



Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

## CREDIT HOURS

### Policy Statement

As part of its review of an institution seeking initial or continuing accreditation, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) conducts reviews of an institution's assignment of credit hours. Academic credit has provided the basis for measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled not only in traditional classroom settings but also laboratories, studios, internships and other experiential learning, and distance and correspondence education. Students, institutions, employers, and others rely on the common currency of academic credit to support a wide range of activities, including the transfer of students from one institution to another. For several decades, the federal government has relied on credits as a measure of student academic engagement as a basis of awarding financial aid.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to institutions and evaluation committees on the Commission's expectations regarding credits and to set forth the federal regulations regarding the award of credit.

**Federal Definition of the Credit Hour.** For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, 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 classroom or 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.

**Guidelines for Flexibility in Interpretation.** An institution is responsible for determining the credit hours awarded for coursework in its programs in accordance with the definition of a credit hour for Federal program purposes. The definition does provide some flexibility for institutions in determining the appropriate amount of credit hours for student coursework.

- The institution determines the amount of credit for student work.
- A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education.
- The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.
- The definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work.
- In determining the amount of work the institution's learning outcomes will entail, the institution may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.