

## Definition of Credit Hour

### I. Purpose

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) has established the following federal requirement to be included in the *Principles of Accreditation*:

The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education and Commission policy. (See Commission policy "Credit Hours.") (Federal Requirement 4.9)

This federal requirement addresses the U.S. Department of Education expectation that recognized accrediting commissions require an institution to have a policy that outlines how an institution defines and awards credit hours for courses and programs. The institutional policy should be consistent not only with "commonly accepted practice," but also the following definition of a credit hour:

**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

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of and a minimum of two hours out of class student work each week 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 outlined in item 1 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.

(See <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Credit%20Hours.pdf>)

This policy statement also partially addresses "Comprehensive Standard 3.4.6 Practices of Awarding Credit" of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, *Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement* (2012 edition).

### II. Policy

#### **Credit Hour Defined**

In accordance with federal government guidelines, Southern Wesleyan University defines a credit hour as the amount of student time investment that reasonably approximates one hour of classroom (or direct faculty instruction) and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student

work for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester—or the equivalent amount of that work as established by Southern Wesleyan, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

In accordance with commonly accepted practices in higher education, Southern Wesleyan University operates on a 50-minute hour for this definition. Fifty clock minutes per week per credit hour for approximately 15 weeks provides approximately 750 minutes of direct faculty instruction time per credit hour based on the Carnegie Unit.

### **Direct Faculty Instruction**

Direct faculty instruction, referred hereafter as *academic engagement*, includes traditional on-campus, face-to-face classroom instruction with regular meetings for approximately 750 minutes for each credit hour granted (equivalent to one hour per week in a 15 week semester)

In the case of online and hybrid courses, academic engagement must be equivalent to traditional classroom instruction in terms of time (750 minutes per credit hour) and may include, but is not limited to, submitting an academic assignment, listening to class lectures or webinars, taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, attending a study group that is assigned by the institution (synchronous or asynchronous), contributing to an academic online discussion, initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course, conducting laboratory work, and completing an externship or internship.

### **Out-of-Class Student Work**

Out-of-class student work, referred hereafter as *preparation*, is typically reading and study time in preparation for academic engagement within the course. Preparation is calculated as 1500 minutes for each credit hour granted (equivalent to two hours per week in a 15 week semester).

## III. Procedure

### **Documenting Credit Hours**

All student work must be documented in the course development summary (completed when developing a course), including a reasonable approximation of time required for a student to complete course assignments.

The following table provides an approximation of time required for specific course activities.

Activity	Assignments	<i>Undergraduate</i> Estimated approximation (by hour)	<i>Graduate</i> Estimated approximation (by hour)
	Reading discussion forums and making	2 hours per forum	3 hours per forum

Academic Engagement (Direct faculty instruction)	research-based responses		
	Reading discussion forums and making responses	1 hour per forum	1.5 hour per forum
	Case studies	1 hour per page	1.5 hours per page
	Research papers	3 hours per page	3-4 hours per page
	Taking quizzes and exams	Length of exam	Length of exam
	Listening to or reading course lectures	25 pages per hour	20 pages per hour
	Reading additional website documents	25 pages per hour	20 pages per hour
	Audio and video	Length of material	Length of material
Preparation (Out-of-class student work)	Required textbooks, ordinary reading level	30 pages per hour	25 pages per hour
	Required textbooks, difficult reading level	25 pages per hour	20 pages per hour
	Study of materials	Length and complexity of material	Length and complexity of material

The average adult reading rate is 250 words per minute with 70% comprehension. [Smith, Brenda D. "Breaking Through: College Reading" 7th Ed. Longman, 2004]

Reading speed can be divided into three categories: reading for learning (100-200 wpm); reading for comprehension (200-400 wpm); and skimming (400-700 wpm). With an average of 400 words per page, at 200 words per minute, a student should read around 30 pages per hour (200 words per minute x 60 = 12,000 words per hour divided by 400 = 30 pages per hour). Therefore, we are using 25-30 pages per hour.

Audiobooks are recommended to be 150-160 words per minute or 22 pages per hour.

Reading on a monitor is estimated to be 180-200 wpm or 27 pages per hour.

Slide presentations can be calculated at 100 wpm or 15 slides per hour.

Discussion forum times are based on an analysis of average time spent in online graduate courses [Brown, A. H., & Green, T. (2009). Time students spend reading threaded discussions in online graduate courses requiring asynchronous participation. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 10(6), 51-64.]

### Verifying Student Workload

Instructors must verify a student's workload in some manner. One way to document how many hours students are spending to complete a task is to survey students at the end of each semester. This data could be gathered from students with each submitted assignment.

**The guidelines in this policy about computation of workload are guidelines only, and a credentialed faculty member has the freedom to make necessary adjustments based upon his or her professional judgment.**

IV. Appendix

**Course Time Based on Format**

<b>Format</b>	<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Weekly Academic Engagement (per 3 credit hour course)</b>	<b>Weekly Preparation (per 3 credit hour course)</b>
Traditional, face-to-face	15	3 hours	6 hours
Online	7	6 hours	11 hours
Hybrid	7	Face-to-face: 3 hours Online: 3 hours	11 hours