Information

Academic Calendar and Awarding of Course Credit Hours

Effective

January 2, 2012

Number

Not Applicable

Applicability

This policy applies to the University of Louisville and its employees and students.

Administrative Authority

Executive Vice President and University Provost

Responsible Unit

Executive Vice President and University Provost

Office of Academic Planning and Accountability

502-852-6169

History

September 13, 2024: Revised policy approved by Gerry Bradley, Executive Vice President and University Provost effective immediately.

April 25, 2022 - Revised policy approved by Gerry Bradley, Interim Executive Vice President and University Provost effective May 1, 2022.

June 26, 2020 - Revised policy approved by Beth A. Boehm, Executive Vice President and University Provost effective July 1, 2020.

Revision Date(s): June 26, 2020; April 25, 2022; May 4, 2022 (minor edit); August 21, 2023; September 13, 2024; November 20, 2025 (minor edit)

Reviewed Date(s): June 26, 2020; April 22, 2022; August 29, 2024

Categories

Reason for Policy:

The University's uniform standards for establishing the institutional academic calendar and determining the amount of credit hours awarded for all courses are designed to meet or exceed federal regulations, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) accreditation requirements, and other applicable accrediting bodies.

Statement:

Academic Calendar

To address the needs of its diverse student body, the University of Louisville (University) has established an academic calendar policy based on a standard of 14 weeks (fall/spring terms). The University's academic calendar structure will align with SACSCOC guidelines provided that: (1) valid, assessable course learning outcomes are established for each course and stated in the syllabi of each course section, as documented in the syllabus collection; (2) the calendar and credit hour requirements are clearly stated in the university catalog and other information resources; and (3) expectations for out-of-class instructional activities are clearly indicated in course descriptions and syllabi. Department chairs and deans continue to be responsible for monitoring and enforcing these requirements for the courses and sections in their units. The university will operate on a year-round calendar based on the following schedule of standard terms and their length:

Fall and Spring Semester:

- Regular Full Term: 70 available instructional days + 6 available culminating project/final exam days = 76 total available meeting days (i.e., 14 instructional weeks and a final exam week).
- Half Terms: 35 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam days).

Summer terms (I, II, III, and 10 week) must provide sufficient instructional days to provide the required contact hours.

- Summer I: 15 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam).
- Summer II: 25 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam).
- Summer III: 25 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam).
- Ten-week term: 50 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam).

Winter Session: Minimum of 15 available instructional days (inclusive of culminating project/final exam day).

- The only recognized University holiday for winter session is Christmas Day.
- Winter session courses may meet on Saturday if required to fulfill the minimum required available instructional days.

Academic calendars in the professional schools of dentistry, law and medicine are based on the requirements of their discipline-specific accreditors. Other alternative calendars approved by the University will allow for instruction equivalent to a regular term.

Awarding of Course Credit Hours

The University of Louisville follows uniform standards for determining the amount of credit hours awarded for all academic courses and programs. These standards apply to all instructional sites and methods of instructional delivery. The number of credits per course has historically been determined by face-to-face contact time. The

University's policy is "in general, one credit hour of lecture, discussion, or seminar requires at least 50 contact minutes per week during a regular semester."

The initial credit hour recommendation is made by the faculty in the discipline to ensure consistency with the University's policy and the norms of the discipline.

- **Contact Hours**: One credit hour of lecture, discussion, or seminar requires at least 50 contact minutes per week during a regular full-term semester (as allowed by SACSCOC and consistent with the federal recognition of the Carnegie Unit definition). Courses offered through distance education or other alternate methods must offer opportunities for a comparable amount of interaction with the instructor. Courses offered during a half term, summer term, winter session, or other approved alternative calendar must provide equivalent total contact minutes per credit hour as those required cumulatively in a regular full-term semester course.
- **Out-of-class Work**: Based upon the term in which a course is scheduled and whether the course requires a culminating project and/or final exam, courses must indicate on the syllabus the following expectations of out-of-classroom activity:
    - Courses in the regular full-term semester **with** a culminating project/final exam scheduled during final exam days: Two (2) hours of out-of-class work per credit hour per week or thirty (30) hours of out-of-class work across the semester per credit hour awarded.
    - Courses in the regular full-term semester **without** a culminating project/final exam scheduled during final exam days: Two-and-one-half (2.5) hours of out-of-class work per credit hour per week or thirty-five (35) hours of out-of-class work across the semester per credit hour awarded.
    - Courses scheduled in summer terms, winter sessions, half terms, or other alternative terms: Total out-of-class work must be thirty (30) hours per credit hour awarded.
- The University policy allows for standard instruction, innovation, and the use of instructional technology while adhering to the requirements established by the federal government and the applicable accrediting bodies (See Online Education and Regular and Substantive Interaction for additional details).
- Academic units utilizing Prior Learning Assessments (PLA) and/or Competency-based Education (CBE) must follow their internal academic unit curriculum review processes to determine the equivalencies to contact hours used to

determine credit hours for such instruction. The explanation of equivalency processes used by academic units and/or departments to award credit through PLA and/or CBE must be reviewed and approved by the Office of the Provost prior to implementation. This review ensures SACSCOC standards and policies are followed, and academic programs demonstrate sufficient rigor, quality, and integrity for SACSCOC compliance. The Office of Academic Planning and Accountability (OAPA) will maintain a record of approved equivalency processes.

