



POLICY & PROCEDURE DOCUMENT

NUMBER: 1.40345

DIVISION: Academic Affairs

TITLE: Engagement Requirements for Hour of Credit

DATE: February 1, 1977

REVISED: July 19, 2005, January 28, 2013, September 23, 2013, September 5, 2017, ~~December 6, 2021~~ XXX XX, 2024

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I. Purpose and Scope

Western Kentucky University (WKU) uses semester credit hours (SCH) as the basis for measuring the amount of learning accomplished. This measurement of engaged learning delineates the units connected with student learning experiences in both traditional classroom settings and nontraditional classroom settings such as laboratories, studios, internships, practica and other experiential learning, and in semester and non-semester-based, classroom courses, classroom hybrid course, online hybrid course, online (web) course, connection course face-to-face, and distance learning delivery modes including classroom hybrid courses, online hybrid courses, online (web) courses, and connect courses.

The purpose of this policy is to provide faculty of Western Kentucky University guidance in setting credit hour expectations for WKU academic courses and programs consistent with federal regulations.

II. Policy

A. Definition of Credit Hour

1. In order to comply with federal regulations and comply with Southern Association of Schools and Colleges: Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) policy, Western Kentucky University has adopted the federal definition of the Credit Hour as identified by SACSCOC in their policy statement on credit hours approved June 2011, edited January 2012 and August 2018 ~~December 2023~~, which follows:

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Federal Definition of the Credit Hour. For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, 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:

- a. 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
- b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required outlined in **item 4-a 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.

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2. Western Kentucky University is responsible for determining the amount of credit hours awarded for WKU academic courses and programs and will abide by the SACSCOC guidelines for flexibility in interpretation when assigning credit hours for student coursework, stated as follows:

- a. The institution determines the amount of credit for student work.
- b. A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education.*
- c. The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.
- d. The definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work.
- e. In determining the amount of work the institution's learning outcomes will entail, the institution may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.
- f. To the extent an institution believes that complying with the Federal definition of a credit hour would not be appropriate for academic and other institutional needs, it may adopt a separate measure for those purposes.
- g. 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 that amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.

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- h. **A program's formal degree requirements may include zero (0) earned hours of academic credit when such courses are meaningful such as formal program assessments, or other courses where students will gain experience and knowledge related to their degree program. These courses will fall under the requirements of all courses in terms of instruction by qualified faculty and will be approved through the university curriculum process in the same manner as non-zero credit courses.**

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i. A zero-credit course may be approved through the curriculum approval process if some of the following conditions are met:

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- ii. The course is largely independent study or practical experience and does not meet as a class on a regular basis, or the course is a focused area of study, practical experience, or creative expression.
- iii. The course has designated student learning outcomes.
- iv. The course is not offered as a credit-bearing course.
- v. The course requires minimal faculty involvement and minimal use of other university resources (e.g., equipment or library resources).
- vi. Grading is accomplished with minimal assessment.
- vii. A zero-credit course proposal must (1) justify the unique nature of the course to account for a student earning no credit; (2) demonstrate how utilization of university resources is nominal; and (3) present a plan for inclusion of faculty time associated with the course in the allocation of faculty workload within the respective department or college.
- viii. Zero (0) credit courses are part of degree programs and will not be used to transcript co-curricular, engagement, or other accomplishments occurring outside of academic classrooms or laboratories.

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*Note: WKU's standard calendar consists of 16 weeks each fall and spring semester, including approximately one week of holidays and breaks. For the purposes of this policy, an "hour" of instruction is interpreted as 50 minutes of contact time or its equivalent. Thus each semester hour of credit involves 15 weeks x 50 minutes = 750 minutes = 12.5 hours of contact time, or its equivalent, including formally-scheduled final examination periods during the period allotted for final examinations but excluding the registration period.

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- 3. Alternative delivery modes that form a component of any course must maintain standards of educational integrity and must demonstrate a degree of engagement consistent with the intent of this policy. Online and hybrid courses corresponding to courses offered in face-to-face format must meet the same content requirements and student learning outcomes as courses offered in the traditional format and academic credit will be equivalent to credit awarded for corresponding face-to-face courses. For online or hybrid courses with no corresponding face-to-face courses, academic credit is awarded based on student attainment of student learning outcomes of the course.
- 4. Shortened terms: Courses offered during sessions shorter than a full semester must meet the minimum 750 minutes of instruction per academic credit hour as well as the same content requirements and student learning outcomes as those courses offered in fall and spring semesters.
- 5. Course calendar oversight: The University Calendar Committee is responsible for recommending all class scheduling dates, including when classes begin and end, semester breaks, and commencement exercises for the University. These dates must conform to the designated instruction times for both semester weeks and class minutes.

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III. Procedure

1. Determination of credit hours for WKU academic courses and programs will be proposed by program faculty, recommended by the University Faculty Senate and approved by the Provost (or designee), according to the established university curriculum approval process. This process will be followed for all credit-bearing and zero (0) credit courses in addition to new and revised program proposals.
2. Minutes of classroom instruction associated with each course section will be regularly audited by the Office of the Provost. Course sections with alternative delivery modes (e.g. required out-of-class learning experiences, use of WKU supported learning technologies, etc.) will be provided in a notation in Topnet describing the nature of planned replaced contact time.

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IV. Related Policies

V. Reasons for Revision

January 2013

Substantially amended to include federal definition of credit hour and comply with SACS policies.

September 2013

Amended note in II.A.2 to allow formal class sessions that occur during the final examination period to be included in the determination of contact time

Modified policy title and II.A.3 to more fully address requirements for alternative delivery modes.

September 2017

Added item III.2. to reflect existing practice and align with Policy 1.421V.

December 2021/February 2024

Non-substantive changes resulting from fifth-year review in accordance with Policy 0.000V and updates to bring policy into compliance with SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement.