



Valdosta State University's Determination of Credit Hours for Courses Policy:

- 1) defines a credit hour,
- 2) provides direction for determining credit hours for courses, and
- 3) ensures credit hours are properly applied and assigned to courses to conform with commonly accepted practices in higher education.

VSU's academic operations continuously demonstrate compliance with Federal Regulation Program Integrity Rules,¹ University System of Georgia (USG) Policy 3.4, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Standard 10.7, and the guidance in Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges *Policy Statement on Credit Hours*.²

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF THE CREDIT HOUR:

Part 600, Institutional Eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, provides the following 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 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." (34 CFR Part 600.2).

The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines a credit hour as "A unit of measure representing the equivalent of an hour (50 minutes) of instruction per week over the entire term. It is applied toward the total number of credit hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award."

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA DEFINITIONS FOR THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR:

"The academic calendar for each USG institution shall consist of two semesters, each with at least 15 weeks of instructional time, as defined by federal regulations issued by the United States Department of Education. The 15 weeks of instructional time shall not include registration or final examinations....A minimum of 750 minutes of instruction or equivalent is required for each semester credit hour. A course offered in fewer than 15 instructional weeks shall contain the same total hours (contact hours, preparation time, content, and requirements) as the same course offered in the standard 15-week semester." (USG Policy Manual Section 3.4³)

¹ Program Integrity Rules, Federal Register Vol. 75 Number 209, page 66831 (October 29, 2010, effective July 1, 2011).

² <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/Credit-Hours.pdf>

³ <https://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section3/C339>



POLICY:

This credit hour policy applies to all courses at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) that award academic credit on an official transcript regardless of the mode of delivery including, but not limited to, fully online, hybrid, lecture, seminar, laboratory, studio, directed study, or study abroad. Academic units are responsible for ensuring that credit hours are awarded only for work that meets the requirements outlined in this policy.

Valdosta State University utilizes the federal definition of the credit hour as a basis for determining the amount of credit assigned for student work. The VSU Academic Committee of the Faculty Senate is responsible for ensuring that credit hours are appropriately approved for course work, and the VSU Registrar's Office ensures that credit hours are accurately attached to courses in the student information system. The Registrar's Office ensures that the number of class minutes for lecture- and laboratory-based courses have been accounted for during the scheduling of courses. The following methodology guides credit hours assignments.

Lecture Courses:

Traditional lecture-based courses that meet only in a face-to-face format must meet for 750 minutes for each semester credit hour, whether offered in a full-semester, half-semester, or other format. In addition, it is expected that students will spend a **minimum** of two hours in out-of-class preparation for every hour spent in class. Therefore, a one credit hour course must require a minimum of 750 class meeting minutes and 1500 out-of-class preparation minutes. All courses will require a **minimum** of 2250 engaged minutes per semester hour.

When courses are offered in hybrid or fully online format, 2250 engaged minutes are still required and expected for each hour of credit. Because it is difficult to measure engaged minutes for courses offered in hybrid or online formats, course content and learning outcomes should be matched to those established in face-to-face sections of the same courses. Face-to-face courses may be conducted through in-person delivery or through electronic delivery whether synchronous or asynchronous.

Laboratory/Studio/Clinical Courses:

Standard academic practice specifies that a **minimum** of 2250 engaged minutes must be required for each semester credit hour. In the case of laboratory, studio, or clinical courses, most of these engaged minutes will be spent in the actual execution of the laboratory, studio, or clinical exercises. Students may also be expected to spend out-of-class time preparing for laboratory, studio, or clinical exercises. In all cases, class time plus expected out-of-class preparation time must add up to a **minimum** of 2250 engaged minutes per semester credit hour for the specified course.

Courses that blend activity/laboratory/studio/clinical and lecture components:

Courses that blend lecture components with laboratory, studio, or clinical components pose challenges in making the correct credit hour determination. The standard remains that a **minimum** of 2250 engaged minutes must be required for each semester credit hour. There are four components in this type of course:

- Lecture component
- Out-of-class preparation for the lecture component



- Activity/laboratory/studio/clinical component
- Out-of-class preparation for the activity/laboratory/studio/clinical component

In general, it is appropriate to expect that students will spend a **minimum** of two hours in out-of-class preparation for every one hour spent in the lecture component of the class. The activity/laboratory/studio/clinical component may exist with or without an expectation of out-of-class preparation. In determining whether the requirement for a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes per semester hour of credit has been met, minutes expected to be spent in class lectures, out-of-class preparation for the lecture component, the activity/laboratory/studio/clinical component, and out-of-class preparation for the activity/laboratory/studio/clinical component should be summed. For internships, the minimum engaged minutes required for awarding academic credit should adhere to the “Guidelines for Granting Academic Credit for Participation in Internship Programs” section of the *Academic Catalog*.

