



Policy Directory

Responsible Division: Academic Affairs
Responsible Office: Academic Affairs
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Policy on Credit Hour

Policy:

This policy clarifies both the United States Department of Education mandate and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requirement that Alcorn State University demonstrates that (i) it has institutionally defined a “credit hour,” (ii) it has provided a rationale for allocating credit hours by course and by degree level, and (iii) these explanations reflect a reasonable approximation of the minimum amount of student work, based on the traditional Carnegie unit (credit hour), that is in accordance with commonly accepted practices in higher education.

I. PREAMBLE

This policy is intended to satisfy both the United States Department of Education mandate and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requirement that Alcorn State University demonstrates that (i) it has institutionally defined a “credit hour,” (ii) it has provided a rationale for allocating credit hours by course and by degree level, and (iii) these explanations reflect a reasonable approximation of the minimum amount of student work, based on the traditional Carnegie unit (credit hour), that is in accordance with commonly accepted practices in higher education. The following primary and secondary legal recitations are in order:

II. PRIMARY CITATIONS

A. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – FEDERAL DEFINITION OF THE CREDIT HOUR:

Part 600, Institutional Eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, provides the following definition:

Federal Definition of Credit Hour - In accordance with federal regulations effective July 1, 2011, both institutions and accrediting agencies are required to come into compliance with regulations regarding the definition and assignment of credit hours under §600.2 and §600.24. Federal regulations mandate that all candidates and accredited institutions comply with the definition of the credit hour as set forth in §600.2, which defines the credit hour as:

Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), 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).*

Source: Federal Register

B. Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (CREDIT HOURS)

Per §511 of the Institutions for Higher Learning Policies & Bylaws (HOURS TO DEGREE), *All undergraduate degree programs must have a minimum of 120 [credit] hours and a maximum of 124 hours unless the Board has granted an exception. A request for exception will come to the Board with a justification and recommendation from the Commissioner. Among other issues, these reviews will take into account:*

- a. Accreditation standards of the appropriate specialized accrediting agencies which mandate a baccalaureate program of over 124 credit hours.*
- b. Licensing standards of the professions involved which require a baccalaureate program of over 124 credit hours. Developmental and curriculum prerequisite preparative courses do not count as part of the 124 credit hour requirement.*

(BT Minutes, 7/2004; 3/2008)

C. ALCORN CATALOG

See also, *Alcorn 2016-18 Catalog*, p. 67, "SPECIAL NOTE: It is necessary for the average student to spend approximately three hours of his/her time in "effort" each week for each semester hour of credit carried. This amount of time includes lectures, laboratories, preparations, etc. Advisors may be consulted regarding this matter."

III. SECONDARY CITATIONS

- A. 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."
- B. A Handbook of Policies and Procedures by C.J. Quann:**

*"Academic credit is a measure of the total time commitment required of a typical student in a particular course of study. Total time consists of three components:
(1) time spent in class;
(2) time spent in laboratory, studio, fieldwork, or other scheduled activity;
(3) time devoted to reading, studying, problem solving, writing, or preparation."*

IV. ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY'S CALENDAR & CREDIT-HOUR DEFINITION

Calendar

Alcorn follows the standard academic calendar, 30 weeks of instruction for the academic year, with semesters 15 weeks in length, fall and spring, excluding designated university closings and exam periods.

Credit Definition

Alcorn State University measures academic advancement by programs and degree levels in terms of institutionally-established semester credit hours or, simply, credits, as defined by the Carnegie unit. Specifically, the credit hour is based on the traditional 50-minute Carnegie instructional hour and adjusted to accommodate a 15-week semester. As a proxy for undergraduate and graduate student educational engagement, a credit hour is the basic unit of measurement used to indicate the amount of instructional and learning time required to achieve the learning goals and objectives of college-level courses required by the various academic programs at Alcorn State. Thus, for example, under the Carnegie 50-minute hour, a 1-credit hour course should have approximately 12.5 hours (which reasonably approximates 15 hours) of instructor-led activities in a 15-week semester. When added to the implied 2 hours per week (or 30 hours in a 15-week semester) that students are expected to engage in research, assignments, and other independent learning activities beyond participation in the instructor-led activities, students are expected to allocate a minimum total of 42.5 hours (which reasonably approximates 45 hours) per semester to complete the work contained in a one-credit course.

Traditional, Face-to-Face, Hybrid & Distance Learning Courses

The foregoing standards apply to all traditional classroom, hybrid, and distance learning courses. Thus, traditional or face-to-face classroom-based instruction, hybrid courses, and distance education (i.e., synchronous Blackboard Connect-mediated) courses are based on a 1:1 ratio, where each hour of credit granted, as defined by the Carnegie unit, is matched by the number of hours of instructor-led activities.

Asynchronous, Digitally-Mediated Courses

In an asynchronous online environment, the use of active teaching practices such as providing and moderating content-directed discussion boards or other interactive communication exchanges may be viewed as an instructor-led activity. However, logging into a course landing site is neither sufficient nor adequate to satisfy the teaching/learning requirement for online learning for either the student or the faculty member. Alcorn program faculty determine the amount of student work expected in each online course in order to achieve the course objectives and learning outcomes (as noted in the course description and syllabus). The assigned credit hour is based on at least an equivalent amount of work as represented in the definition of credit hour.

Alternate Instructional Delivery Modalities

Other types of instructional delivery options (e.g., studios, laboratories, clinicals, apprenticeships, ensembles, band, cooperative education courses, internships, and practica) are assigned credit hours based on a ratio of contact hours to credit hours. The methods for assigning credit values for these types of courses are submitted by academic units and are reviewed and approved by the

University Curriculum Committee and are documented in the course syllabus and course syllabi repository. Furthermore . . .

Athletics

- In intercollegiate athletics, students may earn one credit for meetings that follow established Southwestern Athletics Conference (SWAC) and National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) practice schedule and intercollegiate competitions during the 15-week semester. Only two credits of athletics may be applied toward an Alcorn degree.

Music

- For applied studio music instruction, weekly hour lessons carry two or three credits, with the expectation that time spent practicing, preparing, and performing outside lessons will equal the Carnegie unit.

Ensembles

- Band, Concert Choir, Jazz Ensemble, and Jazz Combo are classified at Alcorn as ensembles. Students enrolled in ensemble courses may earn one credit hour for meetings that follow established participation schedules during the 15-week semester--minimum of 3 contact hours per week.

Practica & Internships

- For practica and internship courses at the baccalaureate level, students must complete a minimum of 100 hours of on-site practicum or internship work across the semester. For cooperative extension courses at the baccalaureate level, students must complete a minimum of 300 hours of on-site cooperative extension at the work-site throughout the semester, subject to a university-employer agreement.

Courses in Biological and other sciences

- Credit Hour: Contact Hour Ratio/per week
Lecture 1 credit = 50 minutes
Laboratory 1 credit = 110 minutes

Licensure/Professional Programs

- The School of Nursing offers three programs. Credit to contact hour guidelines for each of the three programs are noted in the chart below.
 - Nursing Courses in the Associate of Science in Nursing Program:
Credit Hour: Contact Hour Ratio/Per Week
Didactic 1 credit = 50 minutes
Laboratory 1 credit = 180 minutes
Clinical or Fieldwork 1 credit = 180 minutes
 - Nursing Courses in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program:
Credit Hour: Contact Hour Ratio/per week
Didactic 1 credit = 50 minutes
Laboratory 1 credit = 120 minutes
Clinical or Fieldwork 1 credit = 120 minutes
 - Nursing Courses in the Master's of Science in Nursing Program:

Credit Hour: Contact Hour Ratio//per week
Didactic 1 credit = 50 minutes
Laboratory 1 credit = 240 minutes
Clinical or Fieldwork 1 credit = 240 minutes

- In the School of Education & Psychology, internship classes, education students teaching courses (12 credits), students must total 560 hours of student-teaching to be eligible for licensure. The practicum in teacher education comprises 75 hours of clinical experience completed through four restricted classes.
- For the School of Education & Psychology counseling programs, students participate in a one-semester Practicum course comprised of 100 clinical hours, plus 100 minutes in classroom each week for 15 weeks. The Internship courses comprise 600 hours of field experience that expand over the final two-semesters of coursework.

Caveat: Course policies that differ from the foregoing institutional policy are approved through Alcorn's Curriculum Committee and are subsequently submitted to the vice president for Academic Affairs for final approval.

Taken together, Alcorn observes the credit hour as defined by the Carnegie unit on the semester system, a generally accepted standard in higher education. A credit hour represents approximately three hours of work per week. Of these three hours per credit hour unit, only one will be class-time. This credit hour equivalency, based on the Carnegie unit, may vary somewhat from class to class and student to student. Credit values and reasonable approximations to the amount of instructional time needed to address all required learning objectives documented on the official course syllabus are approved by the University Curriculum Committee with final approval through the vice president for Academic Affairs/chair of the Deans and Directors Council. Academic units are responsible for ensuring that credit hours are awarded only for work that meets the requirements outlined in this policy, namely that the credit hour be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit, in accordance with accepted practices in higher education.