

Niagara University

Semester Credit Hour Policy and Compliance

PURPOSE: To define the University's policy on the assignment of semester credit hours and the method by which the University's compliance with credit hour assignment is assured.

POLICY:

All units of credit awarded will conform to the federal and state guidelines (see appendix). These guidelines require a minimum of 2250 instructional minutes (37.5 seat-hours) per 3-hour class with an additional 4500 minutes (75 hours) of work outside of class. This meets the requirement of 2250 minutes per credit hour. Further information is in the guidance section below. These guidelines are also in compliance with policies set forth by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education generally follows a semester system with fall and spring semesters consisting of a minimum of 15 weeks, which includes one week for exams. Alternate terms are typically less than 15 weeks but adhere to the policy in terms of meeting time and the amount of work required.

The faculty, Department Chairs, and College Deans are responsible for developing, maintaining and evaluating the curriculum within an academic program. Assignment of credit hours for courses are determined within the program based on faculty expertise and course learning objectives. Existing courses will be evaluated for adherence to the federal credit hour regulation. New courses will, upon review and approval at the program level, be reviewed by the Academic Senate Curriculum Committee and recommended for approval or denial.

The Curriculum Committee is charged with following the policy on credit hours in their review and approval of all courses and curricula and for determining that the expected student learning for the course meets the credit hour standard. Approved courses are sent to the Registrar's Office for inclusion in the University Catalog. The Registrar's Office reviews the class schedules prior to the start of each semester to ensure that all classes are scheduled for the minimum number of minutes or otherwise notes when course schedules do not match assigned credit hours. Any discrepancies are brought to the attention of the appropriate department for correction or explanation.

GUIDANCE FOR CREDIT HOURS:

The following provides general guidance on the how the credit hour translates to the particular instruction method. Please note that the credit-hour definition does not specify exact amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work – the information below serves as general guidance only.

Lecture and Seminar: Courses with multiple students which meet to engage in various forms of group instruction under the direct supervision of a faculty member. In-class plus out-of-class total 2250 minutes per credit hour, with 1/3 of that total being in-class instructional time (1:2 ratio).

Laboratory: Courses with a focus on experiential learning under the direct supervision of a faculty member wherein the student performs substantive work in a laboratory setting. The minimum in-class instructional time per credit is typically twice that of a lecture (2:1 ratio).

Clinicals: Courses with a focus on experiential learning under the direct supervision of a faculty member wherein the student performs substantive work in a clinical setting. The minimum contact time per credit is three times that of a lecture (3:1 ratio), depending upon the amount of outside work assigned.

Individual Study: Courses of study designed in instances where enrollment has fallen below established standards but under conditions where a student or students require that course be offered in order to progress academically (such as the need for a particular course in order to graduate). The faculty member will work with the student(s) to arrange meeting times which may or may not match the normal course schedule. These courses must match the total amount of work using the examples listed above (2250 total minutes per credit hour). *The faculty member is required to keep records of the meeting times and student work assigned so that contact hours can be calculated.*

Independent Study: Courses of study in which a faculty member regularly interacts and directs student outcomes with periodic contact. Minimum credit hours are determined based on faculty instructional contact minutes and student outside work time. These courses must match the total amount of work using the examples listed above (2250 total minutes per credit hour). *The faculty member is required to keep records of the meeting times and student work assigned so that contact hours can be calculated.*

Internship/Practicum/Field Experience: Courses of study where a faculty member regularly directs student outcomes with periodic contact, but the learning environment is off-campus at an approved site. This should involve a site supervisor/preceptor and directed learning outside of a lecture setting. Contact time and outside work requirements must be established and documented and must match the total amount of work using the examples listed above (2250 total minutes per credit hour). *The faculty member or program director responsible for the experience is required to keep records of amount of supervised work and the amount of outside work assigned so that contact hours can be calculated.*

Online Courses & Hybrid Courses: See established Niagara University Policy for these courses that are in keeping with the policy articulated here.

Appendix – State and Federal Guidelines:

New York State – Credit Hour Definition

All credit-bearing degree and certificate programs at Niagara University are approved by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Calculation of credit hours for these programs follow NYSED guidelines, which are consistent with the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of a credit hour.

Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, Title 8 – Education Department, Chapter II – Regulations of the Commissioner, Subchapter A – Higher and Professional Regulations, Part 50 –

General, Section 50.1 (o) stipulates the following: “Semester hour means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of this Subchapter. This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year.” Section 52.2(c)(4) stipulates: “A semester hour of credit may be granted by an institution for fewer hours of instruction and study than those specified in subdivision (o) of section 50.1 of this Subchapter only: (i) when approved by the commissioner as part of a registered curriculum; (ii) when the commissioner has granted prior approval for the institution to maintain a statement of academic standards that defines the considerations which establish equivalency of instruction and study and such statement has been adopted by the institution; or (iii) in the event of a temporary closure of an institution by the State or local government as a result of a disaster, as defined in section 50.1(w) of this Title, when the commissioner has granted approval for the institution to maintain a statement of academic standards that defines the considerations which establish equivalency of instruction and study and such statement has been adopted by the institution.”

U.S. Department of Education – Credit Hour Definition

Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34: Education, Part 600 – Institutional Eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, Subpart A – General, Section 600.2 stipulates the following: “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 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, practicum, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.” U.S. Department of Education guidance on Program Integrity regulations related to the credit hour (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2009/credit.html>) also stipulate: The credit-hour definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work.

Further note that the definition provides that a credit hour may be for an equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time. There is no requirement that a 3-semester hour course meet 3 hours

per week during a semester or a 3-quarter-hour course meet 3 hours per week during a quarter. The requirement is that the institution determine that there is an amount of student work for a credit hour that reasonably approximates not less than one hour of class and two hours of out-of-class student work per week over a semester for a semester hour or a quarter for a quarter hour. For example, an institution with a semester-based calendar has a graduate seminar for which it awards 3 semester hours. The class meets only one hour per week over a 15-week semester with the students expected to perform a substantial amount of outside research that is the equivalent of 8 or more hours of student work each week of the semester. For purposes of the Federal definition, the institution would be able to award up to 3 semester hours for the course.”

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