

Calculation of Academic Credit Hours for Degree and Non-Degree Programs

In the October 29, 2010 Federal Register, the U.S. Department of Education (“the Department”) issued new regulations pertaining to, among other things, the definition of a credit hour. For degree programs and selected non-degree programs, a credit hour, as defined in 34 C.F.R. §600.2, 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.

Given the unique nature of vocational education, the Commission found that the credit hour definition as defined in §600.2 paragraph (1) as one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work may not accurately reflect the reality of the learning environments for ACCSC member schools. As a general rule in vocational and career-oriented education, a combination of didactic learning, hands-on practice and experimentation, and out-of-class work/preparation represent the best learning environment and opportunity for students to acquire the necessary skills and competencies. The combination and measure of these different learning modalities, however, is highly variable and depends greatly on the type of program taught and the educational objectives. Given the variety of learning environments and experiences in vocational and career-oriented education typically found in ACCSC-accredited institutions, the Commission has developed a definition of a credit hour that a) reasonably approximates the federal definition and b) provides flexibility in program design and delivery as a means to afford students the best opportunity to achieve programmatic learning objectives (See *Section II (A)(3)(e-g)* and *Appendix III, Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*).

NOTE: The Commission’s conversion to credit hour is specifically to calculate **academic credit** and is not aligned with the Department of Education’s calculation of financial aid credit hours for awarding Title IV funds. Please contact the Department of Education for information regarding calculating for Title IV funds.

Credit Hour Programs:

Generally, in order for the Commission to recognize a program in credit hours, the program must be comprised of a majority (>50%) of courses that require out-of-class work/preparation. Programs that do not have an out-of-class work/preparation component are considered clock-hour only programs. A school must be able to justify the number of hours estimated and types of assignments for out-of-class work/preparation (*Section II (3)(f), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*).

Degrees Program: All degree programs must be measured in credit hour, therefore schools are required to document out of class work as applicable in at least 51% of the courses in the degree program.

Non-Degree Programs: If a program is deemed eligible for clock-to-credit hour conversion according to 668.8(k)(2) - Non-degree programs of at least one academic year in length, a credit hour is defined as follows:

- a. One semester credit hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction and for each 30 clock hours of instruction, the maximum amount of outside work permitted is 7.5 hours (25% of the total instructional hours).
- b. One quarter credit hour must include at least 20 clock hours of instruction and for each 20 clock hours of instruction, the maximum amount of outside work permitted is 5 hours (25% of the total instructional hours).

In order to assist schools in the calculations, the Commission designed specific outlines to calculate credit hours. The non-degree outline automatically calculates 25% out of class work and the total credit hours of a program. The forms are available on the ACCSC website:

- Non-Degree Program: Outline of a Non-Degree Program
- Degree Program: Outline of a Degree Program

Credit Hour Programs and the Carnegie Unit:

Some institutions may utilize the Carnegie unit conversion based on either the standard 10/20/30 for quarter credits or 15/30/45 for semester credits; however, as noted in the Federal requirements, the school must document two (2) hours of outside work for each didactic hour in class (e.g., 15 didactic hours must demonstrate 30 hours of outside work). The use of the Carnegie unit for **non-degree programs** entails documenting out of class work potentially exceeding the 25% limit as mandated for Title IV funding calculations. While the Commission will acknowledge up to 25% out of class work for each course based on instructional hours for the purposes of federal financial aid calculations, the Commission’s calculation for an academic credit hour allows for a school to include in its calculation of a credit hour, outside work greater than 25%. By increasing the out of class work hours, the academic credit hour issued for each course will align with the standard Carnegie unit calculation of a semester or quarter credit hour.

In order to assist schools with the credit hour calculations in non-degree programs using the Carnegie unit, the Commission designed a specific outline that allow for an option to include additional out of class work hours, exceeding the 25%. The non-degree outline is available on the ACCSC website:

- Non-Degree Program: Outline of a Non-Degree Program

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following sections:

- Form Section (Rows 2-11):** Fields for School Name, Program Title, Program Length in Month, and Credit hours for this program are measured in (X c Semester Quarter). Includes checkboxes for '100% of Courses Transfer to Degree, OR School must use Carnegie Unit (check one)'.
- ACCSC Minimum Requirements (Rows 12-17):** Lists requirements for 1 Semester Credit Hours (SCH) = 48 Units and 1 Quarter Credit Hour (QCH) = 30 Units, including clock hours for didactic, supervised lab, and externship.
- Table Section (Rows 18-26):** A table with columns: Course Titles, Didactic, Supervised Lab, Externship, Total Instructional Clock Hours, Outside Work Clock Hours (25% limit), Total Clock Hours & Outside Work Hours (25% Limit), Didactic, Supervised Lab, Externship, and Total Credit Hours.
- Callout Boxes:**
 - Top right: 'Alanna Marx: When using the carnegie unit, the school is expected to document additional outside work. By selecting "yes" here, column "I" of the spreadsheet will open to allow a school to enter additional outside work.'
 - Bottom right: 'Alanna Marx: Column "I" is where a school will enter the total outside work hours that exceeds the 25%. This will be the 25% outside work from column "H", plus the additional work exceeding 25%, for a final total.'

Clock Hour Only Programs:

If a program is not deemed eligible for clock-to-credit hour conversion according to 668.8(k)(2), regardless of state or accrediting agency recognition of academic credit hours, these programs are required to measure student progress for Federal Financial Aid purposes in clock units hours only. Therefore, the program must be deemed a clock hour only program by the Commission.

Although a clock hour program may include out of class work, schools are not required to document the out of class work in a clock hour only program. In order to assist schools in the calculations, the Commission designed specific outline that calculates clock hours only. The form is available on the ACCSC website:

- Allocation of Hours for Clock Hour Programs