One credit hour (unit) should involve an input of approximately three hours per week, or the equivalent amount of work for other instructional formats, for the average student (e.g., one hour of scheduled class and two hours of out-of-class preparation). Typically, a three semester credit hour course meets for three 50-minute (or two 75-minute) sessions per week for fifteen weeks. Irrespective of course instruction type or delivery method, all courses require a minimum of 2,250 engaged minutes per semester hour. This basic measure may be adjusted proportionately to reflect modified academic calendars and formats of study. Regardless of the format of course content delivery, course workload expectations must align to the stated learning outcomes for students. A contact hour represents the measure of scheduled instruction given to students and is dependent on the instructional format for the course. The contact hours should be calculated on a per week basis. For example, one contact hour per week of lecture for 15 weeks equals one credit hour (e.g., a three semester credit hour course meets for 45 contact hours). Although infrequent, deviations may exist from the prescribed formulas; however, the institution must still account for the expectation that a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes will be required for every semester hour of credit assigned to the course.

For each course, the number of semester hours credit, the number of lecture contact hours (or equivalent) per week, and the number of laboratory or studio contact hours per week are listed in the student information system.⁴

Guidelines for Zero Credit Hour Courses:

Academic departments may develop and offer zero (0) credit courses as a requirement in a degree program to engage students in innovative experiences beyond the classroom. Activities in a zero credit course may include internships, participating in research, experiential learning, career preparation, international experiences, faculty mentoring, capstone exams, certifications, or other learning experiences designated for that particular major. Generally, the course is used for the purposes of tracking student progress at the institution such as the achievement of certain program admission, progression, or completion-related benchmarks or as a prerequisite to other courses.

⁴ When conducting a course search in Banner, select the course number/name and then “View Catalog Entry” to see the credit hours, lecture hours, and laboratory hours.



Requests for zero credit courses must be submitted through the existing curriculum approval process (Graduate Executive Committee and/or Academic Committee) and should meet these conditions:

- Students will primarily work independently to complete the course activities
- The course does not meet as a class on a regular basis
- The course has a required syllabus with student learning outcome(s)
- The course requires minimal use of university resources (e.g., faculty time involvement, library resources, technology resources)
- The course cannot be offered as a for-credit course
- Evaluation of student work/performance/completion is accomplished with minimal assessment
- The course uses Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading and will be recorded on a student's transcript
- The course will not be included in a student's GPA calculation
- The college dean will assign an instructor of record to successfully monitor student completion

Deviations from these conditions must be clearly justified in writing to be approved by the college's dean and the VSU Academic Committee.

POLICY REVISIONS:

Proposed revisions to this policy should be submitted in writing to the Chairperson of the Academic Committee of the Faculty Senate by way of the Office of Academic Affairs or Office of the Registrar.

APPROVAL DATE:

Prepared by Institutional Effectiveness:	November 6, 2012
Graduate Executive Committee Review:	November 29, 2012
Deans' Council Endorsement:	December 12, 2012
Department Heads' Council Information Item:	November 27, 2012
Academic Committee Information Item:	January 14, 2013
Provost and VPAA Approval:	January 31, 2013
Forwarded to Catalog Editor:	March 11, 2013

Sources: Federal Register; USG Policy Manual; SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy; Dr. Barbara L. Brown, GPC.

Revisions

09/12/2018: Updated policy reference numbers to SACSCOC Standard 10.7; updated section of quoted text directly from BOR Policy 3.4; added footnote URL to SACSCOC Policy Statement on Credit Hours; added footnote URL to BOR Policy 3.4

11/11/2019: Revised section links to items in the academic catalog; added paragraph providing more detail about equivalencies. Revisions reviewed and endorsed by Academic Committee on 11/11/2019.

03/08/2022: Revised URL for SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy; updated VSU logo.

01/30/2024: Added guidelines for zero credit hours courses as required by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' revised Credit Hour Policy Statement approved at the Annual Meeting in December 2023.

Shared with Deans' Council 01/24/2024 and Council of Department Heads 01/30/2024, and an information item on the agendas for Graduate Executive Committee and Academic Committee.