

Assignment of Semester Credit Hours

Revised March 2, 2016

Oklahoma Christian University (OC), like many other higher education institutions, assigns credit hours to undergraduate and graduate classes as a unit of measurement for coursework. The federal government defines a *credit hour* as follows:

Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), 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 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10-12 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 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 ([Title 64 Part 600 Subpart A - General](#)).

Therefore, the number of credit hours assigned to a course at OC is designed to indicate:

1. Expected outcomes
2. Mode of instruction
3. Amount of classroom time
4. Amount of preparatory work outside of the classroom

Understandably, this information varies from one institution to the next. At OC, the Carnegie Unit is the basis for educational measurement, in which a *semester credit hour* is primarily based on the number of classroom hours (45-60 minutes) per week throughout our 15-week semester (14 weeks of instruction and one week of final exams). Thus, in a typical three hour face-to-face course, a student receives three hours of direct faculty instruction per week (usually in three one-hour class meetings) and a minimum of two hours of activities to be completed outside of class meetings.

Asynchronous (Blended and Online) Classes

The Carnegie Unit as a form of educational measurement is consistent through online and other forms of learning at OC as well, though contact hours in asynchronous learning environments are more difficult to monitor. Therefore, the definition of contact hours in asynchronous learning environments at OC is based on the following guidelines:

1. The course syllabus clearly documents that the course covers the same amount of material or course content that would normally be expected if the class were a traditional campus-based face-to-face course. Clear documentation includes the course objectives, course topics, and the stated expectations for readings, projects, and other assignments, as well as the stated learning

outcomes. It is the responsibility of both the faculty teaching the course and the North Institute for Teaching and Learning to determine together if the course content delivered online is of sufficient scope and rigor to ensure the amount of material delivered is comparable to the same campus-based course.

2. During the planning and development of an asynchronous learning environment, faculty work with North Institute staff to estimate the amount of time that a typical student will take to interact with course content. This must be equivalent to the number of contact hours normally expected in a campus-based course and documented in the course syllabus. *Hours for completing homework assignments, working on projects, studying for exams, etc. are considered outside the contact hour requirements for the course.* The following rubric is used as a guideline for the instructional design of asynchronous courses.
3. Faculty are encouraged to determine class attendance by the evaluation of student participation in scheduled online discussions, required interaction with the faculty as well as other classmates, and the timely submission of class assignments rather than simply the number of log-ins provided in the statistics measured by the course management system. Quality and quantity of work demonstrate the rigor and time on task assignments necessary to equal those of the traditional course delivery.

Statement of Equivalence

Courses taught in the web-based format must be equivalent to the same courses taught in the traditional format, meaning that they must meet the following requirements:

1. Courses developed specifically for web-based delivery must be approved through the Academic Affairs Committee and/or Graduate Council curriculum processes in the same way as new traditional courses. This requires further approval from the North Institute for Teaching and Learning as well (new policy proposed as of Spring 2016).
2. The processes and procedures for offering web-based courses are the same as other OC courses.
3. Departments offering courses in a web-based format, in conjunction with the North Institute for Teaching and Learning, are prepared to document that the courses have student learning outcomes that are equivalent to those for courses taught in a traditional format. The rubric below provides guidelines to assist in the documentation of those requirements.

Rubric for Asynchronous Credit Hour Estimates

In asynchronous learning environments, the traditional face-to-face contact time is redefined as the time a typical student spends interacting with course content. This definition excludes student work traditionally done outside of class, such as homework, studying, reading, and writing papers. When faculty plan and develop asynchronous courses, whether blended, or fully online, they must account for the amount of direct instruction, as defined above, for each credit hour. They must also account for two hours of out-of-class student work per credit hour.

The following rubric is used to estimate asynchronous contact hours in the absence of data. *Student work completed outside of class must be accounted for in the traditional manner.* Note that online courses that are offered synchronously (e.g., via Google Hangout) account for contact time in the traditional manner since the instructor is online “live” with the students.

