

CREDIT HOUR AND SEMESTER UNIT

Credit Hour

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

As such, the CSU's accreditor, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (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 the 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:

- a. Approximates not less than:
 - i. 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 equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
 - ii. 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, practice, studio work and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours; and
- b. 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.

As in the past, a credit hour is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period. In some 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.

For purposes of accreditation, all CSUs 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. Universities are responsible for publishing a clearly stated practice or process that ensures they are in compliance with the student credit hour definition.

Definition of Semester Unit

One semester unit corresponds to:

- One hour (50 minutes) of direct instruction per week for fifteen weeks in a fall or spring semester for a lecture, seminar or discussion, with at least two hours of out-of-class work;

- Two hours (100 minutes) of classwork in an activity course per week for fifteen weeks, with at least one hour of out-of-class work;
- Three hours (150 minutes) of laboratory work per week for fifteen weeks in a laboratory course per week for fifteen weeks, with at least one hour of out-of-class work.

Supervision courses must likewise satisfy the credit hour requirement of 150 minutes minimum of academic work per unit per week for fifteen weeks or equivalent amount of work over a different period of time.

Courses offered in a timeframe shorter than 15 weeks (winter session, summer sessions, or during regular sessions), or scheduled to meet on a day that campus is closed, must provide the equivalent required number of hours of direct faculty instruction as defined for the credit hour.

Definition of Continuing Education Unit (CEU)

CEUs are nationally recognized units of measurement for participation in professional development programs for which academic credit is not awarded. CEUs may neither be applied to nor substituted for graduation requirements. One CEU is earned for ten hours of instruction. San Francisco State University policy requires an evaluation of student learning for all courses which award CEUs.