

April 23, 2012

TO: WVU Faculty

FROM: Federally-Defined Credit Hour Subcommittee  
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RE: New Course Credit Hour Assignment Guidelines as federally defined by §600.2

The U.S. Department of Education adopted new regulations related to awarding academic credit for Title IV institutions eligible for financial aid in 2010. The new regulations were engaged on January 1, 2012 and define a credit hour as follows:

*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 reasonably approximates not less than: (1) one hour of classroom or direct faculty **instruction** and a minimum of two hours of 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 in paragraph (1) of this definition for other activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practicums, studio work, and other academic work leading toward the award of credit hours.<sup>1</sup>*

These regulations will be used by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to comprehensively evaluate an institution's accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation starting in 2012. Under Policy no. 3.10(a)<sup>2</sup>, the HLC will review an institution's assignment of credit hours in the following context:

*The institution's assignment of credit hours shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education. Those institutions seeking, or participating in, Title IV federal financial aid, shall demonstrate that they have policy determining the credit hours awarded to courses and programs in keeping with commonly-accepted practices and with the federal **definition** of the credit hour, as reproduced herein for reference only, and that institutions also have procedures that result in an appropriate awarding of institutional credit in conformity with the policies established by the institution.*

Currently, new course proposals and course modifications are reviewed by members of the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee. The total credit hours for each course are validated based on the correspondence between the number of contact hours per course, the per class assignments (such as readings, labs, homework and quizzes), and the more encompassing class assignments (such as exams, presentations and final projects). In the case of outside-of-the-classroom courses, such as practicums or field experience, the credit hours are based on the number of hours involved in the outside-of-classroom experience as well as the nature of the assignments.

As West Virginia University (WVU) seeks reaffirmation in 2013-14, guidelines for reviewing established courses and approving new courses are needed to ensure that institutional practices are in compliance with the federal definition of a credit hour. The following guidelines were developed to ensure that all existing and new courses comply with the federal definition of a credit hour. Each guideline was created with respect to best practices within a given discipline and in recognition that decisions pertaining to the assignment of credit hours are based on approved learning outcomes, discipline-specific experiences, and the nature of the assignments. Guidelines are presented for five course formats offered at WVU, namely: face-to-face, online, experiential learning, study abroad, and studio/ensemble work, and variable credit offerings. All courses, regardless of format, must be approved by Faculty Senate before they are included in the course catalog.

### **Delivery Context**

West Virginia University (WVU) courses offered for credit are based on semester hours. Semesters are 15 weeks long plus one week for final exams. A single credit hour is equivalent to 50 minutes of guided instruction within the classroom. An hour of preparation, or related activity outside of the classroom, is equivalent to 60 minutes.

### **Face-to-Face Classroom Learning**

One credit hour is equivalent to one hour of guided instruction (50 minute class) and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time such as during the summer sessions, which may be variable. One credit hour in other academic activities, as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practicums, studio work, study abroad, experiential learning opportunities, online learning and other academic work is defined at least by an equivalent amount of work as required in the preceding paragraph and outlined in more detail below.

### **Online Classroom Learning**

One credit hour of online learning is equivalent to 15 hours of direct instruction via computer-assisted (modules), multimedia interaction, discussions, and/or engagement for exams/quizzes/assessments as documented in the course syllabus and approved to meet best practices in online learning, and 30 hours of student work (e.g. readings, supplemental home work) to complete the course requirements as set forth by the course instructor. Online courses developed from existing face-to-face instruction adhere to the defined learning outcomes and assessments of the original face-to-face format for the course. All WVU online programs are reviewed for nationally accepted standards for online learning.

### **Experiential Learning**

In experiential learning, including opportunities representing laboratory/lecture courses, undergraduate research (with or without laboratory), professional development internships, and service learning, a total of three hours of classroom and preparation time per week over a period of fifteen weeks for one credit hour or the equivalent amount of work over a shorter period of time is required. Courses must incorporate adequate opportunities to document student progress and student completion of the stated learning objectives for each experience.

### **Study Abroad**

One credit hour is equivalent to 15 hours of guided instruction and 30 hours of cultural, linguistic or other types of engagements as described by the syllabus and approved by the faculty, department Chair, Dean, and Associate Provost. Exceptions to this general rule would need to be justified and approved on an individual basis.

### **Studio/Ensemble Work**

In studio courses representing the arts, design, and theatre, one credit hour is equivalent to 1.5 hours of guided instruction and three hours for studio class preparation each week for 15 weeks as defined by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)<sup>3</sup>. In accordance with the National Association of Schools of Music standards<sup>2</sup>, one credit hour of ensemble work in the music field represents three hours of practice each week, on average, for a period of fifteen weeks plus the necessary individual instruction as defined by the major subject.

## **Variable Credit Offerings**

Variable credit courses often represent student experiences that range in contact hours based on the focus and discipline of the experience. Practicums (teaching and research), field experience, undergraduate and graduate research and laboratory rotations and credit, and independent studies offer a range of contact. One credit hour is equivalent to 15 contact hours of guided instruction (e.g., student progress meetings, assessment) and 30 hours of student work to complete the requirements set forth by the advisor or course instructor (e.g., team meetings, review sessions, thesis/dissertation preparation) over a 15 week period. Instructors/Mentors and students should discuss the appropriate number of total credit hours for a given course based on the time needed to attain outcomes of the particular endeavor.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Education. Office of Postsecondary Education. Guidance to institutions and accrediting agencies regarding a credit hour as defined in the final regulations. March, 18, 2011. Accessed on April 18, 2012 at: <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/attachments/GEN1106.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Policy adopted on second reading: Credit hours – Policy no. 3.10(a). Adopted November 4, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Schools of Art and Design. 2011-12. Accessed on April 18, 2012 at: <http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/index.jsp?page=Standards-Handbook>.

<sup>4</sup> National Association of Schools of Music. Handbook 2011-12. Accessed on April 18, 2012 at: [http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASM\\_HANDBOOK\\_2011-12.pdf](http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASM_HANDBOOK_2011-12.pdf).

[adopted 5-14-2012]