include, but not limited to, submitting an academic assignment, listening to class lectures or webinars (synchronous or asynchronous), taking an exam, an interactive tutorial, or computer-assisted instruction; attending a study group that is assigned by the institution; contributing to an academic online discussion; initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course and laboratory work, externship or internship. *Preparation* is typically homework, such as reading and study time, and completing assignments and projects. Therefore, a 3 credit hour course would require 135 hours (45 hours of academic engagement and 90 hours of preparation).

All student work must be documented in the curriculum materials and syllabi, including a reasonable approximation of time required for the student to complete the assignments. Evaluation of a student’s work must be identified as a grading criterion and weighted appropriately in the determination of a final grade for a course.

In addition to an institution’s determination and documentation of credit hours, DETC requires its subject matter specialist to verify that the courses are assigned appropriate credit. The following statement is included in DETC’s A.1. Examiner’s Rating Form for All Institutions; A.3. Rating Form for Off-Site Degree Subject Specialists, A.4. Rating Form for On-Site Subject Specialists, and the cover letter to the Subject Specialist:

Is each course assigned the appropriate “semester” and “quarter” equivalent to the commonly-accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement in an appropriately accredited institution? (1 credit/semester hour requires 15 hours of academic engagement plus 30 hours of preparation OR 1 quarter hour/unit requires 10 hours of academic engagement plus 20 hours of preparation or equivalent).

(Please note: for Title IV purposes, DETC institutions must comply with Federal requirements for credit hour or clock-to-credit hour conversions which may be different from those required by DETC for academic purposes.)

Action

An institution must have policies and procedures for determining its credit hours and for applying the policies and procedures to its programs and coursework. The institution must document that the amount of credit awarded for student work is in accordance with DETC’s credit hour definition. In determining the amount of work the institution’s learning outcomes require, the institution must measure and document its various methods for collecting this information.

Institutions may assign credit hours 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 a typical student.

Typically, determining the credit hours for a course is done during the course development stage. Learning outcomes are established and stated in the course objectives. An institution must measure and document the amount of time it takes the average student to achieve learning outcomes, and specify the academic engagement and preparation time.

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