

## Credit Hour Policy Policy Number Academic Policies Committee

**Applies to:** Faculty, students

**Supersedes:** Guidelines and policies concerning course credit units, class schedules, and course numbering. April, 1995, [VPAA 95-01](#)

**Purpose of the policy:** This policy establishes that the student credit hour definition at Cal Poly Humboldt is consistent with the CSU and federal credit hour definition. Further, this policy establishes practices for ensuring compliance with the student credit hour definition, in compliance with federal law (Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations, sections 600.2 and 600.4, revised July 1, 2020), WSCUC guidelines and CSU policy. This policy pertains to all Cal Poly Humboldt degree programs and courses bearing academic credit.

### I. Background

On July 1, 2020, the United States Department of Education changed its definition of the student credit hour. The new federal law (600.2 and 600.4), updated July 1, 2020, shifted responsibility for credit hour compliance to the accreditation agency and/or state. The law requires all accredited institutions to comply with the federal definition of the credit hour.

As such, the CSU's accreditor, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), has published its own updated definition of student credit hour and related accreditation processes (implementation June 2021). The new regulations no longer require an accrediting agency to review an institution's credit hour policy and procedures. They do require the WSCUC to review the institution's definition of credit hour and its processes and policies for ensuring the credit hour policy is followed.

For purposes of accreditation, all CSU campuses are required to develop, communicate and implement procedures for regular, periodic review of this credit hour policy to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable and consistently applied (CSU memorandum December 21, 2020). Campuses are responsible for publishing a clearly stated practice or process that ensures they are in compliance with the student credit hour definition.

### II. Definitions

**Credit Hour:**

Cal Poly Humboldt commonly uses the term “unit” (for example, a 3-unit course) in the way that “credit hour” is used herein.

For all CSU degree programs and courses bearing academic credit, the “credit hour” is defined as the amount of work represented in stated learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement. Such evidence is an institutionally established equivalency that:

1. Approximates not less than 45 clock hours of work per unit, including:
  - a. One hour of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two [clock] hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
  - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph 1.a. 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; and
2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines and degree levels. Institutions have the flexibility to award a greater number of credits for courses that require more student work.

**Clock Hour:** The amount of actual time spent on student work. As in the past, each “clock hour” of work is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period.

**Direct Faculty Instruction:** Course activities related to the academic subject that occur during synchronous (in-person or online) class time where there is opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students, or similar asynchronous (e.g., online) course activities in which student-faculty engagement is intrinsic or in which student participation in an activity can be monitored and documented. Examples include but are not limited to: read/view/listen to a lecture or webinar; engage in a class discussion; take an exam; and participate in a tutorial, field, lab, performance, or internship activity.

**Out-of-Class Work:** Course activities related to the academic subject, completed outside of synchronous (in-person or online) class time, including but not limited to: conduct subject-matter research, read/view/listen to assigned materials, study course materials/concepts; and complete homework assignments and projects. To count towards credit hours, out-of-class work must either be monitored (e.g., engagement time recorded within a learning management system like Canvas) or be evidenced in a manner that can be assessed by faculty (e.g., submit assignments that are consistent with required work time).

**Note:** Courses that include extensive informal/joint activities (e.g. social events, travel) should pay special attention to ensuring that credit hours are reasonably based on course content-related direct faculty instruction and out-of-class work consistent with those definitions.

### III. Course Classification & Scheduling

Minimum required clock hours of student work does not vary by course mode or type. However, the relative contribution of direct faculty instruction and out-of-class work does vary—Cal Poly Humboldt follows a [course classification system](#) that specifies the requisite hours of direct faculty instruction (“Weekly Class Hrs. Per Unit of Credit.” assuming a 15-week term).

**Table 1. Minimum clock hours of student work per credit hour (unit), 15-week term**

<a href="#">Course Classification</a>	Minimum Clock Hours of Direct Faculty Instruction Per Unit	Minimum Clock Hours of Out-of-Class Work Per Unit	Minimum Total Clock Hours Per Unit
<b>C1-C6</b>	<b>15 total (1 per week)</b>	<b>30 total (2 per week)</b>	<b>15 + 30 = 45</b>
<b>C7-C14</b>	<b>30 total (2 per week)</b>	<b>15 total (1 per week)</b>	<b>30 + 15 = 45</b>
<b>C15-C21</b>	<b>45 total (3 per week)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45 + 0 = 45</b>
<b>S23-25, 36, 48, C77-78</b>	<b>Varies</b>	<b>Varies</b>	<b>45</b>

