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Owner [Laura Massa:](#)
[Interim Assoc VC](#)
[Ac&Fac Prgms](#)
Area [Academic and](#)
[Student Affairs](#)
Codes [AA 2011-14](#)

CSU Definition of Credit Hour

The California State University definition of the student credit hour has been updated, pursuant to the attached memorandum dated December 21, 2020.

I. Policy

Historically, the California State University has used the equivalent of the Carnegie Unit for measuring and awarding academic credit that represents student work and achievement. In the CSU, the credit hour measure we have used has also been consistent with requirements of our accreditor, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

As of July 1, 2011 [federal law](#) (600.2 and 600.4 revised July 1, 2020) requires all accredited institutions to comply with the federal definition of the credit hour, which appears below. The federal definition is consistent with CSU practice, but is defined systemwide for the first time. Effective immediately, for all CSU degree programs and courses bearing academic credit, the "credit hour" is defined as "the 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, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours."

As in the past, a credit hour is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period. In courses, such as those offered online asynchronously, in which "seat time" does not apply, a credit hour may be measured by an equivalent amount of work, as demonstrated by student achievement. WSCUC shall require its accredited institutions to comply with this definition of the credit hour; and it shall review periodically the

application of this credit-hour policy across the institution, to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable, appropriate to degree level, and that they conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education.

A. Update to Federal Definition of the Student Credit Hour

On July 1, 2020, the United States Department of Education changed its definition of the student credit hour. Fundamentally, the change now shifts responsibility for credit hour compliance to the accreditation agency and/or to the state.

As such, WSCUC has published its own updated [definition](#) of student credit hour and related accreditation processes. The new regulations no longer require an accrediting agency to review an institution's credit hour policy and procedures. It does require WSCUC to review the institution's definition of credit hour and an institutions' processes and policies for ensuring the credit hour policy is followed.

The CSU credit hour definition is consistent with [federal law](#) (600.2 and 600.4 revised July 1, 2020) and the requirements of WSCUC. The CSU defines a credit hour as an amount of work represented in stated learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement. Such evidence is an institutionally established equivalency that:

1. Approximates not less than:
 - a. One hour of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit (or 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter hour of credit) or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
 - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph 1.a. 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; and
2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines and degree levels. Institutions have the flexibility to award a greater number of credits for courses that require more student work.

For purposes of accreditation, all CSU campuses are required to develop, communicate and implement procedures for regular, periodic review of this credit hour policy to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable and consistently applied. WSCUC published new draft guidelines that took effect in June 2021. Campuses are responsible for publishing a clearly stated practice or process that ensures they are in compliance with the student credit hour definition.

If you have additional questions, please contact Assistant Vice Chancellor and State University Dean, Academic Programs Dr. Brent Foster at bfoster@calstate.edu.

II. Authority

This policy is issued pursuant to [Section II of the Standing Orders of the Board of Trustees of the California State University](#) as further delegated by the [Standing Delegations of Administrative Authority](#). The president may delegate authority and responsibility described in this policy to other campus officials pursuant to [Section VI of the Standing Orders of the Board of Trustees of the California State University](#).

All Revision Dates

8/22/2023, 2/1/2022, 3/11/2021, 3/5/2021, 10/4/2011

Attachments

[LJB AMW to Provosts SCH.pdf](#)

Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date
EVC	Nathan Evans: Deputy VC ASA ,Chief Acad Offc	8/22/2023
Area Manager/Owner	Leo Cota: Dir, Stra Org Eng & Cultur Dev	8/9/2023
Area Manager/Owner	Laura Massa: Interim Assoc VC Acd&Fac Prgms	6/13/2023