



SUBJECT:	Academic Affairs		
POLICY:	211.2 Credit Hour		
PROCEDURE:			
EFFECTIVE:	April 2014	REVISED:	April 2026
REVIEWED:			

Introduction & Purpose

Great Falls College MSU uses instructional contact time to define the credit hour, with exceptions for competency-based learning.

Policy

Great Falls College MSU follows the Montana Board of Regents Policy 309 on Credit Hours. Specifically, one credit hour equals the following, regardless of the length of term. Terms with less than 16 weeks of instruction must still meet the required number of instructional and student work hours as specified below for each credit hour. For online courses, the institution awards the same credit hours for satisfactory performance in the course as for on-site courses. Regardless of mode of instruction or length of term, courses should be consistent in terms of purpose, scope, quality, assessment and expected learning outcomes. Below are the credit hour specifications:

Direct Instruction: 15 hours of instructional contact time or equivalent plus 30 hours of outside preparation or student work per credit for a total of 45 hours of instruction and student work per credit

Labs: 30 hours of laboratory work plus necessary outside preparation or student work, normally expected to be 15 hours, for a total of 45 hours of laboratory work and student work per credit

Clinicals: 45 hours of shop or clinical instruction or the equivalent per credit.

Other: If direct instruction is not the principal mode of learning for an academic experience (e.g., internships, studio work,) the student time required to complete the course should reasonably approximate 45 hours of student work per credit.

The college recognizes instructors will have additional time preparing to teach and assessing student work. Student work required outside of class consists of activities such as reading and reviewing course materials, completing written assignments and homework, practicing skills, conducting research, collaborating with peers, engaging in experiential learning, and preparing for assessments. These activities are designed to support stated learning outcomes and meet credit-hour expectations for student engagement beyond instructional time.

Competency-based Courses

Credit may also be awarded for an amount of learning equivalent to a seat-time-based course as documented by a student’s achievement of the course’s student learning outcomes.

Example: A traditional three-credit course (3 didactic hours 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-time 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 Council before the course is approved.

Definitions

Credit Hour - A unit of instruction to quantify student learning

Instructional Contact Time - Direct, explicit instruction teaching the course content with 50 minutes of classroom instruction or equivalent equaling one hour

Competency-based Learning - Learning based on a student's ability to demonstrate achievement of a course's learning outcomes.

Related Policies