

Online Credit Hour and Workload Guidelines

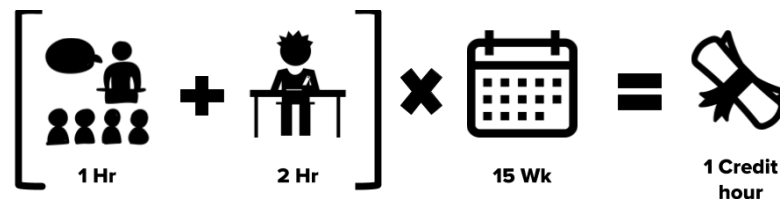
Introduction

As universities move programs online, technology affords us the opportunity to reduce direct classroom instruction while increasing online, asynchronous learning. This document will help you think through balancing workloads as instructional methods change, maintaining program rigor, achieving student outcomes, and meeting the requirements of your accrediting body.

What is a Credit Hour?

Carnegie Credits

Originally defined by the Carnegie Foundation in 1906, a credit hour is considered 1 contact hour of instruction and 2-3 independent study hours¹. This definition continues to be used by most universities and accrediting bodies and informs the credit hour definition of the US Department of Education.



US Department of Education

For the purposes of Title IV financial aid funding, the US Department of Education similarly defines a credit hour as:

[...]an amount of work 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 work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10 to 12 weeks for one-quarter hour of credit, or at least 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 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.*²

¹ Silva, E., White, T., & Toch, T. (2015). *The Carnegie Unit: A Century-Old Standard in a Changing Education Landscape*. Place of publication not identified: Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse. doi:

<https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/carnegie-unit/>

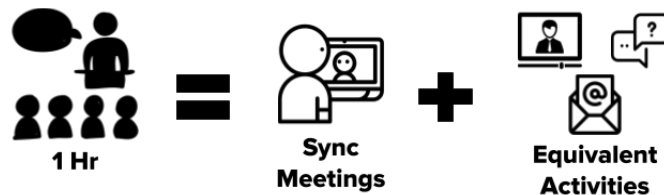
² 2018-2019 FSA Handbook Volume 2, Chapter 2: Program Eligibility, Written Arrangements, & Distance Education 8 (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1819FSAHbkVol2Ch2.pdf>

Remember, individual states or institutions may be more restrictive. Consult your registrar for campus-specific requirements.

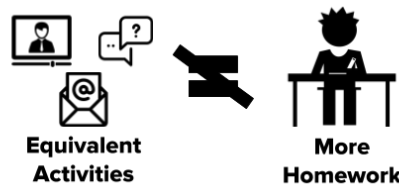
How do online courses change the credit hour?

When moving programs online, direct, face-to-face instruction is often reduced or eliminated. To continue to meet the requirements of the Department of Education, accreditors, and any institution-specific requirements, universities employ various academic technologies to provide an “equivalent amount of work” through “other academic activities as established by the institution.”

Your institution can define what is meant by “other academic activities,” as long as this work is defensible to the relevant accrediting body. As you calculate the required credit hour workloads, “direct faculty instruction” is divided into synchronous online class time and equivalent activities.



Equivalent activities generally include engaging asynchronous activities or direct, asynchronous instruction (e.g. video lectures). Most institutions generally do NOT count increased homework hours toward equivalent activities.



Rather, institutions typically interpret equivalent activity as engagement with the professor or teaching assistant. Thus, anything that provides professor feedback can count as contact hours. Most interactive activities that provide computer-generated feedback will count, as it is assumed that the professor (or proxy) wrote the feedback.

| Equivalent Activities to Direct Instruction | Non-equivalent Activities |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office hours • Video of expert if student has to reply and feedback is received • Video lecture of professor (lead by the professor) • Discussion board contributions • Journal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading articles • Writing a paper for an assignment • Interviews conducted with others to create data for an assignment • Completing assignments (that don't involve immediate feedback via computer or professor) |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive activity so long as it provides feedback • Email discussions with professor | |
|--|--|

How do we think about student effort and workload?

Moving from synchronous to asynchronous teaching can be challenging, and occasionally programs will overcompensate for a reduction in direct instruction with huge increases in both asynchronous activities and homework. These overbuilt programs can be discouraging for working professionals. As a program moves from face-to-face instruction to online, the goal is to keep the total hours calibrated to the institution’s best practices for professional learners, while keeping the workload consistent from week-to-week throughout the course. We encourage and support programs in estimating course workloads and targeting the course outcomes to meet the needs of your students.

The following tables illustrate the trade-off between direct instruction and equivalent activities, and can serve as a guide for academic programs looking to provide a rigorous and effective online program.

1 Credit Course

| Activity | Hours per week for 15 week term | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Class time | .5 | 1 |
| Equivalent Activities | .5 | 0 |
| Homework | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 3 | 3 |

2 Credit Course

| Activity | Hours per week for 15 week term | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---|-----|---|
| Class time | .5 | 1 | 1.5 | 2 |
| Equivalent Activities | 1.5 | 1 | .5 | 0 |
| Homework | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| total | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

3 Credit Course

| Activity | Hours per week for 15 week term | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|---|-----|---|
| Class time | .5 | 1 | 1.5 | 2 |
| Asynch | 2.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 1 |
| homework | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| total | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |

4 Credit Course

| Activity | Hours per week for 15 week term | | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|
| Class time | .5 | 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 2.5 |
| Asynch | 3.5 | 3 | 2.5 | 2 | 1.5 |
| homework | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| total | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

5 Credit Course

| Activity | Hours per week for 15 week term | | | | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|
| Class time | .5 | 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 2.5 | 3 | 3.5 |
| Asynch | 6.5 | 6 | 5.5 | 5 | 4.5 | 4 | 3.5 |
| homework | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| total | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |