

ASSIGNMENT OF CREDIT HOUR POLICY

October 2016

Revised August 2024

In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR 602.24(f), the regional accrediting agencies (i.e., Middle States Commission on Higher Education) have been charged with reviewing an institution's policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded as well as the application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and course work, and make a "reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education."

The university has established the following procedures to ensure that the amount of contact time and independent work expected of students is being met:

1. Faculty must include a statement about the expected hours of work on their syllabi beginning in the spring 2017 semester.
2. Department chairs and deans are responsible for reviewing syllabi annually to make sure that the requisite number of hours is being met.
3. Curriculum committees and the academic editor will also review the stated hours on the syllabus when approving new courses.

The document below explains to faculty members, chairs, and deans what a "credit hour" means and provides suggestions for how faculty might create appropriate statements for their syllabi.

CREDIT HOUR POLICY

The federal government defines a semester is approximately 15 weeks long. GW's semesters are 14 weeks of instruction time plus a 15th week reserved for exams. Courses that do not schedule a final exam nor have a final paper or project due during exam week must make up the instruction time during the 14 weeks of classes.

What are the time requirements for a one-semester credit hour?¹

37.5 hours of work per semester is required for one credit hour. These hours will consist of 50 minutes of direct or guided interaction plus 100 minutes of independent learning per week during the course of a normal 15-week semester, which includes one week for exams. Research papers, projects, and take-home exams that are **due during the exam week** may count as the 15th week of instruction. Courses that meet for 14 weeks and do not include a final exam or project/paper due during exam week may include an addition 10 minutes of independent learning per week for each credit hour. *Other combinations of time are possible, where appropriate* (such as a higher proportion of instructional/interactional time for a laboratory or a lower proportion of instructional/interactional time for independent research). Class and study time *may exceed these minimums* to ensure students meet course learning goals.

¹ The U.S. Department of Education defines "credit hour" as: "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 out-of-class student work for approximately 15 weeks for one 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 as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours." Federal regulations assume that a credit hour equals 50 minutes of real time. A committee representing associate deans in all schools met over the summer and agreed to the credit hour policy and implementation process below.

GUIDELINES

What constitutes direct instruction?

Direct instruction or guided interaction is the amount of time a student is expected to be engaged in direct or guided interaction with an instructor. Examples include, but are not limited to, in person or online lectures, seminars, discussions, art and design studios, supervised group work, and examinations.

What constitutes independent learning?

Independent, out of class, learning is the amount of time students spend outside of scheduled or direct instruction or contact hours with instructor to fulfill course objectives. Examples include, but are not limited to, reading assignments, working out problems, preparing for exams, online and face-to-face group work, writing papers, and working on a project.

How do faculty communicate that their courses meets the requisite number of hours for the credits assigned to their classes? The amount of work required in a class is communicated by faculty members and listed on the syllabi. While there is no specific space where this statement must go, faculty might consider locating their statements near the beginning of their syllabi, where their learning goals are articulated. A sample [template](#) for a syllabus is available for faculty to consult. Possible models for statements on syllabi will vary by course but could include:

- **Sample 1: Fall/Spring: 3-credit lecture-based course with discussion sections and final exam** or final project or paper due during the final exam period
Over 15 weeks, students will spend 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in lecture, and 1 hour (50 minutes) per week in discussion section (37.5 hours for the semester). Homework and other out-of-class work is estimated at around 5 hours (300 minutes) per week (75 hours for the semester) and includes a 2-hour final exam or a final project or paper due during the exam period for which approximately 10 hours of independent work is assumed.
- **Sample 2: Fall/Spring: 3-credit graduate seminar with final exam** or final project/paper due during the final exam period

Over 15 weeks, students will spend 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in class. Required reading for the seminar meetings and written response papers or projects, final exam, or final projects are expected to take up, on average, ~6 hours (350 minutes) per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend 25 hours in instructional time and 87.5 hours preparing for class.

- **Sample 3: Fall/Spring: 3-credit (2 hour) graduate seminar with no final exam** or project due during exam period
Over 14 weeks, students will spend 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in class. Required reading for the seminar meetings and written response papers or projects are expected to take up, on average, 6.5 hours (390 minutes) per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend 23+ hours in instructional time and 89+ hours preparing for class.
- **Sample 4: Summer 3-credit, 6-week lecture-based course**
Summer courses are twice as intensive as those held during the academic year. Over 6 weeks, students will spend 6 hours (360 minutes) per week in class and 12.75 hours (765 minutes) per week doing independent learning. This amount to 36 hours of class time and 76.5 hours out-of-class doing coursework. Instructional time includes a 2-hour final exam.
- **Sample 5: 1-credit skills course**
Over 6 weeks, students will spend 12.5 hours (750 minutes) in class and 25 hours (1500 minutes) outside of class developing skills. This amounts to a little over 2 hours of instructional time and 4+ hours developing skills per week.
- **Sample 6: 3-credit independent study or independent research course**
Over 15 weeks, the student will meet with the instructor for 7.5 hours (375 minutes) and will be expected to spend an average of 7 hours (350 minutes) per week or 105 hours per semester researching and producing a substantial paper or project, or engaged in an internship and writing a paper about their experience.
- **Sample 7: Fall/Spring 3-credit art or design course**
Art and design studio courses are expected to meet a minimum of 1.5 hours (90 minutes) of instructional time per credit hour and 1.5 hours (90 minutes) of out of class time for each credit earned (NASAD Standard). Over 15 weeks, this 3-credit studio

course will meet for 4.5 hours (225 minutes) for studio instruction per week, and students will be expected to spend an additional 4.5 hours (225 minutes) per week working on their artwork and preparing for class.

