

# University of St. Thomas Policies

## DEFINITION AND DETERMINATION OF CREDIT HOURS

**Policy Number: A.00.00**

### SCOPE

The following course types are covered by this policy.

- Classroom-based: Scheduled contact occurs primarily face-to-face in a classroom setting.
- Faculty-directed independent learning: Scheduled contact occurs via faculty supervision of students pursuing directed study for credit for such activities as capstone projects, independent work for distinction, or graduate thesis and dissertation requirements.
- Place-or practice-based: Scheduled contact occurs in non-classroom locations such as corporations (internships), schools, or clinics.
- Blended: Scheduled contact is a defined mixture of face-to-face and distance/online interactions.
- Online: Scheduled contact is mediated entirely online.

### PURPOSE

Academic credit provides the basis for measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a student enrolled in traditional classroom settings, laboratories, internships, clinical fieldwork, online and hybrid courses, and other experiential learning. The credit hour value is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement to include contact time, the educational experience, and out-of-class preparation by the student.

### DEFINITION OF A CREDIT HOUR

The faculty of the University of St. Thomas (UST) determine the amount of credit awarded for undergraduate and graduate courses based on the unit of semester credit hour in accordance with federal and state rules.

UST adheres to the Carnegie unit for contact time, which is 750 minutes for each credit awarded: 14 weeks of classroom time totaling 2,100 minutes of instruction plus the 150 minute exam.

The University of St. Thomas (UST) defines a credit hour in accordance with federal regulation 34 CF 600.2 and the Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, Rule 4.6 [\[1\]](#). As outlined by federal regulation:

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 hour of credit, 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.

The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) stipulates that “traditionally delivered three semester credit hour courses should contain 15 weeks of instruction (45 contact hours) plus a week for final examinations so that such a course contains 45 to 48 contact hours *depending on whether there is a final exam.*” Additionally, “courses delivered in shortened semesters are expected to have the same number of contact hours and the same requirement for out-of-class learning as courses taught during a normal semester”

## **DETERMINATION OF THE AMOUNT AND LEVEL OF CREDIT HOURS**

The faculty of each academic department or program review process ensures that the amount and level of credit awarded for undergraduate and graduate courses are compatible with sound academic practice in their particular academic disciplines and their professional judgment applied to the following criteria:

- The student learning outcomes of the course
- The amount and quality of work required by the student learning outcomes for the course
- The sophistication of course content relative to the content of:
  - (a) other courses in the discipline;
  - (b) the same or comparable courses in the discipline at other institutions; and
  - (c) other courses in the curriculum in general
- Any recommendation that may come from the chief academic officer, or an academic department
- Any relevant guidance that may be available from sources such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)

The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving the amount and level of credit recommended by the faculty for all undergraduate courses leading to the baccalaureate degree, whether on-campus, off-campus, or online. The Graduate Council is responsible for reviewing and approving the amount and level of credit recommended by the faculty for all graduate courses.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSIGNMENT OF CREDIT**

For courses offered during a typical 15-week semester, the combination of scheduled contact and independent student effort must be equivalent to at least 3 hours per week per credit hour. The guidelines should be adjusted accordingly a) for shorter courses, b) as directed by external agencies such as specialized accreditors, or c) as warranted by the standards of the discipline.

In a **face-to-face course**, credit hours are generally based on the hours per week the students spend in the classroom or lab, or “contact hours” with the students. A course that meets for three 50-minute periods per week during a full 15-week semester is considered 3 credit hours.

For **online and blended learning courses**, the hours per week is calculated by *Time on Task*. Faculty developing courses in these modalities estimate how long it will take the average student to complete all of the assignments to achieve the student learning outcomes for that week, including reading assignments, videos, quizzes, discussions, and group work.

## **LEVEL OF CREDIT**

The level of credit indicates the progressive complexity of coursework. Courses numbered 1000 contain entry level information for students beginning their academic degree. These are introductory courses that constitute the beginning of college work and do not require previous college experience (no pre-requisites are required). Typically, these courses would be taken by freshmen. Each level above that contains higher levels of disciplinary content. 2000 level courses have a higher level of disciplinary content than 1000-level courses. 3000- and 4000- level courses are typically the final courses students would take in their bachelor degree and the level would be the highest level of learning that should occur for the bachelor degree level.

This pattern of progressively more disciplinary content and complexity continues for Masters and Doctoral level courses, which carry course numbers at the levels of 5000, 6000, 7000, and 8000.

**APPROVED: Dr. Richard Ludwick**

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