

# Defining and Assigning Credit Hours Policy

Updated 5/30/2023

**Purpose:** To define Cornell University's policy on assigning credit hours and the method of assessment to ensure compliance with such a policy.

**Policy Statement:** All credit hours awarded by Cornell University conform to New York State Education Department (NYSED) and U.S. Department of Education guidelines, provided below. Additionally, credit hours awarded by Cornell University comply with credit hour regulations of the Middle States Commission of Higher Education (MSCHE).

**New York State Education Department Policy:** The New York State Education Department approves all credit-bearing degree and certificate programs at Cornell University. Credit hour calculations for courses in these programs follow NYSED guidelines, which are consistent with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a credit hour.

Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, Title 8 – Education Department, Chapter II – Regulations of the Commissioner, Subchapter A – Higher and Professional Regulations, Part 50 – General, Section 50.1 (o) stipulates the following:

*Semester hour means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of this sub chapter. This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year.*

Section 52.2(c)(4) stipulates:

*A semester hour of credit may be granted by an institution for fewer hours of instruction and study than those specified in subdivision (o) of section 50.1 of this Subchapter only: (i) when approved by the commissioner as part of a registered curriculum; (ii) when the commissioner has granted prior approval for the institution to maintain a statement of academic standards that defines the considerations which establish equivalency of instruction and study and such statement has been adopted by the institution; or (iii) in the event of a temporary closure of an institution by the State or local government as a result of a disaster, as defined in section 50.1(w) of this Title, when the commissioner has granted approval for the institution to maintain a statement of academic standards that defines the considerations which establish equivalency of instruction and study and such statement has been adopted by the institution.*

Source: Westlaw; NYSED Commissioner of Regulations

<https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/lcca5c8abc22111dd97adcd755bda2840?viewType=Fu&transitionType=Default&contextData=%28sc.Default%29>

## U.S. Department of Education Credit Hour Policy and Definition:

Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34: Education, Part 600 – Institutional Eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, Subpart A – General, Section 600.2 stipulates the following:

*Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8 (k) and (l), 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 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, practical, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.*

Source: eCFR ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=1&SID=b209720cc245666fe4a9ac1010a918fa&ty=HTML&h=L&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=s34.3.600\\_12](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=1&SID=b209720cc245666fe4a9ac1010a918fa&ty=HTML&h=L&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=s34.3.600_12))

### Middle States Commission on Higher Education Policy:

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) issued a Credit Hour Policy in August 2012, revised October 2012, that requires MSCHE institutions to comply with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a credit hour. MSCHE also noted in the statement that institutions must provide this information to the Commission's evaluators "at appropriate points of accreditation review so they can verify compliance with the credit hour regulations."

Source: MSCHE ([https://www.msche.org/?s=Credit%20Hour&styp=ipf\\_policies-guide](https://www.msche.org/?s=Credit%20Hour&styp=ipf_policies-guide))

### Compliance with the Credit Hour Policy:

The faculty in each School or College at Cornell are responsible for all aspects of the curriculum and degree program requirements. Each School or College has a curriculum committee or designee that reviews proposed new courses and degree programs, as well as revisions to existing programs and degree programs. These reviews include an assessment of the credit hours associated with each.

The Office of the University Registrar in conjunction with the Office of Enrollment Compliance and Design will review a subset of classes to ensure they are scheduled for the appropriate amount of instructional time for the credits assigned. Any discrepancies or concerns will be reported back to the School or College.

Syllabi for all courses must include an explanation of the amount of time students are expected to devote to the course and must include a breakdown of time expected in the classroom as well as an expectation of time spent on the course outside of the classroom-based time, if applicable.

### Instructional Time:

Credit hours are assigned to courses on the basis of instructional time. Instructional time may occur in the classroom or outside the classroom, depending on the type of course. Instructional time in the classroom is inclusive of regularly scheduled instruction, as well as a scheduled examination period. Instructional time during the examination period may include, but is not limited to; seated exams, take-home tests, and/or final projects or papers. Instructional time for classroom based courses does not include vacation periods, homework, travel, or orientation. Credit hours are calculated on the basis of instructional time, which is supplemented, but cannot be replaced by hours expected outside of instructional time.