Faculty members may devise alternate statements that better explain the circumstances of their classes and their expectations of students. The chart below is included to help faculty members in calculating time associated with the credit hours of their classes.

Tables for Calculating Direct Instruction and Independent Learning per Credit Hour and by Modality

15 Week Lecture/Seminar that includes Exam/Paper/Activity due during Exam Week

Course format	Credit unit	Direct instruction	Independent learning	Total minutes/week	Total hours/week	Total semester hours (15 week semester)
Lecture/Seminar	1	50 minutes	100 minutes	150 minutes	2.5 hours	37.5 hours
	1.5	75 minutes	150 minutes	225 minutes	3.75 hours	56.25 hours
	2	100 minutes	200 minutes	300 minutes	5 hours	75 hours
	3	150 minutes	300 minutes	450 minutes	7.5 hours	112.5 hours
	4	200 minutes	400 minutes	600 minutes	10 hours	150 hours
Laboratory/discussion	1	150 minutes of instructor/TA time	Limited/variable	Limited/variable	2.5 hours	37.5 hours
	2	300 minutes	Limited/variable	Limited/variable	2.5 hours	75 hours
Internships, field/clinical experience	1	Variable	150 minutes	150 minutes	2.5 hours	37.5 hours
	2	Variable	300 minutes	300 minutes	5 hours	75 hours
	3	Variable	450 minutes	450 minutes	7.5 hours	112.5 hours
	4	Variable	600 minutes	600 minutes	10 hours	150 hours

14 Week Lecture, Seminar, or Studio that does not include Exam/Paper/Activity Due during Exam Week

Lecture or Seminar	Credit unit	Direct Instruction	Independent learning	Total minutes per week	Total hours per week	Total semester hours Over 14 week
	1	50 minutes	~110 minutes	~160 minutes	2.7 hours	~37.5
	2	100 minutes	~220 minutes	~320 minutes	5.3+ hours	75 hours
	3	150	330+ minutes	480 minutes	8+ hours	~112.5 hours
	4	200	~445 minutes	645 minutes	10.75 hours	150 hours
Studio	1	75 minutes	75 minutes	150 minutes	2.5 hours	37.5 hours
	2	150 minutes	150 minutes	300 minutes	6 hours	90 hours
	3	225 minutes	225 minutes	450 minutes	7.5 hours	112.5 hours
	4	300 minutes	300 minutes	600 minutes	10 hours	150 hours

Online, Hybrid, and Accelerated Courses

Courses offered entirely online, in a blended format, or accelerated time frame must have the same learning outcomes and substantive components of standard face-to-face courses. The syllabus must demonstrate that the course is equivalent to and reasonably approximates the Department of Education’s definition of a credit hour (one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work over a 15 week semester). Thus, the course must meet the total amount of instructional and student work time, or 37.5 hours of coursework per credit hour, although the amount of instructional time and independent learning may vary across modalities and number of weeks in a semester. Below are examples from Milken Institute School of Public Learn, School of Nursing, and the School of Medicine’s Health Sciences online courses that demonstrate different ways to meet these requirements.

MILKEN INSTITUTE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
10-Week Online Session: No Activity during Exam Week

Credit unit	Direct Instruction per week	Asynchronous portion/Synchronous portion per week	Independent learning-Indirection Instruction per week	Other Activities per week	Total Hours per week	Total semester hours
1	1.5 hours		2.25 hours		3.75 hours	37.5
2	2.75 hours	80 minutes/ 80 minutes	2+ hours		7.5 hours	75 hours
3	4 hours	2 hours/ 2 hours	3.25 hours		11.25 hours	112.5 hours
4	4 hours	2 hours/ 2 hours	6 hours	60 minute synch group session	15 hours	150 hours
5	4 hours	2 hours/ 2 hours	9.25 hours	90 minute synch group session	18.75 hours	187.5 hours

MILKEN INSTITUTE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

11-Week Online Session: Includes Final Exam/Paper/Activity during Exam Week

Credit unit	Direct Instruction per week	Asynchronous portion/Synchronous portion per week	Independent learning-Indirection Instruction per week	Other Activities per week	Total Hours per week	Total semester hours
1	1.5 hours		~2 hours		~3.4 hours	37.5
2	2.75 hours	80 minutes/ 80 minutes	~1.4 hours		6.8 hours	75 hours
3	4 hours	120 minutes/ 120 minutes	~2.2 hours		~10.2 hours	112.5 hours
4	4 hours	120 minutes/ 120 minutes	4.6 hours	60 minute synch group session	13.6 hours	150 hours
5	4 hours	120 minutes/ 120 minutes	7.5 hours	90 minute synch group session	17+ hours	187.5 hours

SCHOOL OF NURSING and HEALTH SCIENCES

Course Length	Direct Instruction	Independent Learning	Weekly Average	Semester Total
7 weeks	300 minutes (5 hours)	660 minutes (11 hours)	16 hours	112.5 hours
8 weeks	300 minutes (5 hours)	540 minutes (9 hours)	14 hours	112.5 hours
10 weeks	225 minutes (3.75 hours)	450 minutes (7.5 hours)	11.25 hours	112.5 hours
13 weeks	172.8 minutes (2.88 hours)	336 minutes (5.61 hours)	8.49 hours	112.5 hours
14 weeks	150 minutes (2.5 hours)	330 minutes (5.5 hours)	8 hours	112.5 hours
15 weeks	150 minutes (2.5 hours)	300 minutes (5 hours)	7.5 hours	112.5 hours