

Online Credit Hours: Academic Credit Guidelines

Updated: 5/13/2016 by Jaesoon An

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Policy Statement: Credit/Semester Hours

A credit/semester hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement. UNC Charlotte adheres to the Carnegie unit, which is a nationally recognized equivalency that consists of not less than:

1. 750 minutes of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of 1500 minutes of out of class student work for one semester hour of credit. Each credit hour corresponds to 50 minutes per week of classroom or direct faculty instruction and 100 minutes of out of class work per week for a 15 week 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 or instructional modes of delivery as established by the institution including distance education, hybrid, and face-to-face instruction, laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Source: <http://provost.uncc.edu/policies/academic-credit>

Faculty Resource 1: Credit Hours for Online/Hybrid Classes

In compliance with above policy statement, instructors of 3 credit online/hybrid courses are expected to provide “direct faculty instruction” for 150 minutes per week (37.5 hrs. per 15 week semester). This is the same amount of time as the “class seat time” of the classroom-based class. For “out of class student work,” instructors are expected to give homework assignments that will take minimum 300 minutes per week (75 hrs. per 15 week semester) for students.

References:

- University of Central Oklahoma defines online contact hours as follows:

Online and hybrid courses must meet the same credit hour requirement as face-to-face courses. Faculty teaching online and hybrid courses must account for 13 hours of instructional time and 27 hours of student work for each credit hour. A three credit hour course requires 120 hours of instructional time and student work. Logging on constitutes neither active faculty teaching nor

active student learning. Faculty must demonstrate active faculty engagement in online teaching/instructing students. Methods such as discussion boards, chats, etc. can serve as instructional time. (Source: <https://www.uco.edu/academic-affairs/files/policiesandguidelines/2instructionandcoursework/2.11CreditHrdefinition.pdf>)

Faculty Resource 2: What Constitutes "Direct Faculty Instruction" in Online/Hybrid Classes?

Among the learning activities the instructor gives through online learning environments such as Canvas, Moodle, and electronic textbooks, how do you distinguish the learning activities for "direct faculty instruction" from those for "out of class student work"?

Related to this question, Laurie Isenberg in the Blended and Online Learning Constituent Group of EDUCAUSE provides below guides:

Online classes warrant further clarification, as definitions of "contact with the instructor" and "hours outside of class" are less obvious.

In courses offered synchronously online (i.e. live online seminars or videoconference courses), credit hour definitions may be identical to traditional face-to-face courses.

In courses offered asynchronously online, the "direct contact"/"hours outside of class" dichotomy does not accurately apply to all learning activities.

Activities that may qualify as "direct contact" would have the direct oversight or supervision of the course instructor. Examples include:

- Interaction with posted modules or lessons written or procured by the instructor
- Chat room, phone, in-person, email, or video-conference discussions with the instructor and/or other students
- Discussion board or wiki posting
- Presentations

Activities that may qualify as "hours outside of class" are independently pursued and would include:

- Reflection and study
- Research
- Reading
- Writing, particularly writing outside of discussion boards
- Individual or group projects

Source: <http://www.educause.edu/discuss/teaching-and-learning/blended-and-online-learning-constituent-group/definition-contact-hours-asynchronous-courses>

Faculty Resource 3: How to Estimate Time for the “Out of Class Student Work”

While the instructor can keep track of the time they themselves spend for the learning activities for “direct faculty instruction,” s/he may need some guidelines on estimating the time students are likely to take to complete the learning activities for “out of class student work.”

Related to this question, Laurie Isenberg (referenced above) recommends:

Err on the side of generosity when estimating how much time it takes students to reflect, research, read and write. Many students struggle academically, and spend hours beyond what a faculty member may realize.

A journal article, *Quantifying Online Learning Contact Hours* by Powell, K, Helm, S. Layne, M, and Ice, P (2012), lists some common factors and associated time measurements to consider when estimating the time and expectations on students’ homework performance:

Homework Time Factors	Quantitative Measurement
Composition speed for discussion board postings	25 words written per minute
Time provided for composing discussion board posting	20 minutes allotted per discussion board
Reading peers’ discussion board postings	180 words per minute (the assumption is made that students read all of their peers’ postings for the duration of the course)
Reading instructor’s feedback	10 minutes allotted per graded assignment for the student to review instructor feedback
Quizzes	60 minutes allotted for taking a quiz, and 60 minutes of preparation time
Weekly lecture notes:	50 minutes allotted per issuance of weekly lecture notes (ex. eight week course = eight weekly lecture notes; sixteen week = sixteen weekly lecture notes)
Links to external websites	20 minutes per external URL
Midterm examination	10 hours are allotted for taking the examination 10 hours for studying/preparation

Final examination	3 hours are allotted for taking the examination 10 hours for studying/preparation or (20 hours for studying/preparation when a midterm exam is not administered)
General reading assumption	250 words per double-spaced, typed page
Reading course materials	200 words read per minute or 180 words read per minute for electronic materials
Upper level undergraduate courses:	8 hours granted to students taking this level of study
Miscellaneous assignments	120 minutes granted per miscellaneous assignment Composing a formal writing assignment 120 minutes granted for preparation time 20 words written per minute 30 minutes granted for each page of writing
Conducting research for a formal writing assignment	120 minutes granted per page of writing

Source: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1056395>

Faculty Resource 4: Search Keywords for "Online Credit Hours"

- online credit hours
- online contact hours
- online credit hour equivalent