

Office of the Provost

Guidance on

Defining the Academic Credit Hour

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

To ensure continued Title IV student financial aid eligibility, all academic programs must follow applicable federal rules and guidance from U-M's regional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), concerning credit hour definitions. Faculty members and instructors — with oversight and guidance from curriculum committees that oversee program curricula — are responsible for ensuring that courses are designed and delivered in ways that conform with these standards. Adopting and following the Office of the Provost Guidance described here ensures that academic programs meet the HLC requirements and federal rules concerning credit hour definitions.

GUIDANCE

Course credit is based on contact hours, which is defined as time spent by students engaged with the course instructor. For each credit earned per full academic term, students are expected to receive at least one contact hour of instruction and perform at least two to three hours of work outside of class each week. This guidance should be adapted appropriately for courses of durations other than full term (minicourses, half-term courses, or other curricular structures). Labs are expected to meet for at least two hours for each credit earned. It is generally accepted that 50-60 minutes is equivalent to one hour in determining the credit hour standard.

IMPLEMENTATION

The UM-Ann Arbor supports 19 academic units that maintain distributed authority and localized control in delivering academic excellence in pursuit of our shared mission. As such, faculty-led curriculum committees in each school and college ensure that any school/college policies for assigning credit hours conform to this guidance and that faculty and instructors who deliver any credit-bearing course appropriately apply such school/college policies and the credit hour guidance. Faculty and instructors — with oversight and input from faculty-led curriculum committees — should determine the activities that would appropriately be viewed as faculty-led engagement within the context of a course and academic program.

The Office of the Registrar centrally maintains all policies and procedures that schools and colleges locally apply in accordance with the federal credit hour definition under 34 CFR 600.2 (see below).

RATIONALE

The guidance provided above applies the federal definition of the credit hour policy to the UM-Ann Arbor. The current federal [definition of a credit hour](#) (34 CFR 600.2) states that for each credit earned, students must engage in a minimum of one hour of faculty-led instruction or academic engagement and at least an additional two hours of work outside of class each week for approximately 15 weeks. It also states that an equivalent amount of academic engagement is required on the part of the student who participates in other academic activities for which the institution awards credit hours. These activities could include independent studies, internships, experiential learning, or similar activities that are integrated into the formal curricula of a school or college. Hybrid and online courses require an equivalent amount of instruction and student work as required by in-person courses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Higher Learning Commission \(HLC\) policy on assignment of credits, program length, and tuition](#)
- [Rackham Graduate School guidelines on the assignment of credit hours](#)
- [Guidance for estimating credit hours for online courses](#)