

UNCW Credit Hour Definition and Policy:

**I. Proposed Credit Hour Policy for UNC Wilmington: [Motion 2011-10-M01]**

In defining a credit hour, UNC Wilmington recognizes the University of North Carolina policy on scheduled instructional time or equivalent per credit hour and the Federal definition and Carnegie unit recommendations.

1. For courses taught in a traditional classroom format, a credit hour is normally granted for completion of at least one 50 minute session of classroom instruction per week for 15 weeks, or the equivalent time per semester, and a minimum of 2 hours per week for 15 weeks of out-of-class student work, or the equivalent time per semester.
2. Alternatively, a credit hour may be granted for at least an equivalent amount of work as required in item 1 above for other academic activities or instructional modes of delivery, such as distance education, blended distance and face-to-face instruction, laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

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**II. Issue:**

The federal government is requiring all institutions to adopt policies defining credit hours and conforming to federal definitions. In response, SACS COC is proposing Federal Requirement 4.9, requiring institutions to have policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education and include the federal definition of credit hour as outlined in Commission policy. The revised Principles of Accreditation will likely include Federal Requirement 4.9 (new): “The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that (1) conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education and (2) include the federal definition of credit hour as outlined in Commission policy. (Definition of credit hours) (See Commission policy “Institutional Degrees and Credits.”)”

The requirement for a definition of a credit hour is one of several program integrity rules which appear to be aimed principally at supposed problems with federal student aid programs at for-profit colleges and universities.

**III. Federal definition of credit hour:**

Federal language:

“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 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

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.”

This definition is based on the Carnegie Unit and is meant to link a credit hour to some measure of student expectations and minimum amount of student work. In a “Dear Colleague” letter, the U.S. Department of Education emphasizes that this definition is not meant to dictate a particular ratio of classroom versus out-of-class time and is meant only to establish a minimum baseline for determining a credit hour. Institutions are free to adopt higher standards and may also argue for other standards that represent a comparable level of work and student learning. Subsequent clarifications have also indicated that the hour of classroom time can be considered equivalent to the commonly accepted 50-55 minute class session.

**VI. UNC General Administration Policy on Credit Hours (from the UNC Policy Manual):**

“All UNC campuses must ensure that every course offered for academic credit adheres to the standard of a minimum of 750 scheduled minutes of instructional time or the equivalent per credit hour. The time may include required examination periods, but may not include study days. In setting the academic calendar for each semester, campuses may set holiday periods, study days, and final examinations appropriate to accommodate the scheduled classes. In no case may a campus set a calendar that has optional final examinations if the time is considered a part of the required minimum class time.”

(Note: for a one credit course, this amounts to 15 class sessions at 50 minutes of scheduled time per class).