



## Definition of a Credit Hour

### No. 6901

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**Affected Parties:**  
Undergraduate  
Graduate  
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Other

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### 1.0 Purpose

To establish the definition of a credit hour for all courses, regardless of academic level or instructional delivery, receiving academic credit

### 2.0 Policy

In accord with federal regulations and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges policy statement, 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:

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one (1) semester 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 and outlined in item 1 above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, independent studies, internships, practica, field studies, undergraduate research, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

This policy applies to all courses at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, professional) that are awarded academic credit, regardless of mode of delivery. The expectation of contact time and student effort outside the classroom is the same in all formats of a course whether the course is delivered fully online, in a face-to-face lecture or seminar format, or a combination of face-to-face and electronic formats. Courses that follow a less structured schedule of interaction, such as independent studies, internships, research experiences, or studio work, at a minimum should state clearly learning objectives, expected outcomes, and workload expectations to meet the standards set forth above. For courses offered via the virtual campus, the department head and the academic dean of the course offering subject will be accountable for all qualitative aspects of virtual campus course offerings as well as assuring the standards for awarding credit are consistent for credit that must be met by all students in other instructional delivery formats. As an approved participant in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), Virginia Tech adheres to the interregional guidelines for the evaluation of all distance education courses and assures the quality, benchmarking, and course expectations of virtual are the same as on-campus courses.

### 2.1 Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine Credit Hour Guidance

Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine maintains a separate [credit hour policy](#) that describes the medical education program credit hour requirements by block, consistent with practices at U.S. medical schools accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME).



## 2.2 Contact Minutes Guidelines

Regardless of instructional delivery of the course, workload expectations must align with the stated learning outcomes for students and meet the standards for contact minutes and credit hours awarded per the instructional format. Definitions of credit hour and contact minute ratios are provided at the University Registrar website ([www.registrar.vt.edu](http://www.registrar.vt.edu).)

## 3.0 Procedures for Establishing Credit Hours

### 3.1 Procedure for Establishing the Academic Calendar:

#### 3.1.1 Calculation of Total Class Meeting Time for Academic Calendar

Virginia Tech adheres to the federal definition of credit hour along with the Carnegie unit for contact time (750 minutes for each credit awarded). The required contact time is 2250 minutes for a three-credit lecture course. A Monday-Wednesday-Friday class meets for 50 minutes a day (150 minutes a week), and meets for 15 weeks, resulting in total contact minutes of 2250 for the term. A Tuesday-Thursday class meets for 75 minutes a day (150 minutes a week) and meets for 15 weeks, resulting in a total of 2250 minutes for the term. As long as the 2250 minutes are attained, a class could be approved to meet a lesser number of days to get the total necessary contact time. This calculation applies to summer and special sessions which may mean longer class meeting periods over fewer weeks than during the regular terms.

#### 3.1.2 Establishing the Calendar

The Academic Support Committee is a university standing committee with reporting responsibilities to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies. The Academic Support Committee has as one of its core missions the establishment of the criteria for the academic calendar to support the university's requirement for the total contact hours required for a standard 3-credit course. The University Registrar establishes calendars based on the university approved calendar criteria. Any changes to the calendar criteria require action of this university standing committee, the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies, and the University Council.

#### 3.1.3 Publication of the Academic Calendar

The Office of the University Registrar shall maintain the official academic calendar on its website.

### 3.2 Procedures for Course Review

#### 3.2.1 Curriculum Committee Review of Credit Hours

The curriculum committees within each academic college and at the university level shall comply with this policy in the review and approval of all courses, including certifying that the expected learning outcomes meet the credit-hour definition. The determination of credit hours is made when a new course or revision to an existing course is proposed. Each curriculum committee shall review the learning outcomes, instructional format, and contact time as well as assignments and evaluation mechanisms as described in the official course syllabus. Any change in credit hours for a course must be reviewed through the curriculum governance process and include all appropriate learning objectives and official course syllabus.



### 3.2.2 Oversight of Credit Hour Equivalency

The faculty and departments, in coordination with the respective department heads and deans of the academic colleges, the Vice President and Dean of the Graduate School, and the Office of the University Registrar, are responsible for ensuring that each course complies with the university's credit hour standards as set forth in this policy.

## 4.0 Definitions

## 5.0 References

34 CFR 600.2 Code of Federal Regulations: Federal Definition of a Credit Hour  
<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?rgn=div8&node=34:3.1.3.1.1.1.23.2>

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, Credit Hours Policy Statement  
<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/Credit-Hours.pdf>

VAC 40-31-10, Commonwealth of Virginia Regulations Governing Certain Institutions to Confer Degrees, Diplomas, and Certificates  
[www.schev.edu](http://www.schev.edu)

National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education  
<http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-policies-and-standards>

Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine Credit Hour Policy  
[https://medicine.vtc.vt.edu/content/dam/medicine\\_vtc\\_vt\\_edu/student-life/handbook/19-20/Credit\\_Hour\\_Policy.pdf](https://medicine.vtc.vt.edu/content/dam/medicine_vtc_vt_edu/student-life/handbook/19-20/Credit_Hour_Policy.pdf)

## 6.0 Approval and Revisions

Approved March 2, 2016 by Executive Vice President and Provost, Thanassis Rikakis.

- Revision 1  
Technical update in section 5.0 to update links.  
Approved March 11, 2020 by Vice President for Policy and Governance, Kim O'Rourke.
- Revision 2  
Technical update to include the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine credit hour policy in section 2.1.  
Approved September 29, 2020 by Executive Vice Provost, G. Don Taylor.