

UWM Credit Hour Policy

Rationale:

The US Department of Education has issued a number of new regulations governing higher education institutions. These come broadly under the title of "Program Integrity Rules." One of the primary motivations as stated by the Department is their responsibility to ensure accountability for the federal financial aid distributed annually. While most aspects of compliance with these regulations do not require an institutional policy, one relating to an institutional policy on assigning credit hours to courses and other forms of instruction does require a policy. Currently, we do not have a UWM policy on credit hour assignment. We are now required to have one before the end of this academic year, 2011-12.

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Introduction and Need for a Credit Hour Policy:

In October 2010, the US Department of Education published final regulations on program integrity issues (75 FR 66832) that include a federal definition of a credit hour. Institutions that seek to maintain Title IV (Federal financial aid) eligibility are required to have policies and procedures "for properly implementing the credit hour regulatory requirements..." While the regulations are effective July 1, 2011, the Department of Education has stated that for the 2011-12 financial aid award year, it will consider the institution to be making good-faith effort as long as the institution is in the process of complying with the credit hour provisions. The regional accrediting agency (Higher Learning Commission) is given the responsibility to review the institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hours and applying them to its programs and course work.

History:

UWM has to date been guided by the University of Wisconsin System's "Policy on Academic Year Definition and Assorted Derivatives" (available at: <http://www.wisconsin.edu/acss/acps/acps4.pdf>) in setting expectations for the investment of time per credit awarded. However, application of this policy has not been very detailed and, thus, requires some implementation specifics.

Background:

The new Federal regulation requires each institution to have policies and procedures on credit hour that define it at the institution for all modes of instruction, i.e. face-to-face, online, and blended modes. The institutional policy on credit hour must comply with the Federal credit hour definition, which states:

"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 activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward to the award of credit hours."

Proposed UWM Policy on Definition of Credit Hour:

Study leading to one semester credit represents an investment of time by the average student of not fewer than 48 hours for class contact in lectures, for laboratories, examinations, tutorials and recitations, and for preparation and study; or a demonstration by the student of learning equivalent to that established as the expected product of such a period of study.

Proposed UWM Guidelines for Implementing the Credit Hour Policy:

1. UWM operates on a semester calendar. Instruction is scheduled during 15 or 16-week fall and spring semesters; a 3-week intersession between fall and spring semesters; and summer sessions of varying lengths. UWM also offers courses during fall and spring semesters in sessions shorter than the full semester. The schedule of classes can be viewed at <http://www4.uwm.edu/schedule/>
2. UWM assigns semester credit hours to all forms of instruction, and in accepting transfer credit from other institutions, converts quarter hours to semester credits.

3. The credit hour assignment for a course is made at the time a course is approved by a campus-level faculty governance committee – the Academic Program and Curriculum Committee (APCC) for undergraduate courses, and the Graduate Curriculum Committee (GCC) for graduate courses.
4. All new course proposals, as well as those changing their credit level, should contain specific information on the investment of time by the average student necessary to achieve the learning goals of the course to facilitate review of the assigned credit hours by the appropriate campus-level faculty governance committee
5. Per the revised course syllabus policy (please see <http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/facdocs/1895B.pdf>), the syllabus for a course each time it is offered will provide information on the investment of time by the average student necessary to achieve the learning goals of the course. Such information will be tailored to the length of the session and the format of the course (e.g. f2f, hybrid, online, independent study, etc.) and will detail all applicable items related to class contact, laboratories, examinations, tutorials and recitations, assignments, and preparation and study.
6. Review of credit hour assignments will be included as part of regular program reviews. In the event of an audit either by UWM or by an external agency, the Provost (or designee) must provide appropriate documentation as evidence of such reviews. Per the uniform syllabus policy, each department will maintain a file of current syllabi for all classes. Each syllabus will be placed in the file within two weeks of the first class meeting. The file will be kept for two years. In the event of an audit either by UWM or by an external agency, the department chair (or designee) must provide appropriate copies of such syllabi.