

Credit Hour Policy at Oklahoma City University

The credit hour or semester hour, terms used interchangeably, is the unit of instruction. One credit hour is constituted by a minimum of one hour¹ of classroom or direct instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for a semester (or its equivalent). An equivalent amount of work (minimum three hours per week for a semester or its equivalent of combined direct instruction and outside of class student work) must be represented for a credit hour in other academic activities such as laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work and other academic work.

Semester is defined as not less than 16 weeks. Courses offered in shorter timeframes must have an equivalent number of hours dedicated to instruction and student work as that spent in a semester-based class.

The following guidance indicates how this policy is applied to credit situations that are not taught in the standard 16-week format or are not classroom-based learning experiences. The credit hour guidelines represent a minimum baseline. It is acceptable to exceed these levels.

Federal Credit Hour Definition: 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 not less than: (1) 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 (2) at least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward to the award of credit hours.

34CFR 600.2 (11/1/2010)

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 approximation for the amount of academic activity defined" (Federal Register, Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66486).

Courses Meeting Fewer than 16 Weeks and Online or other Distance Learning Guidance

Due to Federal regulations from the US Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission requires institutions to document how they determine seat-time and out-of-class time equivalencies for online courses and therefore document how the number of credit hours assigned to an online course is determined.

The credit hours awarded for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per credit hour for a 16-week semester.

For example, a 3-credit course should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 16-week semester. Given that the "course hour" is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 120 total hours for the course. These hours may consist of course activities including, but not limited to, those listed below.

- Face-to-face course meetings (low residency, hybrid, or compressed semester (i.e. 9-week, Block, Summer 1 & 2, and Maymester courses)
- Time to read/view assigned texts or other assigned materials
- Virtual course meetings or student-instructor and student-student interactions
- Experiential learning activities consistent with the learning objectives of the course
 - Service learning projects
 - Research with faculty
 - Practicum placements
- Synthesis/processing/reflection time and activities (may be used for writing or production of creative work which may take many forms including but not limited to journals, formal papers, blogs, art, music, etc.)

²Assignment of Credit Hours: The institution's assignment and award of credit hours shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education. Those institutions seeking, or participating in, Title IV federal financial aid, shall demonstrate that they have policies determining the credit hours awarded to courses and programs in keeping with commonly-accepted practices and with the federal definition of the credit hour, as reproduced herein for reference only, and that institutions also have procedures that result in an appropriate awarding of institutional credit in conformity with the policies established by the institution.

The University must define and employ a consistent process for determining equivalencies for seat-time (in-class time) and out-of-class time for online courses. The remainder of this document provides the protocol for documenting in-class and out-of-class time for online courses. The Provost's Office is responsible for operationalizing this protocol.

² <https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/assignment-of-credits.html>

Courses offered in both online and on-ground format

If a course is offered both on-ground and online, and each of the following conditions is met, then the online course is considered to have equivalent classroom and out-of-class time as the on-ground course, no additional action is needed.

- Term length is the same
- Syllabus (including course activities) is the same
- Stated student learning outcomes are the same
- Online students are required to regularly engage with the instructor and with other students in the course. Regular engagement between the instructor and the student is initiated by the instructor.

If each of the above conditions are not met then additional information is gathered which will be used to calculate in-class and out-of-class time equivalencies for the online course. The process for gathering this data follows.

Process for documenting seat-time & out-of-class time equivalencies

The following process is used to document seat-time and out-of-class time equivalents for an online course which either does not have an on-ground counterpart or for which the term length, the syllabus, or the student learning outcomes differ between the online and on-ground versions of the course.

- The Survey of Online Course Activity is sent to the instructor of record. The survey asks the instructor to provide information about the learning activities required for students enrolled in the course.
- The instructor may either complete the survey or respond by asking the unit's distance education coordinator to gather the information.
- The unit's distance education coordinator uses the information gathered either by the survey or by information gathered to calculate seat-time equivalency and out-of-class time equivalencies.
- The University's Distance Education Coordinator contacts the instructor to discuss the results of the calculation and modify the results if warranted based on additional information provided by the instructor.
- Seat-time and out-of-class time equivalencies of all online courses are documented by the University's distance education coordinator.

In order to provide a consistent approach for calculating the in-class and out-of-class equivalencies, standard assumptions are used. The discussion with individual instructors will provide additional context for the course and allow adjustments to be made to the calculation if needed. Instructors are invited to contact the University's Distance Education Coordinator to discuss the assumptions used as well as the class activities. Since this is a new process for the University, feedback and ideas to ensure the process and calculations accurately reflect the equivalent of seat-time and out-of-class time are welcomed.

Calculating Seat-time and Out-of-Class time Equivalencies for Online Courses

The tables below provide examples of activities commonly included in online courses and how seat-time and out-of-class time equivalencies are calculated for each activity. Additional activities will be added as requested by individual faculty members, by online programs, or as they become a commonly occurring activity in online courses offered by Oklahoma City University. Time estimates are based on literature noted in the references section at the end of this document.

Transitioning to the online teaching environment provides an opportunity to consider how best to design a course to effectively and actively engage students in the learning process, to consider how best to provide learning experiences in the online environment. Online course design and learning experiences are likely to differ from those used in the traditional face-to-face classroom. Instructional designers in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning or within the academic unit are available to consult with faculty to explore new course designs, learning experience design, and instructional tools.

The following estimates of time for learning activities in the online classroom are not intended to suggest that each learning activity should be included in every course and are not intended to suggest a direct translation of a face-to-face course is best for creating an online version of the course.

The term *Assumption* will be used to denote the agreed upon time estimates due to the fact that pace of reading, writing, and other activities varies widely, time spent in any of these areas will not be identical for all students. Rather an assigned activity should reflect a reasonable expectation by the instructor of the time it would take to meet the learning objectives of the course or assignment.

Seat Time Equivalencies
Discussion Boards
Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Composition Speed for Discussion Board Postings: 25 words written per minute• Time provided for discussion board posting: 20 minutes per discussion board• Reading peers' discussion board postings: read at 180 words per minute• Students read all peers' postings for the duration of the course (all peers within the student's discussion group).
Calculation Data Points <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total number of discussion boards for the duration of course• Required minimum number of words for initial DB postings per week• Required number of initial DB postings• Number of responses required per DB• Required minimum number of words for DB responses to peer

Reading Instructor's Feedback
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 minutes allotted per graded short assignment for the student to review instructor feedback • 40 minutes allotted per graded major assignment for the student to review instructor feedback <p>Calculation Data Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of assignments for which students will review feedback.
Quizzes
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 minutes per question allotted for taking a quiz <p>Calculation Data Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of quiz questions during the course.
Weekly Lecture Notes, Recorded Lecture Videos
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 minutes allotted per issuance of weekly lecture notes <p>Calculation Data Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos: Time based on length of lecture (e.g., 10 minutes recorded lecture equals 10 minutes of contact time) • Time allocated for student to review video: Estimated by instructor based on complexity of material [e.g. if students need to review and take detailed notes on several slides, add an extra 3-5 minutes per slide]
Links to External Websites
<p>Assumption:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 minutes per URL <p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of external websites, non-classroom websites students are directed to visit.
Video, Audio, Music, or Other Media
<p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time based on length of media • Repeated viewing/listening based on related assignments, to be estimated by instructor [e.g. if students need to listen to a piece of music or watch a video two or three times to answer a question or write a reflection, add time for repeated listening/viewing]
Midterm/Final Exam/Exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on allotted time for taking the exam

Out-of-class Time Equivalencies
Reading Materials
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 words read per minute for hard-copy materials • 180 words read per minute for electronic materials • 450 words per page (paperback); 600 words per page (monograph); 700 (textbook)³ <p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of pages read by students. (Include supplemental resources)
Major Writing Assignments/Research Papers
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time for researching topic: 120 minutes per page of writing • Other writing preparation: 120 minutes for preparation time • Time estimate for writing: 20 words written per minute and 30 minutes for each page of writing <p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of writing assignments • Number of pages for each writing assignment
Online Group Work
<p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time estimated by faculty based on complexity of assignment and extent of collaboration required in group task
Miscellaneous Assignments and other learning activities
<p>Assumption</p> <p>Assumption:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 minutes per miscellaneous assignment • 30 minutes (similar to in-class activity) • 60 minutes <p>Calculation Data Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of assignments by type (xxx) in the class that do not fit with any of the above entries.
Studying/Preparation Time
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam Preparation: 10 hours for studying/preparation for each exam • Quiz Preparation: 60 minutes of preparation time for each quiz

³ <http://cte.rice.edu/workload/>

Independent Study and Internship Guidance

Credit hours applicable for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per week, per credit hour for a 16-week semester.

A 3-credit independent study or internship should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 16-week semester. Given that the "course hour" is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 120 total hours for the course.

Specific independent study and internship guidelines and forms are provided at the school/college from which the course is being taken. Guidelines at the college/school level may include the number of independent studies (or credits) and internships permitted per student for a single degree, required student GPA, and which course numbers can be assigned as independent study. However, the following general standards apply across all academic units and all levels of students.

General Guidelines

Definition: Independent study courses should have content that is unique from other approved courses in the curriculum and be taught in individualized or small group sessions with the faculty member guiding it (face-to-face or electronic).

- a) Generally, an independent study will earn from 1 to 3 credits, though exceptions can be approved by a college/school office.
- b) Effort per credit hour earned must substantially meet the approved Oklahoma City University credit hour definition. Activities counted towards course workload and instructional time can include the following (this is a set of examples, not an exhaustive list):
 - i. Time spent on course-related reading or other content delivery media
 - ii. Substantive face-to-face or virtual student-instructor interaction
 - iii. Writing assignments or other forms of learning assessments
- c) Experiential education activities [such as research (lab or otherwise), service learning, scholarly/creative community presentations]

Travel Seminar Credit Hour Guidance

The Oklahoma City University definition of a credit hour indicates that the calculation of credit hours applicable for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per week, per credit hour for a semester (or its equivalent).

Instruction and student work for the purposes of credit hour computation in travel seminars includes the following types of activities:

- Course meetings before, during, and after the dates of travel
- Time to read/view assigned texts
- Lectures (from the course instructor, guest lecturers, faculty/staff/students at partner institutions, guides, local residents, etc.)
- Discussion meetings (with course instructors, guest lecturers, faculty/staff/students at partner institutions, guides, local residents, peers, etc.)
- Museum, clinic, business, government building or other site visits
- Organized cultural excursions and performances that engage students with the learning objectives of the course
- Service learning projects
- Student presentations
- Synthesis/processing/reflection time (may be used for writing, discussion, or production of creative work which may take many forms including but not limited to journals, formal papers, blogs, art, music, etc.)

For example, a 3-credit course should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 16-week semester. Given that the "course hour" is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 120 total hours for the course.

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