



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Credit Hour Policy

Effective August 23, 2012, Rev. October 30, 2012

Context

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education expects all candidate and accredited institutions to demonstrate that they use acceptable and consistent methods for assigning credit hours to all courses and programs of study. The credit hour is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as a basic institutional measure of the level of instruction and academic rigor that establishes eligibility for federal funding.¹ Both within and between institutions, consistency in credit hour determinations has implications for the transferability of credit and for demonstrating that all courses and programs—regardless of teaching and learning formats or delivery mode—are of sufficient academic rigor, content, and depth.

The purpose of this document is to guide institutions in assigning credit hours in ways that are consistent with U.S. Department of Education credit hour regulations and that allow for flexibility.

Definition

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 of out-of-class student work 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 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.”

The U.S. Department of Education establishes the credit hour as the basis for measuring an

¹ U.S. Department of Education Office of Post-Secondary Education, “Guidance to Institutions and Accrediting Agencies Regarding a Credit Hour as Defined in the Final Regulations Published on October 29, 2010.” This policy also reflects regulations specified in 34 CFR §600.2, §602.24 and §668.8

institution's eligibility for federal funding. The Carnegie unit, represented in point (1) above, has served as the traditional unit of measure, but the Department also recognizes that institutions are developing other measures of educational content and credit equivalency. The purpose of the credit hour policy is to ensure that credit hour measures are reasonably equivalent regardless of how institutions award credit hours to courses and programs in various modes of instruction and teaching and learning formats.

Policy

The Commission recognizes that institutions may use one or both of the options identified in the definition of credit hours when assigning credit hours.

Institutions must provide the following information to the Commission's evaluators at appropriate points of accreditation review so they can verify compliance with the credit hour regulations:

1. Written policies and procedures used to assign credit hours;
2. Evidence and analyses demonstrating that these policies and procedures are consistently applied across programs and courses, regardless of delivery mode or teaching/learning format;
3. An explanation of how the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted standards of higher education.

The Commission must take appropriate action if evaluators find deficiencies as part of their review processes. If the Commission concludes that there is evidence of systematic non-compliance with the credit hour policy, it is obligated to notify the U.S. Department of Education.

Procedures

This policy is implemented through the process described in the document, [Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations](#).

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