Interactions with Course Content	Time on Task Estimates	Examples
Start-Up Preparations	10 minutes/task	Download and install software; computer preparation; course orientation
Reading (Descriptive and Technical Texts)	3 minutes/page	Textbook and reference materials (online and traditional)
Reading Screens (Online without Interactivity)	2 minutes/screen	Presentation slides; syllabus; case studies; journal articles
Reading Screens (Online with Interactivity)	4 minutes/screen	Multimedia, ThinkApp with guiding questions, tutorials; text with embedded polls or one question “quizzes”
Video	8-10 minutes/video	Instructor podcasts; demonstrations; Ted Ed videos
Online Lectures	15-20 minutes/video (or audio)	Staged “studio recordings”
Audio Podcasts	5-8 minutes/podcast	Brief introductions; overviews; “sidebars”
Simulations and Gaming	15 minutes/simulation	Virtual labs; hands-on learning; virtual field trips
Practice Problems (Not Homework)	20-30 minutes/problem	Match; computer science; case studies; parsing verbs; surveys
Outside Online Short Training Courses	50 minutes/course	NIH extramural research course (for research involving human subjects)
Writing Assignments (Not Homework)	90 minutes/page (including preparation)	Short reflective essays/paragraphs
Discussion Forums	60 minutes/session	Discussions; chats; group collaborations; blogs; social learning; online office hours
Quizzes	20 minutes/quiz	
Exams	60-180 minutes/exam	

Using the 15-week semester, the Carnegie unit of the semester credit hour, the 50-minute class hour, and the Rubric for Asynchronous Credit Hour Estimates, the various types of OC course offerings are measured under the following credit hour guidelines.

Credit Hour Guidelines

One semester credit hour is assigned in the ratio of hours per week devoted to the course of study:

Non-Laboratory Class Instruction

- Lecture/Recitation: Normally, one credit hour is associated with a class meeting for 50 to 80 minutes per week for the entire semester (or the equivalent of 700 to 1,120 semester minutes, excluding the final exam). Another widely repeated standard states that each in-class hour of college work should require two to three hours of preparation or other outside work.

Laboratory Class Instruction

- Laboratory: Normally, one credit hour is associated with a class laboratory meeting time for 85 to 170 minutes per week for an entire semester (or the equivalent of 1,190 to 2,380 semester minutes, excluding the final exam). Two semester credit hours may be earned a class meeting for 170 to 340 minutes per week over the semester. (The overlap in minutes in class allows for departmental discretion.)
- Clinic: One semester credit hour of clinical practice is associated with 60 to 225 minutes per week over the semester.
- Studio: One semester credit hour is associated with a class meeting of 80 to 100 minutes per week over the semester.

Independent Study

- Experiential, Individual, Research, Thesis Study: Credit hours associated with this type of instruction are assigned credit depending on the amount of activity associated with the course, faculty supervision, and students' outside work activities. They are also affected by standards from specialization accreditation agencies. For example, in the case of private music lessons, the National Association of Schools for Music (NASM) recommends that one credit hour be given for each three hours per week of practice, plus the necessary individual instruction, with a maximum of six credits per term allowed for the major subject in music performance.
- Asynchronous: Credit hours associated with this organizational type of course should be equivalent to credit hours when a course is delivered in another format on campus.

Types of Credit Awarded at OC

- Regular Credit: Credit earned for regularly offered collegiate courses of instruction that meet the requirements of a degree program.
- Comprehensive Exam Credit: Credit awarded to students for research toward completion of a comprehensive exam in a graduate program. This credit allows measure of the expected amount of work and the resources used, while the student earns zero degree credit hours. The benefit obtained is to account for the resources provided and for use in reporting to governments.

Value of Guidelines

Even though exceptions may be necessary, guidelines are still useful in assigning a measure of students' academic experiences. Consistency in measuring the effort of students and faculty contributes greatly to reliable reporting and evaluation.

These guidelines also help students understand the amount of effort that must be expended to complete a course or receive a degree. At most institutions on a semester credit hour system, a four-year degree usually requires 120 to 140 semester hours of credit, implying that the full-time student would earn 15 to 17 semester credit hours for each of eight semesters. If each semester credit hour represents about three hours of study or class attendance each week, this would imply 45 to 51 hour workweek for the student.

Summary of the Assignment of Semester Credit Hours

Instructional Type	Weekly Student Class Hours	Preparation Weekly per Class Hour	Semester Minutes Class/Prep (Excluding Final Exams)	Number of Semester Credit Hours Awarded
Non-Laboratory Class Instruction				
Lecture	50-80 Minute Class	Required	700-1,120	1 Semester Hour
Laboratory Class Instruction				
Laboratory	85-170 Minute Classes	Varies	1,190-2,380	1 Semester Hour
Laboratory	170-340 Minute Classes	Varies	2,380-4,760	2 Semester Hours
Clinic	60-225 Minute Clinical Practice	Varies	840-3,150	1 Semester Hour; Equivalent Hours May Be Assigned
Studio	100-300 Minute Classes	Varies	1,400-4,200	1 Semester Hour; Equivalent Hours May Be Assigned
Independent Study				
Experiential, Individual, Research, Thesis Study	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Asynchronous (Including Blended and Online)	Same academic rigor as if course were taught on campus (see Rubric for Asynchronous Credit Hour Estimates for credit equivalencies)			