- The use of zero-credit hour courses is limited to instances when UofL is not providing didactic instruction to students or transcripting equivalent demonstrations of learning, but otherwise needs to record students' participation in essential degree requirements to demonstrate competency, scholarship, or mastery of program learning outcomes. Such examples include, but are not limited to graduate student residency, co-op placements, internship experiences or other forms of experiential learning, exam preparation, and comprehensive examinations. Such courses must be approved through academic units' curriculum review processes and be reviewed and approved by the Office of the Provost prior to implementation.

- Courses in the regular full-term semester **with** a culminating project/final exam scheduled during final exam days: Two (2) hours of out-of-class work per credit hour per week or thirty (30) hours of out-of-class work across the semester per credit hour awarded.
- Courses in the regular full-term semester **without** a culminating project/final exam scheduled during final exam days: Two-and-one-half (2.5) hours of out-of-class work per credit hour per week or thirty-five (35) hours of out-of-class work across the semester per credit hour awarded.
- Courses scheduled in summer terms, winter sessions, half terms, or other alternative terms: Total out-of-class work must be thirty (30) hours per credit hour awarded.

The number of credit hours assigned to each course will be published in program curriculum materials and in the university catalogs. The University's electronic registration and content management systems will also reflect the approved credit hour assignments.

Online Education

The University is authorized by SACSCOC to offer online education (i.e., distance education). The U.S. Department of Education has previously adopted the position that a clock hour program can include clock hours earned through distance education, but only if the institution's or program's accrediting agency permits the institution to use that modality and the institution has sufficient technological resources to monitor a student's academic engagement in 50 to 60 minutes of distance education.

Regular and Substantive Interaction

The 2020 Higher Education Act (HEA) guidelines require that an institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors in online courses. Prior to the student's completion of a course or competency, instructors must provide opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency and monitor the student's academic engagement and success. An instructor is responsible for proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed, on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Application

The credit hour standard for the course and the way that the credit hour standard is achieved is communicated to students as part of the course syllabus or equivalent documentation.

Academic units are responsible for the consistent application of the credit hour, credit hour policy, and for ensuring that a stated credit hour standard is maintained as courses and instructors and mode of instruction or course formats change. All courses are required to have stated learning outcomes or objectives. The student learning outcomes are a feature of the course and are approved when the course is approved. Learning outcomes serve as a basis to determine if the amount of learning is consistent across different formats and modes of instruction. In relation to the credit hour policy, a statement of what students will learn is necessary so that credit is based on a demonstration by the student of learning equivalent to expected outcomes of a period of study corresponding to a time-based credit hour assignment or equivalent academic engagement.

Policy Amendments

Amendments to this policy are subject to approval by the University Provost. The University Provost allows academic units with external accreditation requirements to have the flexibility to make policy adjustments based on best practices in that discipline with prior approval.

Related Information:

Federal Regulations: 34 CFR 600.2 - Definition of Credit Hour

Section 103 of the 2020 Higher Education Act (HEA)

Accreditation Policy: SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement

SACSCOC Competency Based Education Definition

Definitions:

A **Credit Hour**, as defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), "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 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 outlined (sic) 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."

A **Competency** is a clearly defined and measurable statement of the knowledge, skill, and ability a student has acquired in a designated program.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) programs and courses are outcome-based and assess a student's attainment of competencies as the sole means of

determining whether the student earns an academic award or credit hour. Such programs may be organized around traditional course-based units (i.e., credit or clock hours) that students must earn to complete their educational program. For CBE programs and courses, an explanation of the determination of the equivalency of the CBE program or course to the clock hour/credit hour must be provided for SACSCOC review.

Distance Education (per Section 103 of the HEA) is education that uses one or more technologies to deliver education to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is the evaluation of a student's learning earned before college through a portfolio assessment, standardized exam, evaluation of noncollege and noncredit programs, or other means of assessing the competencies attained by an individual through learning that occurred outside of the traditional academic environment. For PLA courses, an explanation of the determination of the equivalency of the PLA course to the clock hour/credit hour must be provided to the OAPA for SACSCOC review. PLA, transfer credits, and all other credits earned outside of direct instruction at UofL cannot comprise more than 75% of an undergraduate degree or 66% of a graduate degree.

Substantive Interaction is defined as engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and including at least two of the following—providing direct instruction; assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework; providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency; facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

Responsibilities:

The Office of the Provost is responsible for oversight and interpretation of this policy.