

Credit Hour Policy at Drake University

The credit hour or semester hour, terms used interchangeably, is the unit of instruction. One credit hour is constituted by a minimum of one hour¹ of classroom or direct instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for a semester (or its equivalent). An equivalent amount of work (minimum three hours per week for a semester or its equivalent of combined direct instruction and outside of class student work) must be represented for a credit hour in other academic activities such as laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work and other academic work.

Semester is defined as not less than 15 weeks. Courses offered in shorter timeframes must have an equivalent number of hours dedicated to instruction and student work as that spent in a semester-based class.

Approved by Faculty Senate, March 9, 2011

The following guidance indicates how this policy is applied to credit situations that are not taught in the standard 15-week format or are not classroom based learning experiences. The credit hour guidelines represent a minimum baseline. It is acceptable to exceed these levels.

Courses Meeting Fewer than 15 Weeks and Online or other Distance Learning Guidance

The credit hours awarded for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per credit hour for a 15-week semester.

For example, a 3-credit course should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 15-week semester. Given that the “course hour” is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 112.5 total hours for the course. These hours may consist of course activities including, but not limited to, those listed below.

- Face-to-face course meetings
- Time to read/view assigned texts or other assigned materials
- Virtual course meetings or student-instructor and student-student interactions
- Experiential learning activities consistent with the learning objectives of the course
 - o Service learning projects
 - o Research with faculty

¹ Federal guidance does not specify the number of minutes implied by “one hour” stating that “We believe it is unnecessary to define one hour as either 50 minutes or one clock hour because the primary purpose of...the definition is to provide institutions with a baseline, not an absolute value for determining reasonable equivalencies or approximations for the amount of academic activity defined” (Federal Register, Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66486).

- o Practicum placements
- Synthesis/processing/reflection time and activities (may be used for writing or production of creative work which may take many forms including but not limited to journals, formal papers, blogs, art, music, etc.)

Due to the fact that pace of reading, writing, and other activities varies widely, time spent in any of these areas will not be identical for all students. Rather assigned activities should reflect a reasonable expectation by the instructor of the time it would take to meet the learning objectives of the course or assignment.

Federal guidance for federal student aid further indicates that on-line or distance education must have the following:

- Enrollment verification processes
- Substantial interaction between students and instructors

Independent Study and Internship Guidance

Credit hours applicable for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per week, per credit hour for a 15-week semester.

A 3-credit independent study or internship should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 15-week semester. Given that the “course hour” is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 112.5 total hours for the course.

Specific independent study and internship guidelines and forms are provided at the school/college from which the course is being taken. Guidelines at the college/school level may include the number of independent studies (or credits) and internships permitted per student for a single degree, required student GPA, and which course numbers can be assigned as independent study. However, the following general standards apply across all academic units and all levels of students.

General Guidelines

Definition: *Independent study* courses should have content that is unique from other approved courses in the curriculum and be taught in individualized or small group sessions with the faculty member guiding it (face-to-face or electronic).

- a. Generally, an independent study will earn from 1 to 3 credits, though exceptions can be approved by a college/school office.
- b. Effort per credit hour earned must substantially meet the approved Drake University credit hour definition. Activities counted towards course workload and instructional time can include the following (this is a set of examples, not an exhaustive list):
 - i. Time spent on course-related reading or other content delivery media
 - ii. Substantive face-to-face or virtual student-instructor interaction

- iii. Writing assignments or other forms of learning assessments
- iv. Experiential education activities [such as research (lab or otherwise), service learning, scholarly/creative community presentations]

Travel Seminar Credit Hour Guidance

The Drake University definition of a credit hour indicates that the calculation of credit hours applicable for a given course or academic experience must be reasonably equivalent to the standard of 3 hours combined direct instruction and student work per week, per credit hour for a semester (or its equivalent).

Instruction and student work for the purposes of credit hour computation in travel seminars includes the following types of activities:

- Course meetings before, during, and after the dates of travel
- Time to read/view assigned texts
- Lectures (from the course instructor, guest lecturers, faculty/staff/students at partner institutions, guides, local residents, etc.)
- Discussion meetings (with course instructors, guest lecturers, faculty/staff/students at partner institutions, guides, local residents, peers, etc.)
- Museum, clinic, business, government building or other site visits
- Organized cultural excursions and performances that engage students with the learning objectives of the course
- Service learning projects
- Student presentations
- Synthesis/processing/reflection time (may be used for writing, discussion, or production of creative work which may take many forms including but not limited to journals, formal papers, blogs, art, music, etc.)

For example, a 3-credit course should require the equivalent of 9 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per week for the equivalent of a 15-week semester. Given that the “course hour” is 50 minutes, this would be a baseline of 112.5 total hours for the course.

Use the available worksheet to assist in determining the appropriate number of credit hours to assign to a travel seminar.