

Policy Title: Credit Hours and Instructional Time

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Responsible Executive: Provost

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Responsible Office: Office of the Registrar

Credit Hours and Instructional Time

Policy Statement

A credit hour is a nationally-accepted standard based upon the Carnegie unit, which relates course curricula to their specified learning outcomes and the estimated time allotted to achieve those outcomes. All programs of Baylor University are based on semester credit hours except for those in Baylor University's Law School, which uses the quarter credit hour system.

A **Semester Credit Hour** (SCH) represents a minimum of 15 hours of direct instruction regardless of the number of weeks in the *term calendar*. The **direct instruction** minimum applies to **traditional class instruction types** (lecture, seminar). These classes also carry the expectation of two hours of **out-of-class student work** for every hour in class, which would be an additional 30 hours. Taken together, the direct instruction and out of class student work expectations are called **engaged learning time** and represent 45 hours per semester credit. For **alternate instruction types** (clinical, ensemble, exercise, independent study, internship, lab, practicum, studio, etc.) and **distance delivery modes** (online or hybrid), direct instruction time is more variable, so equivalency for credit hours should be based upon the engaged learning time required to meet the course outcomes.

Zero Credit Hour (ZCH) courses, although uncommon, are typically reserved for academic settings such as an internship, seminar, or other type of variable course. Similarly, other zero credit hour courses may be deemed appropriate for co-curricular campus experiences or be connected to University degree completion requirements. Because no credit hours are earned, no minimum number of instructional hours is required. However, engaged learning time should be appropriate to meet the learning outcomes related to the course description. Student enrollment status is determined by the individual courses taken, as well as the overall credit-hour load.

For Law School courses and programs, a **Quarter Credit Hour** (QCH) represents a minimum of 10 hours of direct instruction, with an expectation of 20 hours for out of class student work for a total of 30 hours of engaged learning. This expectation holds true regardless of the number of weeks in the term calendar.

Reason for the Policy

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) have established general guidelines for defining a semester credit hour. This policy provides additional guidance to encompass the varied instructional types used at Baylor University.

Individuals/Entities Affected by This Policy

Office of the Registrar, Calendar Committees, Curriculum Committees, Faculty Course Developers, Curriculum Proposal Reviewers, Course Schedulers, and Online Program Designers.

Related Documents and Forms

University Policies and Documents

Baylor Course Scheduling Process and Procedures: <https://registrar.web.baylor.edu/courses-catalogs/class-class-scheduling-facultystaff>

Baylor Curriculum Inventory Management System: <https://registrar.web.baylor.edu/courses-catalogs/cim-curriculum-cat-catalog-resources-faculty-staff>

Other Documents

Federal Regulations: [34 CFR 600.2 – Definition of Credit Hour](#)

Accreditation Policy: [SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement](#)

Definitions

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

Alternate Instruction Types	Instructional types that are more individually focused or involve specialized learning environments. These may include clinical, ensemble, exercise, independent study, internship, lab, practicum, studio, etc.
Direct Instruction Time	Time spent receiving instruction directly from a professor, including time scheduled for class exams.
Distance Instructional Modes	Modes of delivering instruction which do not meet primarily in a face-to-face context. These are typically referred to as online or hybrid class sections.
Engaged Learning Time	Time spent receiving instruction directly from a professor plus the estimated amount of out-of-class time needed to achieve learning outcomes.
Instructional Hour	An instructional hour represents 50 minutes of learning time.
Out-of-Class Time	For every 50-minutes spent in class, approximately 2 hours should be spent on course content outside of class.
Quarter Credit Hour (QCH)	A quarter credit hour represents a minimum of 10 hours of direct instruction or its equivalent.
Semester Credit Hour (SCH)	A semester credit hour represents a minimum of 15 hours of direct instruction or its equivalent.
Student Enrollment Status	A student may be reported as either full-time, three-quarter, half-time, or less than half-time status for enrollment reporting and/or financial aid purposes.
Term Calendar	The class days included in an academic term including start date, end date, and allowances for breaks and holidays.
Traditional Class Instruction Types	Instruction that occurs in a face-to-face classroom environment with groups of students and are traditionally labeled lectures or seminars.

