



CREDIT HOUR POLICY

Purpose and Scope of the Policy

This policy defines the credit hour at Mercer University in accordance with federal Program Integrity Regulations and requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. The credit hour policy applies to all courses at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) that award academic credit regardless of the mode of delivery. Academic units are responsible for ensuring that credit hours are awarded only for work that meets the requirements outlined in this policy.

Federal Definition of a Credit Hour

For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, 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 reasonable approximates

1. Not less than 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 outlined in item 1 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.

Mercer Credit Hour Policy

Mercer University adheres to the Carnegie unit for contact time: 750 minutes of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of 1500 minutes of out-of-class student work for each credit awarded. Mercer defines a class hour as 50 minutes. The expectation of contact time inside the classroom and student effort outside the classroom is the same in all formats of a course, whether it is fully online, a blend of face-to-face contact with some content delivered by electronic means, or one delivered in lecture or seminar format.

Guidelines for the Implementation of Mercer's Credit Hour Policy

Traditionally-delivered (face-to-face) courses on the 15-week semester: A 3-hour course must have 2250 minutes of classroom instruction. (Law classes meet for 180 minutes each week for a 14-week semester.)

Condensed courses: Classes meeting on an accelerated schedule will have the same number of instructional minutes (2250 for a 3-hour class) as those taught in the 15-week semester. Courses taught during the 8-week sessions will be scheduled for 285 minutes each week. A faculty member who, with requisite approval by the dean's office, wishes to move some of the required direct instructional time to a web-based environment or to another out-of-class experience for pedagogical reasons must clearly delineate in the syllabus the additional out-of-class experiences that will substitute for in-class instruction. Such experiences must exceed assignments required for the fully face-to-face version of the course in order to count toward direct instructional time and must be required, structured, and faculty-directed. Faculty are responsible for designing their courses to ensure the required number of direct instructional minutes each week, as well as the expected additional student preparatory work (two hours for each hour of direct instruction). Deans' offices are responsible for reviewing and monitoring any proposed deviations from the regular face-to-face class schedule.

Blended or Online Courses: A course that is delivered partially or fully online must meet the same requirements of 750 minutes of direct instruction and 1500 minutes of student work per credit hour. Faculty teaching online or blended courses must account for 37.5 hours (2250 minutes) of direct instructional time for each 3-credit hour course. The syllabus must clearly delineate direct instructional activities, as well as any required synchronous activities required outside class session times indicated in the schedule. Courses carrying the same course number that are offered both face-to-face and blended/online must meet the same learning objectives, be organized around the same or comparable learning activities, and be assessed by similar, comparable assessments.

Activities that count toward direct instructional time typically represent, at a minimum: (1) student content creation or (2) interaction with students and/or the instructor about the academic subject matter. Examples of these activities include the following:

1. In-class instruction
2. In-class tests/quizzes
3. In-class student presentations
4. Online lectures/instruction (synchronous or asynchronous)
5. Online content modules
6. Virtual synchronous class meetings
7. Videoconference meetings
8. Videoconference presentations
9. Online tests/quizzes
10. Discussion boards
11. Virtual labs
12. Virtual or non-virtual field trips
13. Virtual or non-virtual service learning
14. Group and/or team-based activities
15. Audio lectures (including podcasts) accompanied by a low-stakes assessment

Thesis/dissertation and Independent Study courses: Courses where students are working on independent projects, such as in thesis/dissertation hours and independent studies, will conform to the standard minimum of 150 minutes of student work per week over a 15-week semester or the equivalent amount of work distributed over a different period of time for each credit hour awarded.

Laboratory classes: One credit hour is assigned for 100 minutes or more of laboratory work per week throughout a 15-week semester.

Studio classes: One credit hour is assigned for 100 minutes or more of studio work per week throughout a 15-week semester.

Performance/Recital/Ensemble: In accordance with the National Association of Schools of Music recommendations, 1 credit hour of ensemble work or applied music lessons represents a minimum of 3 hours of practice each week, on average, for a period of 15 weeks, plus the necessary individual instruction as defined by the major subject.

Internships, Clinical experiences, Student Teaching: Such experiential, field-based courses require a minimum of 3 hours of student work per week over the 15-week semester for each credit hour awarded. Student work includes clock hours at the field site and meetings with supervisors, as well as outside preparation and assignments. Programs may require more than the minimum 3 hours of student work per credit hour and may be guided by their specific accrediting bodies or applicable state regulations.

Variable credit courses: Courses that are available for variable credit must fulfill the Mercer credit hour policy requirements and clearly articulate the expectations of student work for each credit hour.

Approved June 18, 2013
President William D. Underwood
Revised December 2020