



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

Operating Policy and Procedure

HSC OP: 60.05, **Definition and Calculation of Credit Hours**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this HSC Operating Policy and Procedure (HSC OP) is to provide a general definition of credit hour and practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC).

REVIEW: This HSC OP will be reviewed by June 1 of every odd-numbered year (ONY) by the Academic Affairs and Curriculum Committee and Academics Council.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. Background

TTUHSC has policies and procedures that conform to accepted practices for defining a credit hour and determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery.

2. Definition of Credit Hour

Academic credit provides the basis for measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled in courses using a variety of instructional methods across diverse learning environments. These include traditional classrooms, laboratories, internships, practice, other experiential learning activities, as well as learning via distance education. TTUHSC bases its definition of credit hour on both the federal and state definitions, as indicated below.

- a. Department of Education: *34 CFR 600.2* defines a credit hour for academic programs. With limited exceptions, 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 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, clinical work, practice, studio work, independent study, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.
- b. Texas Administrative Code: In addition to the federal definition of a credit hour, *Title 19 Texas Administrative Code, §4.6*, defines a semester credit hour for a traditionally-delivered three-semester-credit-hour course. Such courses should contain 15 weeks of instruction (i.e., 45 contact hours) and a week for final examinations, if applicable. To ensure the quality of student learning, every college course is also assumed to involve a significant amount of non-contact hour time for out-of-class student learning and reflection.

- (1) Courses delivered in shortened timeframes are expected to have the same number of contact hours and the same requirement for out-of-class learning as courses taught in a normal semester.
 - (2) Courses taught in a non-traditional way (for example, over the internet, or through a shortened, intensive format) that do not meet these contact hour requirements must be reviewed and approved through a formal, institutional faculty review process that evaluates the course and its learning outcomes and determines that the course does, in fact, have equivalent learning outcomes to an equivalent, traditionally delivered course (see *Section 3 below for guidance*).
- c. Zero Credit Course: A zero credit hour course may be approved if the course does not follow the typical classroom instruction model, but has a designated academic requirement. The criteria for a zero-credit course are as follows:
- (1) The course is largely independent study or practical experience and does not meet as a class on a regular basis, or the course is a focused area of study, practical experience, or creative expression.
 - (2) The course has designated student learning outcomes.
 - (3) The course is not offered as a credit-bearing course.
 - (4) The course requires limited faculty involvement and minimal use of other university resources (e.g., equipment or library resources).
 - Faculty involvement may include actions such as initial course setup, periodic progress check-ins, and final evaluations. Faculty contact may include actions with limited student contact. This may include periodic consultations, email correspondence, or brief in-person meetings for feedback and support.
 - (5) Grading is accomplished with limited faculty assessment.
 - Grading may be streamlined to involve minimal faculty time. This may include using a pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading system based on completion of specified requirements or competencies, rather than detailed grading of multiple assignments or exams.

3. **Determination of the Amount and Level of Credit**

Each school is responsible for establishing a formal credit hour review process for all new and revised courses, including zero credit courses, to ensure that the amount and level of credit awarded for undergraduate and graduate courses align with established academic standards and the workload expected of students. As part of the review process, faculty ensure that all distance education courses have learning outcomes that are equivalent to the outcomes for the same or similar courses delivered through traditional formats. A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education. Credits may be awarded on the basis of documentation of the amount of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified amount of academically engaged time, or on the basis of documented student learning calibrated to that amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.

Each TTUHSC school's formal faculty review process must ensure that the amount and level of credit awarded for the school's undergraduate and graduate coursework are in accordance with each of the following:

- a. federal and state definitions of credit hour,
- b. *Standard 10.7 (Policies for Awarding Credit)* and the *Credit Hour Policy Statement* of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC),
- c. sound academic practice in the given field, and

- d. standards of discipline-specific professional organizations and/or accrediting bodies, where appropriate.

The amount and level of credit awarded for courses for each program by the school is determined by the Dean's Office for each school and submitted to the Office of the Registrar. The Office of the Registrar strongly advises against courses with variable credit hours, i.e., courses whose semester credit hours vary by student or by semester, to maintain procedural consistency and fairness regarding course content and instruction time received by students.

For courses that do not meet the standard federal and state definitions of a semester credit hour, or are taught for zero credit, the following process should be followed:

- a. The review and approval process to calculate credit hours for courses taught in a non-traditional way (*as described in Section 2.b.(2) above*), or for zero credit hours, must be documented by each school/program curriculum and/or assessment committee (or equivalent).
- b. The recommended exception/s from the standard definition/s must be approved by the Dean.
- c. Once approved within a school, the Dean will request approval from the Provost.
- d. If approved, the Provost will inform the TTUHSC Registrar no later than 6 months prior to the start of the semester where the change is to occur.