

Credit Hours and Distance Education Courses: Background Information and Process

Why is this Necessary?

Due to Federal regulations promulgated by the US Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission requires institutions to document how they determine in-class and out-of-class time equivalencies for distance courses and therefore document how credit hours for distance courses are determined.

Higher Learning Commission Policy Changes Adopted on Second Reading

Title: Federal Compliance Requirements for Institutions

Assignment of Credit Hours: The institution's assignment and award 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 policies 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.

Federal Credit Hour Definition: 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, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward to the award of credit hours.

34CFR 600.2 (11/1/2010)

What do we need to do to respond to this policy for distance courses?

We need to use a consistent process for determining the equivalent of in-class and out-of-class time for distance courses.

How is Creighton addressing this?

The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) is proceeding as follows to document in-class and out-of-class time for distance courses.

Courses offered both online and on-ground

If the student learning outcomes and assignments for an online course are the same as those used when the course is offered face-to-face and distance students are required to regularly engage with the instructor and other students (discussion board postings, synchronous sessions, etc.) then we can reasonably state the classroom and out-of-class time for the distance course is equivalent to the face-to-face course, therefore the credit hours are the same.

If the student learning outcomes and the assignments for a course are not the same for the distance course and the on-ground version of the course then additional information is gathered which will be used to calculate in-class and out-of-class time for the distance course. The process for gathering this data is outlined below.

Courses offered only online

The process described in the following section will be used to gather information in order to calculate the equivalent of in-class and out-of-class time for the distance course.

Process for documenting in-class & out-of-class time

The following process is used to document in-class and out-of-class time equivalents for an online course which either does not have an on-ground counterpart or for which the student learning outcomes and the assignments differ between the online and on-ground versions of the course.

- TLC personnel use the information gathered from the course in the online course review process to calculate in-class and out-of-class time equivalencies.
- The TLC contacts the instructor to discuss the results of the calculation and modify the results if warranted based on additional information provided by the instructor.
- In-class and out-of-class time equivalencies of all online courses are documented by the TLC and stored on the Office's Intranet site.

The tables on pages 3-5 of this document include the activities that can account for classroom time and out-of-class time.

What if an instructor does not believe the assumptions included in the calculator (tables on pages 3-5 of this document) are those that should be used?

Instructors are invited to contact the TLC to discuss the assumptions used as well as the activities. Since this is an ongoing process for the University, feedback and ideas to ensure the process and calculations accurately reflect the equivalent of classroom and out-of-class time are welcomed.

Documenting Credit Hours for Distance Education Courses

Learning Activities: In Class Time & Homework

<i>Seat Time (In Classroom Time) Equivalent for Distance Education Courses</i>	
Number of Discussion Boards	Total discussion boards for the duration of course
# of Words Required for Initial Posting –	Required minimum number of words for initial DB postings per week.
Initial posting by student	Required number of initial DB postings.
Reading DB Postings	Assumption: Read at 180 words per minute, students read all peers’ postings for the duration of the course.
# of Words Required for Responses:	Required minimum number of words for DB responses to peers.
Minimum required number of responses	Number of responses required per DB.
Reading Instructor’s feedback	Number of assignments for which students will review feedback. Assumption: 10 minutes allotted per graded assignment for the student to review instructor feedback
Quizzes	Number of quizzes during the course. Assumption: 60 minutes allotted for taking a quiz
Weekly Lecture Notes	Total of weekly lecture equivalents. Assumption: 50 minutes allotted per issuance of weekly lecture notes
Links to External Websites	Total of external websites, non-classroom websites, that students are directed to visit. Assumption: 20 minutes per URL
Midterm Exam	Assumption: 3 hours allotted for taking the exam,
Final Exam	Assumption: 3 hours allotted for taking the exam,

Total In-class time

Out-of-Class Time Equivalent for Distance Education Courses	
Assumption is course materials are delivered electronically	Assumption: 200 words read per minute or 180 words read per minute for electronic materials
# of Pages Read in the Course Materials	Total number of pages read by students. (Include supplemental resources.)
Formal Writing Assignment Quantity: Writing Calculation: Writing Preparation Time: Researching Calculation:	Assumptions: 20 words written per minute and 30 minutes for each page of writing. 120 minutes for preparation time, 120 minutes per page of writing
# of Misc. Assignments:	Total number of assignments in the class that do not fit with any of the above entries. Assumption: 120 minutes per miscellaneous assignment
Student Studying/Preparation Time Mid Term Preparation Final Exam Preparation Quiz Preparation	Reflects the preparation/studying time for students. Assumptions: 10 hours for studying/preparation. 3 hours to take the exam, 10 hours for studying/preparation 60 minutes of prep time.

Total Out-of-Class time

Writing Calculations	
Requirement	How Many of Each
Research Paper Average number of pages Writing Calculation: Researching Calculation: Writing Preparation Time:	Assumptions: 20 words written per minute and 30 minutes for each page of writing. 120 minutes for preparation time, 120 minutes per page of writing
Case Study Average number of pages Writing Calculation:	Assumptions: 20 words written per minute and 30 minutes for each page of writing.

Researching Calculation:	120 minutes for preparation time,
Writing Preparation Time:	120 minutes per page of writing

Time allocated for formal writing assignments will be calculated using the above criteria. The writing calculations are then figured in the total for Out-of-Class Time.

Assumptions Used for Calculations

In order to provide a consistent approach for calculating the in-class and out-of-class equivalencies we need to use some standard assumptions. The discussion with individual instructors will provide additional context for the course and allow adjustments to be made to the calculation if needed.

Composition Speed for Discussion Board Postings: 25 words written per minute

Time provided for discussion board posting: 20 minutes per discussion board

Reading peer’s discussion board postings: read at 180 words per minute, students read all peers’ postings for the duration of the course.

Reading Instructor Feedback: 10 minutes allotted per graded assignment for the student to review instructor feedback

Quizzes: 60 minutes allotted for taking a quiz and 60 minutes of prep time

Weekly lecture notes: 50 minutes allotted per issuance of weekly lecture notes

Links to external web sites: 20 minutes per URL

Midterm Exam: 3 hours allotted for taking the exam, 10 hours for studying/preparation

Final Exam: 3 hours to take the exam, 10 hours for studying/preparation

General reading assumption: 250 words per double spaced page

Reading course materials: 200 words read per minute or 180 works read per minute for electronic materials

Miscellaneous assignments: 120 minutes per miscellaneous assignment

Composing a formal writing assignment: 120 minutes for preparation time, 20 words written per minute and 30 minutes for each page of writing

Conducting research for a formal writing assignment: 120 minutes per page of writing