

## UNIVERSITY RULE

### 11.03.99.M1 **Definition of a Credit Hour**

*Approved January 27, 2011*

*Revised March 2, 2016*

*Revised August 21, 2019*

*Next Scheduled Review: August 21, 2024*

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#### **Rule Statement**

This rule defines a credit hour at Texas A&M University (TAMU) in accordance with federal Program Integrity Regulations<sup>1</sup> and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules<sup>2</sup>. It provides the necessary guidelines by which to measure the number of contact hours required for each semester credit hour offered by the University, including traditional face-to-face courses, distance education courses, hybrid courses and shortened courses.

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#### **Reason for Rule**

The U.S. Department of Education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board have established general guidelines for defining a semester credit hour. This rule provides additional guidance to encompass the varied instructional methods used at TAMU.

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#### **Definitions**

Traditionally delivered course – a term to describe a three credit hour face-to-face course in which students and instructor meet at a regular time over a fifteen-week semester or a five- or ten-week summer session for a total of between 45-48 contact hours.

Semester credit hour is defined as not less than:

- (1) One hour of formalized instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in item (1) of this definition for other academic activities leading to the award of semester credit hours.

One hour is defined as a minimum of 50 minutes per week.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of a Credit Hour (§ 600.2, 602.24, 603.24, and 668.8)

<sup>2</sup> TAC, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, Rule 4.6

Formalized instruction includes any combination of the following:

- (1) Classroom instruction through lecture, discussion, or instructor-guided activity
- (2) Instructor-facilitated online learning

Shortened face-to-face course – a term to describe a three semester-credit-hour course in which students and instructor meet face-to-face at a regular time over a time period less than a fifteen-week semester or a five- or ten-week summer session for a total of between 45-48 contact hours.

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## Procedures and Responsibilities

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### 1. GENERAL

This rule defines a credit hour at TAMU in accordance with federal Program Integrity Regulations<sup>3</sup> and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules<sup>4</sup>.

1.1 In 34 CFR 600.2, the U.S. Department of Education defines a credit hour for Federal programs as 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:

1.1.1 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

1.1.2 At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1.1.1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

1.2 In determining the amount of work required to complete the prescribed learning outcomes, as under current practice, the University may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.

### 2. INTERNAL POLICY/RESPONSIBILITIES/PROCESS

2.1 TAMU defines a credit hour as a reasonable approximation of the student learning outcome equivalency of, at a minimum, the U.S. Department of Education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Course developers are to ensure that

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<sup>3</sup> Definition of a Credit Hour (§ 600.2, 602.24, 603.24, and 668.8)

<sup>4</sup> TAC, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, Rule 4.6

the quantity of student learning required per credit is the equivalent of 15 to 16 hours of formalized instruction for the semester through activities that address and demonstrate student competency in the defined learning outcomes and draw upon recommended instructional practices identified below:

- 2.1.1 Logging onto online courses constitutes neither active faculty teaching nor active student learning. Faculty must demonstrate active faculty engagement in online teaching/instructing students. Methods such as discussion boards, chats, etc. can serve as instructional time if faculty is engaged.
  - 2.1.2 Other methods may include rounds and recitations, colloquia instructional how-to videos, tutorials, small group activities, virtual labs, required participation in live or online discussion (e.g. review sessions, online chat, case discussions), or other instructor-driven self-guided activity delivered live or by electronic media.
  - 2.1.3 Other academic activities may include, but are not limited to, laboratory work, research, internships, instructor-supervised independent study, practica, clinical work, studio work, and field work. Faculty may also consider cultural events, group projects, increased course content, research and information literacy, service learning and civic engagement, individual or group conferences, oral presentations, or other methodology.
  - 2.1.4 Activities that are counted for credit must be **REQUIRED** and **STRUCTURED**. Examples of activities that do not count toward instructional time: readings, homework and other intrinsic preparation or activities.
  - 2.1.5 The number of meeting hours for a clinic activity may vary from college to college depending upon the nature of the activity, extent of student engagement, and expected learning/training outcomes.
- 2.2 Student learning outcome equivalencies are to be based on documented qualitative and quantitative expectations for:
- 2.2.1 Time required for students to complete assigned learning activities, taking into account expectations based on degree level, discipline, and weight in students' final course grade;
  - 2.2.2 Time required for students to read and understand content developed by course faculty, excluding time required to read assignments in a course syllabus;
  - 2.2.3 Time required for course faculty to respond to student questions received via e-mail, posted in the online classroom, and/or discussed in the online class chat room; and
  - 2.2.4 Time required for course faculty and students to participate in online conference activities.

- 2.3 Student learning outcome equivalencies reflect differences in delivery methods, type and quality of instruction and interaction, degree of supervision, measurements of student work, academic disciplines, academic calendars, and degree levels.
- 2.4 Online and hybrid courses must meet the same credit hour requirement as face-to-face courses and must account for 45-48 hours of instructional time for each three credit hour course.
- 2.5 Each College/School, through formal faculty review, is responsible for demonstrating to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) that these requirements are met for both traditionally delivered and non-traditionally delivered courses.
- 2.6 Standards established by external discipline-specific accreditation agencies will be applied as required.
- 2.7 Shortened Face-to-Face Courses
  - 2.7.1 Shortened face-to-face courses shall have the same objectives, requirements, and quality of instruction as regular length courses.
  - 2.7.2 Students normally should not carry more courses at a time in shortened format than will give them credit of one semester credit hour per week of instruction.
- 2.8 A department may offer a shortened course or a non-traditionally delivered course if the course has been reviewed by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) (for undergraduate courses) or the Graduate Council (GC) (for graduate courses) and determined to have equivalent learning outcomes to a traditionally offered course as outlined in this rule.

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## Related Statutes, Policies, or Requirements

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Code of Federal Regulations Part 600, Subpart A, §600.2

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules, 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 4.6

Minimum Length of Courses and Limitations on the Amount of Credit that a Student May Earn in a Given Time Period

[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=6](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=6)

U.S. Department of Education Guidance

<https://ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/GEN1106.html>

<https://ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/attachments/GEN1106.pdf>

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**Contact Office**

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[Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President](#)