### Distanced/Online Teaching and Learning:

Online courses at Cornell also comply with policies related to distance education. Regardless of instruction mode or delivery method, the same minimum amount of combined instructional time and supplemental work

is required for credit, and faculty must provide *regular*<sup>1</sup> and *substantive*<sup>2</sup> interactions with students. However, in an online course instructional time may take different forms, such as reading/watching synchronous or asynchronous course lectures, participating in faculty-moderated online discussions, and other required academic interactions with faculty.

**Zero Credit Courses:** In some cases, Cornell University offers courses and classes that carry zero credits. Such activities provide learning opportunities without the possibility of earning credit.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Regular Interaction:** The institution provides the opportunity for substantive interactions between the student and instructor or instructors on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency, monitors the student's academic engagement and success, and ensures that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student. Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-09-02/pdf/2020-18636.pdf>, p. 54809.

<sup>2</sup> **Substantive Interaction:** Engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following: (i) Providing direct instruction; (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework; (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency; (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency. Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-09-02/pdf/2020-18636.pdf>, p. 54809.

## Calculation of Credits

The table below provides a framework for how the credit hour translates to a particular instruction method. In some cases, a course may consist of a combination of more than one type of instruction. In these cases each component of the class will follow the related calculation and the total credit hours will be calculated on the sum of the components.

Generally speaking, the calculations below are grouped into two categories; courses which are assigned credits on the basis of instructional time inside the classroom, and those courses in which the instructional time is entirely outside of the classroom.

### Courses with Classroom Based Instructional Time

Courses with instructional time in the classroom are courses where instructional time is generally defined as time spent in a physical classroom with the instructor during regularly scheduled instruction as well as seated exams, final papers and projects during the scheduled exam period.

In addition to instructional time, classroom based courses carry an expectation of time spent outside of the classroom (requirements indicated above component definitions). This time may include homework, assignments, preparation for the course, group meetings and project work, and tests or quizzes.

Component	Number of Minutes of Classroom Based Instructional Time Per Credit
<a href="#">Lecture (LEC)</a>	750
<a href="#">Seminar (SEM)</a>	750
<a href="#">Discussion (DIS)</a>	750
<a href="#">Design Studio (DES)</a>	750
<a href="#">Laboratory (LAB)</a>	1500 (if significant outside prep is required) or 2250 (if no outside preparation is required)
<a href="#">Studio (STU)</a>	1500
<a href="#">Practicum (PRC)</a>	1500

### Lecture, Seminar, Design Studio, and Discussion Courses

*A credit is awarded for fifteen 50-minute sessions of classroom instruction with an expectation of two hours of outside study for each class session.*

**Lecture (LEC):** Instructor-led course where instruction occurs primarily through a presentation format. Lecture courses may include various pedagogies such as recitation, discussion, testing, evaluation, and other active learning techniques. Lecture courses may have affiliated discussion and/or laboratory components.

**Seminar (SEM):** Instructor-led, interactive course that emphasizes exploration and focused discussions of advanced or discipline-specific topics and may result in the creation of an intellectual product.

**Discussion (DIS):** Instructor-led course, usually associated with a lecture, designed to give students the opportunity for more engagement and interaction with the course content and instructor.

**Design Studio (DES):** Instructor-led course that requires the application and practice of design and artistic theories. Studio instruction is delivered through a variety of pedagogies including formal instruction, presentations, discussion, collective reviews, critiques, independent work, and other active learning techniques.

Number of Credits Awarded	Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Required
1.0	750
1.5	1125
2.0	1500
2.5	1875
3.0	2250

### Laboratory Courses

*The number of minutes of instructional time for these courses depends on the expectation of outside preparation. Courses with little to no substantial outside preparation by the student are awarded one credit for fifteen sessions of 150 minutes of instructional time in the classroom.*

*Where such activity involves the expectation of substantial outside preparation by the student, one credit is equal to fifteen sessions of 100 minutes of instructional time in the classroom.*

**Laboratory (LAB):** Instructor-supervised course that requires application of methods and principles through experimentation, observation, or practice in real-world or simulated settings. Labs often require a defined physical setting and may be stand-alone or affiliated with another component.

