

# SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS GUIDELINES

## **Introduction**

Credit hour is the unit by which an institution measures its course work. The number of credit hours assigned to a course quantitatively reflects *the outcomes expected, the mode of instruction, the amount of time spent in class, and the amount of outside preparatory work expected for the class.*

Considerable variation exists from institution to institution and within a given institution. A *semester credit hour* is the most commonly used system of measuring course work and is usually based on at least a 14-17 week calendar.<sup>1</sup> Further, a class hour varies from 45 to 60 minutes in various institutions. Many of the definitions refer to weekly student class hours (WSCH). Most faculties adopt a consistent measure within guidelines for their institution's course offerings.

These consistencies have made it possible for accrediting groups to compare programs at multiple institutions. They make the handling of transfer credit from institution to institution reasonably systematic. They make it possible that institutions can issue "transcripts that follow commonly accepted practices and accurately reflect a student's academic experience" as required by Criterion 5 of the North Central Association's Criteria for Accreditation (Adopted February 2001). Further, prospective students can make meaningful comparisons between institutions and academic programs. Additionally, federal and state reporting requirements can be analyzed, achieved, and communicated.

Using the 16-week semester, the semester credit hour, and the 50-minute class hour, Purdue University course offerings are measured under the following guidelines.

## **Credit Guidelines**

One semester credit hour is assigned in the following ratio of component hours per week devoted to the course of study:

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<sup>1</sup> Ashford, Brenda (AACRAO). "2000-2001 Academic Calendars Study: Analytical Profiles of Calendar Use and Conversions".

## **NON-LABORATORY CLASS INSTRUCTION <sup>2</sup>**

### **Lecture, Recitation -**

Normally, one credit hour is associated with a class meeting for 50 minutes per week for an entire semester (or the equivalent 750 semester-minutes, excluding final exams). Another widely repeated standard states that each in-class hour of college work should require two hours of preparation or other outside work.

### **Presentation –**

1/2 credit hour is associated with a class meeting for 50 minutes per week for an entire semester (or the equivalent 750 semester-minutes, excluding final exam).

## **LABORATORY CLASS INSTRUCTION <sup>3</sup>**

### **Laboratory, –**

Normally, one credit hour is associated with a class meeting for 50 to 200 minutes per week for an entire semester (or the equivalent 750 to 3,000 semester-minutes, excluding final exam, in other meeting formats). Two semester credit hours could be earned for a class meeting for 150 to 300 minutes per week over the semester. (The overlap in minutes in class allows for departmental discretion.)

### **Lab Prep –**

One semester credit hour is associated with a class meeting 50 to 150 minutes per week over the semester.

### **Clinic –**

One semester credit hour is associated with a class meeting 100 to 300 minutes per week over the semester.

### **Studio -**

One semester credit hour is associated with a class meeting 100 to 300 minutes per week over the semester.

## **INDEPENDENT STUDY <sup>4</sup>**

### **Experiential, Research, Individual Study –**

Credit hours associated with this type of instruction will be assigned credit depending upon the amount of activity associated with the course, faculty supervision, and students outside work activity.

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<sup>2</sup> Purdue University Faculty Senate Document (March 2003). “Document I - Instructional Type Classifications (Pg. 2)”

<sup>3</sup> Purdue University Faculty Senate Document (March 2003). “Document I - Instructional Type Classifications (Pg. 2-3)”

<sup>4</sup> Purdue University Faculty Senate Document (March 2003). “Document I - Instructional Type Classifications (Pg. 3-4)”

Distance –

Credit hours associated with this organizational type of a course should be equivalent to credit hours when a course is delivered in another format on campus.

## **NON-DIRECTED STUDY**<sup>5</sup>

Practice/Study/Observation –

No credit hours or staff effort are directly associated with these learning situations.

## **Types of Credit Awarded in the Purdue University System**

### Regular Credit:

Credit earned for regularly offered collegiate courses of instruction that meet the requirements of a degree program.

### Thesis Credit:

Credit awarded to students for research toward completion of a research project, or a degree thesis or dissertation. This credit allows measure of the expected amount of work and the resources used, while the student actually earns zero degree credit hours. The benefit obtained is primarily to account for the resources provided, to use in reporting to governments, and in maintaining the students' financial aid position. Example: Senior Research Project, Master's Thesis, Doctoral Dissertation.

### Equivalent Credit:

Hours are assigned to courses to reflect the value of resources used to provide the class, such as rooms, instructors, equipment, etc. Equivalent hours are used in the registration process but revert to zero when posted to the student's academic history. Example: A seminar with a visiting professor, over and above existing degree requirements. The benefit obtained is primarily to account for the resources provided, to use in reporting to governments, and in maintaining the students' financial aid position.

### Continuing Education Units (CEU):

These units of credit are usually assigned to continuing education work accomplished during short courses and conferences. Typically, this is not work used to complete requirements for a degree but may contribute to maintaining licensing or other certification.

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<sup>5</sup> Purdue University Faculty Senate Document (March 2003). "Document I - Instructional Type Classifications (Pg. 4)"

## **Procedure for Exceptions**

*Many situations and new developments may cause a given department or faculty member to vary from the guidelines listed above in the assigning of credit.* If this situation should arise, a Registrar Form 40 should be submitted creating or revising the course, specifying the type of variance to be applied, and the expected benefit. This formal notification will allow the Office of the Registrar to document such variances, continuously synchronize the faculty's pedagogical expectations, and will assist in acknowledging interdepartmental preferences that may logically be converted to needed revisions of the guidelines and policies.

## **Value of Guidelines**

Even though exceptions may be necessary, guidelines are still useful in assigning a measure of the student's academic experience. Consistency in measuring the effort of students and faculty contributes greatly to reliable reporting and evaluation.

These guidelines also help a student to understand the amount of effort that must be expended to complete a course or receive a degree. At most institutions on a *semester credit hour* system, a four-year degree usually requires 120-140 semester hours of credit, implying that the full-time student would earn 15 to 17 semester credit hours for each of eight semesters. If each semester credit hour represents about three hours of study or class attendance each week, this would imply an average 45-51 hour workweek for the student.

## SUMMARY OF SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS GUIDELINES

<b>Instructional Type</b>	<b>Weekly Student Class Hours</b>	<b>Preparation Weekly per Class Hour</b>	<b>Semester Minutes Class/Prep (excluding final exams)</b>	<b>Number of Semester Credit Hours Awarded</b>
<b>Non-Laboratory Class Instruction</b>				
Lecture	1 class hour	Required	750/1500	1 semester hour
Recitation	1-2 class hours	Required	750-1500/ 1500	1 semester hour
Presentation	1 class hour	0	750/0	1/2 semester hour
<b>Laboratory Class Instruction</b>				
Laboratory	1 to 4 class hours	varies	750-3000/0	1 semester hour
Laboratory	4 to 6 class hours	varies	3000-4500/0	2 semester hours
Lab Prep	1 to 3 class hours	varies	750-2250/0	1 semester hour
Clinic	2 to 6 class hours	varies	1500-4500/0	1 semester hour, equivalent hours may be assigned.
Studio	2 to 6 class hours	varies	1500-4500/0	1 semester hour, equivalent hours may be assigned.
<b>Independent Study</b>				
Experiential	0			varies
Research	0			varies
Individual Study	0			varies
Distance	Same as if course taught on campus			
<b>Non-Directed Study</b>				
Practice/Study/Observation	0			0 regular credit, equivalent hours may be assigned.
<b>Continuing Education – Other Credit</b>				
Short course/conference	10 class hours		500/0	1 ceu