

Defining Credit Hours: Mr. Carnegie, Meet Our New Modalities

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The Principles of Accreditation, SACSCOC (2018)

- **Standard 10.7** – The institution publishes and implements policies for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for its courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. These policies require oversight by persons academically qualified to make the necessary judgments. In educational programs not based on credit hours (e.g., direct assessment programs), the institution has a sound means for determining credit equivalencies. (*Policies for awarding credit*)
- “Credit hours” and “credit awarded”
 - Standard 9.2 (*Program length*) [CR]
 - Standard 9.3 (*General education requirements*) [CR]
 - Standards 9.4 and 9.5 (*Institutional credits for UG/grad/prof degree*)

“Credit Hours” Commission Policy (2012)

Federal Definition of the Credit Hour. ... a credit hour is an amount of work ... that is an *institutionally established equivalency that reasonably 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*

“Credit Hours” Commission Policy, *cont.*

Guidelines for *Flexibility* in Interpretation....

- The *institution determines the amount of credit* for student work.
- A credit hour is expected to be a *reasonable approximation* of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education.
- The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.

“Credit Hours” Commission Policy, *cont.*

Guidelines for *Flexibility* in Interpretation (*continued*)

- The definition does not dictate particular amounts of *classroom time versus out-of-class student work*.
- In determining the amount of work the institution’s learning outcomes will entail, the institution may take into consideration *alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels*.

“Credit Hours” Commission Policy, *cont.*

Guidelines for *Flexibility* in Interpretation (*continued*)

- To the extent an institution believes that complying with the Federal definition of a credit hour would not be appropriate for academic and other institutional needs, *it may adopt a separate measure for those purposes*.
- Credits may be awarded on the basis of documentation of the amount of work *a typical student* is expected to complete within a specified amount of academically engaged time, or on the basis of documented student learning calibrated to that amount of academically engaged time *for a typical student*.

Resource Manual for the PoA (2018), pp. 101-103

- “NOTE: This standard presumes the institution’s credit hour policies include an acceptable definition of credit hours consistent with the SACSCOC policy on *Credit Hours*” (p. 102).
- “Questions to Consider”
- An **institutional policy** for determining credit hours and awarding credit is required and reviewed at 5th-Year and Reaffirmation, off-site and on-site (p. 157).

Issues and Assumptions

- Many institutions adopt non-traditional curricular formats and modalities before developing the definitions, policy, and procedures required by SACSCOC and the US DOE.
- Developing a definition of credit hours that is applicable to a growing variety of curricular formats and modalities – traditional classes, labs, internships, adult programs, online, experiential – is challenging.
- The common currency of academic credit is being stretched by increasingly diverse methods and modalities in college instruction.
- The commonly accepted definition and practices of 10 years ago are no longer appropriate or sufficient.

Issues and Assumptions, *cont.*

- Federal and state governments, students and parents, and others are becoming more interested and concerned about what they are getting for their dollars.
- Each institution must demonstrate accountability, internally and externally, for how its determination of credit hours relates to the amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.
- Each institution needs to develop its own definition, policy, and procedures – especially related to courses and programs outside the commonly accepted practices in higher education.

Issues and Assumptions, *cont.*

- The *policy and procedures* that support compliance with Standard 10.7 are pertinent to other standards and Standard 10.7 could be viewed as the keystone.
- The *process* of developing an institution-specific definition of credit hours and the necessary policy and procedures can facilitate (or complicate) the demonstration of compliance.
- There are several possible ways to do so.
- This session presents and advocates an inclusive process and one approach to defining credit hours across modalities that led to successful outcomes for Point University.

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

1. Start as soon as possible – give yourself plenty of time.
2. Assign responsibility for Standard 10.7 compliance.
3. Perform an “internal audit” – To what extent do we have:
 - a) Definition of credit hour that serves the purpose of S 10.7 et al.?
 - b) Policy for determining and awarding credit hours that complies with the Commission good practices statement on policies, “Developing Policy and Procedure Documents” (2010, 2017)?
 - c) Process, procedures and supporting materials for continuously applying, enforcing, and improving/revising the policy as it relates to Standard 10.7, et al.?

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

4. Develop a realistic schedule for the project.
5. Determine the stakeholders who could/should be involved in the process, and appoint a representative task force of a manageable size that is composed primarily of “persons academically qualified to make the necessary judgments.”
6. Present the topic and issues to the faculty, announcing the task force. (*Sept. 19, 2013*)
7. Orient the task force: the history and use of the collegiate student credit hour, issues and assumptions, SACSCOC resources. (*Sept 23, 2013 – first of the Committee’s regular monthly meetings*)

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 8. Focus on the development of a definition for credit hours in accordance with:
 - a) The mission and goals of the college/university;
 - b) An aggregation of the Carnegie collegiate student hour, Federal definitions and requirements, and the standards, Commission policies, and guidelines of SACSCOC; and
 - c) The typical student(s) of the institution.
- 9. Research and compile what other institutions have done.
- 10. Identify and compile the methods and modalities used outside the regular classroom, for all programs. *(October 28, 2013)*

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 11. Develop the institutional processes and criteria by which academically qualified people will:
 - a) Determine the number of credit hours awarded for a course;
 - b) Demonstrate that courses of all types, programs, and modalities satisfy the institution's definition of credit hours.
- 12. Develop the specific procedures and supporting materials to be used – e.g., charts, forms, data, etc. *(November 25, 2013)*
- 13. Refine the institutional definition of the credit hour, process(es), procedures and supporting materials into a unified system.

