

Credit Hour Policy

Effective Date: July 1, 2022

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I. Purpose

The Mid-Atlantic Commission on Higher Education (MARCHE), doing business as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission), seeks to ensure that a member institution is able to demonstrate that its methodology for the assignment of credit hours is a reasonable approximation of the amount of work completed by a student and is consistent with commonly accepted practice in higher education. The purpose of this policy is to define the Commission's expectations for institutional credit hour policies, procedures, and/or methodologies. See the accompanying document *Credit Hour Procedures*.

II. Statement of Policy

The United States Department of Education (USDE) establishes the credit hour as the basis for measuring an institution's eligibility for federal funding. A credit hour is a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements for a course taken at an institution of higher education. The Commission shall recognize that institutions may use different methodologies for determining the assignment of credit hours. The institution shall develop a methodology for assigning credit hours to courses and programs that accurately represents the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements of a course taken. The institution shall demonstrate that educational programs are of sufficient content, depth, and program length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or credential. The institution's methodology for assignment and award of credit hours shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and be consistent with applicable laws and regulations wherein the institution operates. Both within and between institutions, consistency in credit hour determinations has implications for the transferability of credit and minimizing the loss of credit for students. The Commission shall review an institution's policy, procedures, and/or methodology for determining credit hour to determine if the methodology used is a reasonable approximation of an amount of student work and is consistent with commonly accepted practice in postsecondary education.

III. Procedures

The Commission staff will develop procedures as are necessary to ensure the consistent implementation of policies. See the *Credit Hour Procedures*.

IV. Definitions

The following definitions are used in the policy and/or procedures:

- A. **Clock hour:** (1) A period of time consisting of (i) A 50- to 60-minute class, lecture, or recitation in a 60-minute period; (ii) A 50- to 60-minute faculty-supervised laboratory, shop training, or internship in a 60-minute period; (iii) Sixty minutes of preparation in a correspondence course; or (iv) In distance education, 50 to 60 minutes in a 60-minute period of attendance in (A) A synchronous or asynchronous class, lecture, or recitation where there is opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students; or (B) An asynchronous learning activity involving academic engagement in which the student interacts with technology that can monitor and document the amount of time that the student participates in the activity. (federal definition in 34 § 600.2).
- B. **Competency Based Education (CBE).** A program that organizes content according to what a student knows and can do, often referred to as a “competency.” CBE programs also generally have very clear claims for student learning, stress what students can do with the knowledge and skills they acquire and have assessments that provide measurable evidence of competency. Student progress is determined by mastery of each competency. Because CBE focuses on whether students have mastered these competencies, there is a focus on learning outcomes rather than time spent in a classroom. Direct assessment is a subset of competency-based education (CBE).
- C. **Credit hour.** An amount of student work defined by an institution, as approved by the institution’s accrediting agency or State approval agency, that is consistent with commonly accepted practice in postsecondary education and that (1) reasonably approximates not less than (i) 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 period of time; or (ii) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in (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; and (2) permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2).
- D. **Direct assessment program.** An instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others and meets the conditions of 34 CFR § 668.10. Direct assessment of student learning means a measure of a student’s knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide evidence of the student’s proficiency in the relevant subject area. Direct assessment is a subset of competency-based education (CBE).

- E. **Distance education.** Education that uses one or more of the following technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously: (i) the internet; (ii) one-way or two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (iii) audio conference; or (iv) Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above. Please see the complete federal definition of distance education, including substantive interaction in the *Substantive Change Guidelines*. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2)
- F. **Educational program.** A legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that: (i) Leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential, or is a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program, as described in 34 CFR part 668, subpart O; and (ii) May, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilize direct assessment of student learning, or recognize the direct assessment of student learning by others, if such assessment is consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment and with the provisions of § 668.10. (federal definition in 34 CFR § 600.2). The Commission may also use the terms certificates and/or degree levels (Standard III – Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience).

Number:

Version: 2022-07-01, EFFECTIVE

Effective Date: July 1, 2022

Approval: Approved by the Commission, June 23, 2022

Initial Approval: August 23, 2012

Revisions: October 20, 2012 (technical amendment); July 1, 2022 (substantive revision);

Federal Regulations: 34 CFR §600.2 Definitions; 34 CFR § 602.26; 34 CFR § 668.10

Standards: Standard III, criterion 1;

Related Documents: *Accreditation Actions Policy; Accreditation Actions Procedures; Credit Hour Procedures; Substantive Change Policy; Substantive Change Procedures; Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Policy; Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Procedures; Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Guidelines; Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations.*