***Courses with little to no substantial outside preparation:***

Number of Credits Awarded	Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Required
1.0	2250
1.5	3375
2.0	4500
2.5	5625
3.0	6750

***Courses with substantial outside preparation:***

Number of Credits Awarded	Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Required
1.0	1500
1.5	2250
2.0	3000
2.5	3750
3.0	4500

## Studio and Practicum Courses

*These courses generally are expected to have twice as many minutes of instructional time as there are minutes of time spent outside of the classroom. A credit is awarded for fifteen 100-minute sessions of classroom instruction with an expectation of one hour of outside study for each class session.*

**Studio (STU):** Instructor-supervised course that requires the application and practice of design, ecological, cultural, and aesthetic theories under the guidance of an instructor or faculty member.

**Practicum (PRC):** Course in which the student has an immersive experience for the purpose of the practical application of theory in a classroom, field, and/or work setting under the guidance and supervision of faculty. Deliverables may include proposals for community or design interventions that may result in implementation by stakeholders.

<b>Number of Credits Awarded</b>	<b>Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Required</b>
1.0	1500
1.5	2250
2.0	3000
2.5	3750
3.0	4500

## **Experiential Learning and Individual Study**

Courses with instructional time generally outside of the classroom where instructional time is defined as time spent on task under the supervision or guidance of the instructor. This includes time spent on research, project based work, or time that is academic in nature spent in the field. Given that these components are outside of the formal classroom, they are calculated on the basis of a 60 minute hour where generally one credit is assigned for 40 hours of instructional time spent on task.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Per Credit</b>
<a href="#">Field Study (FLD)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Independent Study (IND)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Internship (INT)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Presentation (PRS)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Project (PRJ)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Research (RSC)</a>	2400
<a href="#">Clinical (CLN)</a>	2400

### **Field Study, Independent Study, Internship, Presentation, Project, Research, and Clinical Courses**

*These courses are generally outside of formal classroom instruction. They are calculated on the basis of a 60 minute hour and do not carry an expectation of time outside of the instructional time.*

**Field Study (FLD):** Course that provides an immersive, collaborative, and interactive experience. Courses are primarily held in a setting outside the classroom and may include traditional classroom-based lecture and discussion formats. Courses are under the supervision of an instructor or faculty member.

**Independent Study (IND):** Course that is individualized based on a plan of study negotiated between the student and faculty. Students work independently, and faculty provide guidance and supervision.

**Internship (INT):** Course in which the student has an independent, immersive experience in a work setting that provides opportunities for the student to apply knowledge gained through coursework.

**Presentation (PRS):** Course such as a guest lecture series that is designed to present material to students, with minimal preparation expected. Reflection paper or final deliverable may be required.

**Project (PRJ):** Course in which students work in small groups focused on a problem or task under instructor guidance and supervision. The majority of the time is spent outside of the formal classroom.

**Research (RSC):** Course in which students create new knowledge through in-depth investigation, analysis, or research with the expectation of production of a final deliverable (typically a thesis, report, or publication). Students work independently, and faculty provide guidance, review, and evaluation.

**Clinical (CLN):** Course that requires the practical application of theories through an experience in a professional setting, typically outside of the classroom. Courses are under the supervision of a clinical supervisor or faculty.

<b>Number of Credits Awarded</b>	<b>Number of Minutes of Instructional Time Required</b>
1.0	2400
1.5	3600
2.0	4800
2.5	6000
3.0	7200

**Graduate Thesis/Dissertation Courses**

*Time committed to research activities is expected to be substantial, and unless special approval has been granted, all Graduate School research degree students are considered to be full-time.*

**Graduate Thesis/Dissertation (GTD):** Required activity in which graduate research students create new knowledge through original research, culminating in the production and defense of a scholarly treatise that may be suitable for publication.

<b>Number of Credits Awarded</b>
0-12