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 14. Pilot the process, procedures and supporting materials by "auditing" a representative sample of courses (e.g., those taught by committee members).
- 15. Expand, revise, and recalibrate the process, procedures and supporting materials based on the pilot. *(December 19, 2013)*
- 16. Present the fundamentals of the definition, process, procedures and documents to the faculty, and instruct them on performing the "audit" for their courses and giving feedback *(January 7, 2014)*
- 17. "Audit" all currently-being-taught courses for compliance – by their instructors – and gather the results and feedback. *(January 2014)*

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 18. Expand, revise, and recalibrate the process, procedures and supporting materials based on the findings and faculty feedback. *(February 3, 2014)*
- 19. Develop the final policy statement that complies with the SACSCOC policy on policies in cooperation with the academic administration. *(February - March 2014)*
- 20. Present the credit hour definition, policy, and procedures to the faculty for their approval. *(April 24, 2014)*
- 21. Present the credit hour definition, policy, and procedures to the administration for its approval. *(April 30, 2014)*

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 22. Publish/disseminate the credit hour definition, policy, and procedures (e.g., email with attachments, website).
- 23. Bring all courses into compliance in a timely manner. *(May - August 2014)*
- 24. Incorporate the new policy and procedures into other applicable processes and policies – e.g., the faculty handbook, new course development, curriculum/program review, etc.

Steps in an inclusive process for Standard 10.7

- 25. Utilize the credit hour definition, policy, and procedures and the process through which they were developed to demonstrate compliance for Standard 10.7 *(Policies for awarding credit)* and:
 - Standard 9.2 *(Program length)* [CR]
 - Standard 9.7 *(Program requirements)*
 - Standard 10.1 *(Academic policies)*
 - Standard 10.4 *(Academic governance)*
 - Standard 14.3 *(Comprehensive institutional reviews)*
 - and others
- Any questions or comments about the process?***

Point's Definition of the Credit Hour

- One semester hour of credit is granted for 750 minutes of classroom instruction and 1500 minutes of outside-of-class student work (the Carnegie collegiate student hour) **or the equivalent thereof.**
- The number of credit hours awarded for courses is determined on the basis of the time spent in classroom instruction, non-classtime direct instruction, and outside-of-class student work.
- Point's instructional methods are categorized as:
 - [1] Classroom instruction
 - [2] Direct instruction (DI)
 - [3] Outside of class student work (OCSW)

Point's Definition of the Credit Hour, cont.

- **Classroom instruction** includes the traditional classroom, a supervised lab, private instruction, or any similar instructional meeting with an instructor and one or more students.
- **Direct instruction (DI)** is non-classtime instruction that is:
 - [1] planned with educational purpose/outcomes;
 - [2] actively facilitated by an instructor or field supervisor (e.g., guided, monitored, observed); and
 - [3] graded and documented.

Point's Definition of the Credit Hour, cont.

- Direct instruction can include: online lectures/instruction, video conferencing, video presentations, chat rooms, discussion boards, group or team-based activities, online tests/quizzes, virtual labs, directly supervised field experiences, and online content modules.
- Classroom and direct instruction times are **equivalent** for the purposes of credit hour determinations.

In-class Instruction = Direct Instruction = In-class Instruction

Point's Definition of the Credit Hour, cont.

- **Outside-of-class student work** includes the activities related to the course that do not qualify as direct instruction.
- The **ratio** of classroom/direct instruction and outside-of-class student work may vary depending on the course type, with outside-of-class student work serving as the equivalent of classroom/direct instruction on a 2:1 basis (2 minutes of outside-of-class student work equal 1 minute of classroom/direct instruction) and vice versa.

How the Ratio Works: One Semester Hour

- **Totally In-Class and/or Direct Instruction**
100 minutes IC/DI x 15 weeks = 1500 minutes total (25 clock hrs)
- **Carnegie Collegiate Student Hour**
50 minutes in class x 15 weeks = 750 minutes in-class
100 minutes OCSW x 15 weeks = 1500 minutes outside-of-class
= 2250 minutes total (37.5 clock hrs)
- **Totally Outside-of-Class Student Work (no direct instruction)**
200 minutes OCSW x 15 weeks = 3000 minutes total (50 clock hrs)

Point's Definition of the Credit Hour, cont.

- For each DI and OCSW method/modality, the **"normal time to complete"** is the estimated number of minutes that a typical student would take to complete the method/activity in order to achieve the expected learning outcome, as determined and approved by the faculty of Point University.
- Exceptions can/must be specified and approved by an academic VP.
- The determination is the same for all course formats, lengths, levels (UG and graduate), locations, and modes of delivery, whether traditional classroom, laboratory, online, electronic, private lesson, internship, practicum, independent study, senior thesis, hybrid, etc.
