

4.9

Definition of Credit Hours

The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to Commission policy. (See Commission policy "Credit Hours.")

Judgment

Compliant Non-Compliant Not Applicable

Narrative

Note: Text for all linked documents below can be increased/decreased for ease of reading by pressing your keyboard's Ctrl key while rotating the mouse wheel.

Angelo State University has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to Commission policy.

DEFINITION OF SEMESTER CREDIT HOUR

Criteria for determining credit-hour assignments for graduate and undergraduate course work are defined in ASU OP 04.12, Definition and Calculation of Credit Hours. As indicated in the policy, ASU determines the amount of credit awarded based on the unit of the semester credit hour, which is defined in accordance with rules established by the US Department of Education (34 CFR 600.2, 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l)) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB; 19 TAC §4.6).

In summary, a traditional three-semester-credit-hour course contains 3 contact hours per week delivered over 15 weeks of instruction plus a week for final examinations, thus providing 45 to 48 contact hours, depending on whether there is a final exam. To ensure quality of student learning, every course is also assumed to involve a significant amount of out-of-class student learning and reflection. Courses taught in shortened timeframes are expected to have the same number of contact hours as courses taught in a normal semester. Courses taught online may meet an alternate standard but only if the course has been reviewed and approved through a formal, institutional faculty review process that evaluates the course and its learning outcomes and determines that the course does, in fact, have equivalent learning outcomes to an equivalent, traditionally delivered course (19 TAC §4.6).

DETERMINATION OF THE AMOUNT AND LEVEL OF CREDIT HOURS

As specified in ASU OP 04.12, "Each academic component is responsible for establishing a formal faculty review process to ensure that the amount and level of credit awarded for the component's undergraduate and graduate courses is compatible with sound academic practice in the given field. Where appropriate, the components base their review policies and processes on the standards of discipline-specific professional organizations" (ASU Program Accreditation). These departmental review processes align with

ASU OP 04.05, Approval Process for New Degree Programs, which requires all new programs, new courses, and proposed changes to existing courses and programs to be reviewed and approved by the appropriate faculty committees and administrators. As required by ASU OP 04.11, Distance Education, all courses and programs offered via distance education are also approved through this formal curriculum review process. In accordance with ASU OP 04.05, any proposal for a new course or a change to an existing course must be submitted on a Request for Curriculum Change form, which documents the number of contact hours and credit hours associated with each course, the course description, and a justification for the proposed change.

The Request for Curriculum Change form also specifies which administrators and committees are required to review and approve different types of curricular change. Minor curricular changes—such as changing a prerequisite within a department or modifying a course description—must be approved by the appropriate department head and dean, the registrar, and the provost and vice president for academic affairs. More significant changes—including changes in the number of credit hours for a course—must also be approved by the relevant College Curriculum Committee and, where appropriate, the Teacher Education Council (for changes involving teacher certification programs), the University Core Curriculum Committee (for changes to the core curriculum), and/or the Graduate Council (for changes in graduate curricula). All significant curricular changes are also reviewed by the University Curriculum Committee. Each College Curriculum Committee is composed of the dean of the college, the department chairs, an additional faculty member from each department, and a representative from the library. The University Curriculum Committee is composed of the academic deans and faculty representatives from each college. All proposals for curricular change must also be approved by the provost and vice president for academic affairs. For changes at the program level, including new programs or significant changes to existing programs, the proposal is also reviewed by the ASU president, the Board of Regents of the Texas Tech University System, and the THECB, as outlined in Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1, Academic program approval.

At each stage in the process, reviewers analyze the amount and level of credit to be awarded to ensure alignment with relevant institutional policies and THECB regulations, as outlined above and in Comprehensive Standard 3.4.6, Practices for awarding credit. Reviewers also ensure that any new degree programs or significant changes to existing programs align with the institution's program-length requirements, which are based on a required number of semester credit hours (Core Requirement 2.7.1, Program length and Federal Requirement 4.4, Program length). Additional information about the curriculum review process is provided in Core Requirement 2.7.2, Program content and Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1, Academic program approval.

Attached is an example of minutes from the University Curriculum Committee documenting review and approval of several new courses (University Curriculum Committee minutes March 2, 2012), including courses designed for online delivery (see CRIJ 6091, CRIJ 6371, and CRIJ 6381 on pages 4 and 5). All University Curriculum Committee minutes are posted on one of ASU's intranet drives and will be available to the accreditation review team on site.

CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF CREDIT-HOUR CRITERIA

Evidence that ASU consistently applies its definition in the awarding of credit for courses and programs is provided in the course data published in the institutional catalogs (ASU Undergraduate Catalog 2011–2012 and ASU Graduate Catalog 2011–2012). Information regarding the level and amount of credit to be awarded for each course is reflected in the course number, which is published with the course descriptions. In the four-digit course numbering system, the level of the course is identified by the first digit (undergraduate 1-4, master's 5 and 6, and Doctor of Physical Therapy 7); the assigned number of semester credit hours is identified by the second digit; and the university and/or departmental codes are identified by the last two digits.

For courses that contain lecture, laboratory, and/or clinical components, numbers in parentheses follow the descriptive title of the course to indicate the number of course hours associated with each type of instruction. The first number represents the number of lecture hours each week, and the second represents the number of laboratory hours each week. For example, (3-2) indicates three hours of lecture and two hours of laboratory each week. Where three numbers appear, the last number refers to clinical supervision, as in Nursing 3206 (1-0-3).

ASU also uses the Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS), which has been designed to aid students in the transfer of general academic courses between Texas public colleges and universities throughout the state. ASU courses identified as common have the Common Course Number listed immediately adjacent to the ASU course number (e.g., MATH 1302/MATH 1314).

Courses that have an alpha character (i.e., English 130C and Mathematics 130A and 130B) are developmental (pre-collegiate) courses and may not be used to satisfy degree requirements at ASU.