

SUBJECT: Credit Hour
Policy 211.2

Effective: April 2014

Revised:

Reviewed:

Rationale

The United States Department of Education requires that each institution develop a written credit hour policy that defines what constitutes a credit hour of instruction at the institution. Accreditation agencies are tasked with ensuring that the institution's credit hour definition conforms to the definition of a credit hour outlined in the Federal Register (75 FR 66832 p. 66946)

...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 hour¹ 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 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 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.

The Board of Regents of Higher Education for the State of Montana has established a policy on Credit Hours (BOR Policy 309.1: Course Credits: Short Courses and Workshops) that explicitly notes: "The method for awarding credit for short courses and workshops should be consistent with the method used in the regular academic program." The policy then identifies guidelines for awarding credit hours:

- A. One semester credit hour for each 15 hours of classroom contact plus 30 hours of outside preparation or the equivalent; or
- B. One semester credit hour for each 30 hours of laboratory work plus necessary outside preparation or its equivalent, normally expected to be 15 hours; or
- C. One semester credit hour for not less than 45 hours of shop instruction (contact hours) or the equivalent (See BOR Policy 309.1: Course Credits: Short Course and Workshops).

<http://mus.edu/borpol/bor300/309-1.pdf>

Traditional, Seat-Time Based Approach

At Great Falls College MSU the *credit hour* is used as a unit of instruction to quantify student learning. The credit hour is typically related to seat time, as a minimum of one (1) class work hour (50 minutes of classroom instruction and an additional two hours² of out-of-class student work) each week during a 15 week (minimum) semester. Using a seat-time approach, one credit of instruction should be approximately 45 hours³ of combined direct instruction (counting a 50 minute class as 1 hours of instruction) and student work.

- If the learning experience is offered in a different time frame (e.g., six-week summer session), the student time required to complete the course should reasonably approximate 45 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per credit.
- If direct instruction is not the principal mode of learning for an academic experience (e.g., laboratory courses, internships, studio work, some on-line courses), the student time required to complete the course should reasonably approximate 45 hours of student work per credit.

¹One hour is not necessarily intended to represent 60 minutes of instruction in this context. This was noted in the Federal Registrar (Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66846), "We believe that it is unnecessary to define one hour as either 50 minutes or one clock hour..."

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Alternative Approaches

Credit may also be awarded for an amount of learning “equivalent” to learning in a seat-time-based course as documented by intended learning outcomes and verified by assessment of student achievement.

Example: A traditional three-credit course (3 lectures plus 6 hours of “on-their-own” student work per week) is converted to a competency-based course. Since the course learning outcomes are identical for the two modes of delivery, students successfully completing the competency-based course would be awarded three credits. Successful completion of the competency-based course would be documented by direct assessment of student accomplishment of the course learning outcomes.

When there is no equivalent seat-based course for comparison, the equivalent effort required for the proposed number of credits must be established by the instructor when the new competency-based course is proposed. The equivalency will be reviewed and must be affirmed by the Curriculum Committee before the course is approved.

Faculty may also develop courses or new sections of approved courses for which credit is awarded based on an amount of learning equivalent to that in a seat-time-based course.

Any such course, or new section, shall require that its students complete an equivalent amount of work to that required from students in a comparable, seat-time-based course.

All such courses or sections shall receive thorough review to confirm that the intended learning outcomes will be verified by subsequent, comprehensive assessment of student achievement.

Online Courses

Great Falls College MSU follows a competency-based policy for eLearning courses. This is in compliance with the US Department of Education acknowledgement that “seat time” is not an appropriate measure of all courses².

For online courses that have the same learning objectives as face-to-face courses, which follow the BOR standard above, the institution awards the same credit hours for satisfactory performance in the course however it is offered. Regardless of mode of instruction, courses should be consistent in terms of purpose, scope, quality, assessment and expected learning outcomes.

² It is recognized that not all students work at the same pace. This value represents the minimum time that the instructor expects the typical student will require in order to complete the assigned learning activities and accomplish the intended learning outcomes for the course.

³ The value “45 hours” is obtained by counting each 50-minute “hour” for both classroom instruction and student work. It is perhaps more reasonable to expect that students would be required spend between 37.5 and 45 hours per credit.