

# The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

UNIVERSITY POLICY MEMO NO. 29

Effective Date:  
February 10, 2012

## DEFINITION OF A CREDIT HOUR

### PURPOSE

This memorandum is intended to document the existing policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for all courses and programs, regardless of academic level, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill adopted the Federal Definition of the Credit Hour at the Faculty Council meeting on February 10, 2012.

### 1. FEDERAL DEFINITION OF A CREDIT HOUR

For purposes of the application of this policy and in accord with federal regulations, 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 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 outlined in item 1 above 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. APPLICATION OF CREDIT HOUR POLICY

This credit hour policy applies to all courses at all levels (graduate, professional, and undergraduate) that award academic credit (i.e. any course that appears on an official transcript issued by the University) regardless of the mode of delivery including, but not limited to, self-paced, online, hybrid, lecture, seminar, and laboratory. Academic units are responsible for ensuring that credit hours are awarded only for work that meets the requirements outlined in this policy.

The expectation of contact time inside the classroom and student effort outside the classroom is the same in all formats of a course whether it be fully online, a hybrid of face-to-face contact with some content delivered by electronic means, or one delivered in lecture or seminar format. Courses that have less structured classroom schedules, such as research seminars, independent studies, internships, practica, studio work, or any other academic work leading to the award of credit hours, at a minimum, should state clearly learning objectives and expected outcomes and workload expectations that meet the standards set forth above.

### 3. CAMPUS PROCESSES - ACADEMIC CALENDAR

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill adheres to the Carnegie unit for contact time (750 minutes for each credit awarded). The University Registrar chairs the University Calendar Committee that prepares and recommends the annual Academic Calendar for approval by the Chancellor no less than 18 months in advance of the planned academic year. The Academic Calendar must have a minimum of 750 minutes of instruction per credit hour. The standard meeting times for courses are a 50-minute, Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule and a 75-minute, Tuesday-Thursday schedule. For the standard 3-credit hour course, 2,250 minutes of instruction are required. The calendar is planned with a minimum of 42 Monday-Wednesday-Friday meeting days and 28 Tuesday-Thursday meeting days. The policy allows a mandatory examination period to be counted in the minutes of instruction. The University has a required three hour final examination policy that adds an additional 180 minutes of instruction, resulting in a minimum of 2,280 minutes of instruction for every planned term in the Academic Calendar. The calculation for summer sessions follows this same standard of 750 contact minutes for each unit of credit which means longer class meeting times over the course of the two summer terms.

The University Registrar maintains the official Academic Calendar on its website: <http://registrar.unc.edu/AcademicCalendar/index.htm>. In addition, the Academic Calendar is published in the printed and online versions of the Undergraduate Bulletin and in the online version of the Graduate Record.

#### **4. CAMPUS PROCESSES – CURRICULUM REVIEW**

The Administrative Boards or Curricula Committees of each College or School within the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are charged with following the policy on credit hours in their review and approval of all courses and for certifying that the expected student learning for the course meets the credit hour standard. The determination of credit hours is made when a new course or a revision to an existing course is proposed. The submitted syllabus is examined for contact time as well as for assignments and evaluation mechanisms.

The Office of the University Registrar requires training for class scheduling before granting access to any departmental staff approved by a department for scheduling classes. Those members of the permanent staff, generally scheduling officers or student services managers, who create the schedule for each semester (and summer session) have an important role in maintaining credit hour standards. The training that the Registrar provides emphasizes the standard time periods for classes and the University requirement that lecture courses and those intended for first-year students meet at least two times during one week (see Appendix B of [Schedule of Classes Training](#)).