- 15 weeks is the length of a typical full-term semester course not including Spring Break, Fall Break, or Final’s week. For terms of other lengths, the totals are the same and thus the average per week can be calculated by dividing the totals by the number of weeks in the term. For example, a 1-unit C-1 course in a **five**-week term has a minimum of  $15 \div 5 = 3$  hours per week of direct faculty instruction and  $30 \div 5 = 6$  hours per week of out-of-class work. See the [credit hour tables/calculator](#) for help.
- The figures in this table are per unit. For courses that are other than 1 unit, multiply each figure by the number of units. For example, a **3**-unit C-1 course includes  $15 \times 3 = 45$  hours total of direct faculty instruction and  $30 \times 3 = 90$  hours of out-of-class work, for a total of  $45 + 90 = 135$  minimum clock hours of student work in the course.
- 1 clock hour = 50 minutes.

All courses, regardless of modality (e.g., in-person, online, synchronous, or asynchronous) must adhere to the minimum clock hours of direct faculty instruction and out-of-class work as per the credit hour definition, course classification, and units. Fully in-person or online synchronous courses shall be scheduled for at least the number of meeting hours as the required minimum clock hours of direct faculty instruction. Instructors of partially or fully asynchronous courses must take particular care to ensure that the minimum clock hours of direct faculty instruction are met. Hours of direct faculty instruction beyond the minimum may count towards minimum hours of out-of-class work, but not vice-versa.

When planned direct faculty instruction time is interrupted, for example by holidays and class cancellations, faculty should consider, within reason, mitigations to ensure that student learning is not compromised.

#### **IV. Documentation & Compliance**

- a. Cal Poly Humboldt credit hour definitions are communicated to the campus community via the [Cal Poly Humboldt Catalog](#), which is reviewed on an annual basis.
- b. During the scheduling process, courses that are scheduled fully face-to-face or synchronous online are scheduled according to the amount of direct faculty instruction associated with their course classification and units, ensuring compliance with this aspect of the credit hour policy for such courses.
- c. The campus syllabus policy shall require that course syllabi demonstrate compliance with the credit hour policy by including a statement describing the expected minimum hours of direct faculty instruction and out-of-class work as per its [classification](#) and number of units. Further, the syllabus policy shall prompt faculty to ensure that the course structure and assignments are consistent with the included statement.
- d. Cal Poly Humboldt shall review periodically the application of this credit hour policy across the institution, corresponding with (i) periodic review of syllabi as outlined in the syllabus policy, and (ii) Integrated Curriculum Committee review of syllabi provided for new and revised courses.

#### **Related Policies:**

[WSCUC Credit Hour Policy](#)

[CSU Definition of Credit Hour](#)

**Expiration Date:** n/a

#### **Appendix A - Mandatory Catalog Copy Policy**

The CSU annually issues mandatory catalog language each campus must include, inserting our unique policies and practices where indicated. For context, here is the 2022 mandatory catalog copy for [Credit Hour \(sec. XXV\)](#).

#### ***CREDIT HOUR***

*On July 1, 2020, the United States Department of Education changed its definition of the student credit hour. Fundamentally, the change shifted responsibility for credit hour compliance to the accreditation agency and/or to the state.*

*As such, the CSU's accreditor, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), has published its own updated definition of student credit hour and related accreditation processes. The new regulations no longer require an accrediting agency to review an institution's credit hour policy and procedures. It does require the WSCUC to review the institution's definition of credit hour and an institutions' processes and policies for ensuring the credit hour policy is followed.*

*The CSU credit hour definition is consistent with federal law (600.2 and 600.4 revised July 1, 2020) and the requirements of the WSCUC. The CSU defines a credit hour as an amount of work represented in stated learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement. Such evidence is an institutionally established equivalency that:*

- 1. Approximates not less than:
  - a. One hour of 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 equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time;*  
*or*
  - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph 1.a. 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; and**
- 2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines and degree levels. Institutions have the flexibility to award a greater number of credits for courses that require more student work.*

*As in the past, a credit hour is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period. In some courses, such as those offered online, in which "seat time" does not apply, a credit hour may be measured by an equivalent amount of work, as demonstrated by student achievement.*

*For purposes of accreditation, all CSU campuses are required to develop, communicate and implement procedures for regular, periodic review of this credit hour policy to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable and consistently applied. WSCUC published new draft guidelines that took effect in June 2021. Campuses are responsible for publishing a clearly stated practice or process that ensures they are in compliance with the student credit hour definition.*

**History:**

Academic Policies Committee: 2/3/2023

Reviewed: University Senate: X/X/2023

Reviewed: Provost: X/X/2023