
POLICY TITLE: Credit Hour Definition, Compliance, and Review Policy

POLICY PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to align FHSU procedures to new Federal regulations mandating the definition of student credit hour and review of coursework relative to our definition.

BACKGROUND: On October 29, 2010, the US Department of Education issued final regulations on program integrity issues (75 FR 66832). At issue under this Federal regulation is the standardization and formalization of expectations for accreditors to assure that institutions were in compliance with their own definition of a credit hour. To facilitate understanding among accreditors and institutions, the Department of Education developed an umbrella definition under which all accreditation standards and institutional definitions must align. They indicate, "A credit hour for Federal purposes is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates some minimum amount of student work reflective of the amount of work expected in a Carnegie unit". They further indicate "A credit hour is a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements for a course taken at an educational institution. As its most basic, a credit hour is a proxy measure of a quantity of student learning" (Department of Education "Dear Colleague" Letter, March 18, 2011). Statutorily, the Higher Education Act defines credit hour in the following similar manner:

§600.2 Definitions

Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8 (k) and (l), 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 not less than –

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for a 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 further expectation embodied in the Federal regulation is that all title IV institutions must assure (through proactive review) that all courses taught must meet the institution's definition of credit hour.

The Higher Learning Commission, our regional accreditor, responded to the call for greater accountability relative to academic credit by creating a policy (3.10).

ASSIGNMENT OF CREDIT HOURS

The institution's assignment of credit hours shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education. Those institutions seeking, or participating in, Title IV federal financial aid, shall demonstrate that they have policies determining the credit hours awarded to courses and programs in keeping with commonly-accepted practices and with the federal definition of the credit hour, as reproduced herein for reference only, and that institutions also have procedures that result in an appropriate awarding of institutional credit in conformity with the policies established by the institution.

Fort Hays State University has defined the term credit hour in our policies through a rather historic interpretation.

Credit Hour. A unit of credit earned for courses meeting as follows: one 50-minute class per week = 50 minutes x 16 = 800 minutes = 1 credit hour; two 50-minute classes per week = 100 minutes x 16 = 1,600 minutes = 2 credit hours; three 50-minute classes per week = 150 minutes x 16 = 2,400 minutes = 3 credit hours; four 50-minute classes per week = 200 minutes x 16 = 3,200 minutes = 4 credit hours; five 50-minute classes per week = 250 minutes x 16 = 4,000 minutes = 5 credit hours; two 75-minute classes per week = 150 minutes x 16 = 2,400 minutes = 3 credit hours. Three-credit hour courses meet three 50-minute periods per week; a laboratory, studio, or similar types of courses may require more than 50 minutes of contact time to earn one hour of credit. (University Catalog, 2011)

In an effort to assure compliance with this recent Federal regulation and HLC policy, a team was established charged with the review of current FHSU policy related to defining and reviewing adherence to a definition of credit hour. The work of the team was focused on the production of two outcomes:

- Revision/creation of a definition of credit hour that reflects current institutional practices and aligns to the Federal regulations, and
- Articulation of procedures for the compliance review to assure that all FHSU courses meet our definition of credit hour.

APPLIES TO: Division of Academic Affairs

DEFINITIONS:

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POLICY STATEMENT: Fort Hays State University recognizes the need to formalize the most basic of definitions for our instructional activities – the credit hour. It is the expectation that all credit awarded for academic work be based on the

following definition of credit hour.

A “credit hour” is a reasonable approximation of the student learning outcome equivalency of, at a minimum, a Carnegie student credit hour. The quantity of student learning required per credit is the equivalent of at least 45 hours through activities that address and demonstrate student competency in the defined learning outcomes. Student learning outcomes equivalencies reflect differences in delivery methods, quality of instruction and interaction, degree of supervision, measurements of student work, academic disciplines, academic calendars, and course level and type.

NOTE: A Carnegie student credit hour unit equates roughly to contact hours plus study hours at the ratio of 2 study hours to 1 contact hour.

Assignment of credit hours to academic work continues to be the purview of faculty.

Initial Review. FHSU has a long-established process for the initial review of academic work whereby all new courses with assigned academic credit moves through a multi-tiered approval of department, administrative head, Faculty Senate, Graduate Council (if appropriate), General Education Committee (if appropriate) and terminating in the Assistant Provost office. Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, and the General Education Committee have well established practices and criteria associated with their review processes.

In order to address the need for continued review, the following processes will be utilized.

Systematic Review. Every 8 years FHSU must engage in KBOR Program Review. Though the primary focus on Program Review has always been on the viability of the academic program, addition of a systematic process that requires departments to review all academic coursework may inform the Program Review process. To facilitate this review, a master listing of courses from a department will be provided to department chairs. Department chairs will be required to “certify” all courses reasonably approximate the work necessary for the current allotted credit hours. Naturally, if there are disproportionate levels of academic work required Chairs will be asked to submit course changes to align the curriculum. This certification process will likely involve faculty participation, and the primary resource will be syllabi and other course materials. Notably, this systematic academic review process occurs at the level most appropriate – the faculty and department.

Ad Hoc Review. Special circumstances may make an ad hoc review of one or more courses desirable. Ad hoc reviews should be initiated by a department chair to respond to possible issues reported to the chair. Again, this review will certify that the work required for credit offered aligns to department expectations. Chairs will be responsible for working with faculty to align the coursework or to make official changes to the curriculum as needed.

**EXCLUSIONS OR
SPECIAL
CIRCUMSTANCES:**

**RELATED
DOCUMENTS:**

Policies:

Forms:

Other:

KEYWORDS:

Student credit hour, federal regulation, accreditation

**RESPONSIBLE
OFFICE:**

Office of the Provost

**RESPONSIBLE
UNIVERSITY
OFFICIAL:**

Assistant Provost for Quality Management

ORIGINATION DATE: 5/2/2012

REVIEW CYCLE: 2 Years

POLICY ADDRESS:

**LAST
APPROVED ON:**

Adopted by President's Cabinet 5/2/12

**REVIEW/CHANGE
HISTORY:**

**NEXT REVIEW
DATE:**

5/2014