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Zero-Hour Course	Zero credit hour courses are typically in academic settings such as an internship, seminar, or other type of course. While these courses still have student learning outcomes, are overseen by qualified faculty, and are transcribed, their instructional time requirements differ from credit hour bearing courses.
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Principles

This credit hour policy applies to all courses at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) that award academic credit (i.e., any course that appears on an official transcript issued by the University) regardless of the instruction type or mode of delivery. Courses covered include (but are not limited to) independent study, online, hybrid, lecture, seminar, and laboratory instruction.

This policy addresses the minimum standards that apply more generally to academic courses. Advanced undergraduate, graduate, and professional level courses have learning outcomes that require more intensive out-of-class preparation, or higher levels of participation in research activities or internships. In addition, merely meeting these minimum expectations may lead to average grades for any individual student; thus, students at every level usually find that they must spend additional time to achieve academic excellence.

This policy does not create a contractual obligation on behalf of the University toward any individual or entity, including without limitation students, contractors, faculty, staff, or visitors.

Procedures

There are three main processes that are influenced by this policy. They are detailed below.

Curriculum Review and Approval

As appropriate within their respective roles, the Curriculum Committees of each College or School, the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the General Education Committee, Graduate Professional Education, and the Graduate Council are each charged with following the policy on credit hours and level in their review and approval of all courses and for certifying that the expected student learning for the course meets the credit hour and level standard. The determination of credit hours is made when a new course or a revision to an existing course is proposed. The submitted syllabus is reviewed for appropriate contact time as well as for assignments and evaluation mechanisms appropriate for the level of instruction. All courses are approved through the Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system. New course requests and course changes are filtered through CIM's various workflows, approval steps, and governance processes prior to implementation.

There are a limited number of courses that may be offered at zero credit hours. For example, credit for courses that have an accompanying laboratory or clinical component is built into the credit for the overall course. Therefore, the lab or clinical component associated with the course may indicate zero credit hours. There are other courses such

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as Chapel Courses, that may be a zero-hour course but are still required for graduation and completion of a degree. Those requirements are evaluated by university administration and added to the appropriate catalog for clarity of degree requirements.

All zero-hour courses are approved through the same process as credit bearing hour courses via Baylor's CIM system and approved through the appropriate administrative and governance channels. A zero-credit course proposal must justify the unique nature of the course to account for a student earning no credit hours and justify why earning zero hours is appropriate within the University policy on academic credit.

Academic Term Calendars

The Academic Calendar Committee determines the start dates and end dates for standard terms with consideration of breaks and holidays as they impact class days and standard meeting times needed to meet credit hour requirements. Courses scheduled outside the standard academic term calendars are prorated based upon the number of weeks and meeting time duration, so they contain the same number of hours as if the course were scheduled for a standard semester. To maintain the integrity of the instructional program, special effort should be made when scheduling non-standard courses to ensure there is adequate time for students to complete homework assignments, participate in discussion groups, or participate in other forms of engaged learning.

It should be noted that the credit hour system (semester or quarter) and the term calendar length should not be confused. The Baylor University Law School grants quarter credit hours but has term lengths other than 10-weeks long. All other programs at the university grant semester credit hours and most follow a traditional semester term calendar. However, some graduate and professional programs operate on unique calendars with different term lengths, but credits for those programs are measured in semester credit hours and are expected to meet the required direct instruction and/or engaged learning time minimums.

Class Scheduling

The Office of the Registrar and scheduling officers within each of the academic units (who create the schedule for each term) are responsible for maintaining credit hour standards. They do so primarily by facilitating the enforcement of standard meeting times and patterns for classes. With regard to those classes that do not follow a standard calendar and/or standard meeting times, the academic unit has increased responsibility for ensuring that there is sufficient direct faculty instruction, and the Office of the Registrar reviews those proposals for approval.