

## Academic Credit Hour

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Academic/Curriculum

Policy Owner: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

*Effective date:* November 30, 2016

*Approval date:* April 24, 2025

*Schedule for Review:* 2030

Policy Summary:

This policy defines a credit hour.

Policy Statement:

1. All courses offered for credit by Fort Lewis College faculty must meet standards for class contact hours and for expected out of class student work.
2. For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, state guidelines and the Higher Learning Commission standards, a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is the equivalent of
  1. Not less than one hour (50 minutes) of classroom or direct faculty instruction and minimum of two hours out of class student work each week for fifteen weeks for one semester, 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 A. 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.
  3. To assist faculty in ensuring that a course complies with this policy, the summary chart (Appendix A) should be used as a guide.
3. Assignment of credit hours for courses will occur during course approval process and be monitored through faculty, curriculum, and program reviews established by the college.
4. Regardless of the mode of instruction, courses will be consistent in terms of purpose, scope, quality, assessment, and expected learning outcomes with other courses with the same course title and number.
5. For all accelerated courses, the content and substantive learning outcomes will be the same as those in the standard semester. These courses will meet the equivalent guidelines for direct instruction and out-of-class work hours as courses offered in a standard 15 week semester.
6. Course syllabi will state of the number of class contact hours and the expected hours of out of class student work for the course.

Reason for Policy:

This policy ensures that the number of credits awarded for completion of each Fort Lewis College course reflects the U.S. Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education requirements for direct faculty instruction and out-of-class work, and is appropriate for the pursuit of identified learning outcomes.

In 34 CFR 600.2 the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) adopted new regulations related to awarding academic credit for Title IV institutions eligible for financial aid in 2010. The new regulations were engaged on January 1, 2012 and define a credit hour as follows:

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 activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward the award of credit hours. <sup>1</sup>

As of 2012, these regulations are used by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to comprehensively evaluate an institution's accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Under Policy no. 3.10(a), the HLC will review an institution's assignment of credit hours in the following context:

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 policy 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.<sup>2</sup>

In Colorado, institutions of higher education follow Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) contact hour requirements where one contact hour is defined as a minimum of 50 minutes of instructional activity involving direct contact of faculty with students. CDHE guidelines<sup>3</sup> provide further direction for determining the specific credit hours to be awarded for student work in courses and programs using the base contact hour—defined as 750 minutes of section meeting time over the course of a semester—to establish the minimum number of weekly contact hours needed to receive one credit. For example, a three-credit-hour lecture course would need to meet the equivalent of three 50-minute blocks each week, for a total of 2,250 minutes per semester.

#### Responsibilities:

*For following the policy:* Members of the faculty, members of the administration, and the Faculty Senate

*For oversight of the policy:* Provost

*For enforcement of the policy:* Provost

#### Definitions:

**Credit hour** – Consistent with USDOE, HLC and CCHE, a credit hour represents the amount of work governed by intended and clearly identified student learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that approximates one hour (at least 50 minutes) of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours (for undergraduate) or three hours (for graduate) of out-of-class student work each week for a fifteen-week term, or the equivalent amount of work over a term of a different length. Classroom or direct faculty instruction and outof-class student work leading to the award of credit hours may vary for courses that require laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, online work, research, guided study, study abroad, and other academic work to achieve the identified student learning outcomes. In addition, student workload may vary based upon program expectations established by national or regional accrediting bodies.

**Accelerated course** – Courses offered outside of a standard 15 week semester in which the credit hours offered are the same as standard semester courses.

#### Cross-Referenced Policies:

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Education. Office of Postsecondary Education. Guidance to institutions and accrediting agencies regarding a credit hour as defined in the final regulations. March, 18, 2011. Accessed on March 1, 2014 at: <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/attachments/GEN1106.pdf> .

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Policy adopted on second reading: Credit hours -Policy no. 3.10(a). Adopted November 4, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Colorado Commission on Higher Education. FTE Reporting Guidelines and Procedures. July 1, 2002. Access on March 1, 2014 at: <http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Policies/Current/vpartb-Guidelines.pdf>

#### Appendix A:

[Academic Credit Hour Policy Appendix A - October 31 2018.doc](#)

#### Review and Revision History:

This policy was originally approved April 30, 2014. The May 7, 2015 revision modified Appendix A to: (1) change Field Instruction to Field Experience, define Field Experience, but made no changes in determination of credit hour assignment; (2) add definition and credit hour assignments for Practicum; and (3) add definition and credit hour assignments for Internships. The November 30, 2016 revision: (1) reduced direct faculty instruction for music studio/ensemble work from 2.5 hours per credit to 1.83 hours; (2) clarified that faculty led study abroad courses will meet the required instructional and classroom time as defined by the Academic Credit Hour policy; (3) clarified throughout that the basis for determination of instruction and preparation expectations is 14 weeks, not 15 weeks.