CREDIT HOUR POLICY

USD Credit Hour Policy

As required by the Department of Education (DoE) and WASC Senior Colleges and Universities Commission (WSCUC), our regional accreditors, the University of San Diego has developed its own written credit hour policy and ensures that its academic programs meet these institutional requirements.

The DoE and WSCUC provide equivalent definitions of a credit hour:

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, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

--Federal Regulations, 34CFR 668.8(k) and (l)

--WSCUC, Credit Hour Policy

The University accepts this credit hour definition and further meets three requirements for this policy by our WSCUC accreditors:

1. Adopt a credit hour policy for all academic courses and programs.
2. Assure effectiveness of the periodic review processes for determining accuracy and reliability in the assignment and application of the credit hour policy.
3. Account for variations in the assignment of credit hours to assure that they conform to commonly accepted practices by the standards and principles of academic disciplines responsible for assigning credit.

Recent interpretations from federal and regional authorities indicate greater flexibility should be provided to institutions in determining whether learning standards are met that are not solely based on clock hours. This document provides an articulation of the USD Credit Hour Policy, supporting context from the Carnegie Foundation on the Carnegie unit, the supporting contexts from the DoE and WSCUC, and the changing context for USD’s traditions of credit hour applications.

USD Credit Hour Policy - Adopted by USD Senate on 2/08/2018

Standard Undergraduate Courses

One unit of credit is assigned to one hour (55 minutes) of classroom time with a minimum of two hours of out-of-classroom time spent preparing for class, studying, doing homework or research per week, or an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of approximately 14 weeks in length. Equivalencies should be established for standard undergraduate courses by adhering to the standards within the disciplines that offer such courses. In the case of the undergraduate core curriculum, equivalencies will be monitored through the assessment of core learning outcomes for achievement levels shared by several disciplines.

Standard Graduate Courses

One unit of credit is assigned to one hour (55 minutes) of classroom time with a minimum of two/three hours of out-of-classroom time spent preparing for class, studying, doing homework or research per week, or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of approximately 14 weeks in length. Equivalencies should be established for standard graduate courses by adhering to the standards within the disciplines that offer such courses.

Standard Law Courses

One unit of credit is assigned to one hour (50 minutes) of classroom time with a minimum of three hours of out-of-classroom time spent preparing for class, studying, doing homework or research per week, or an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of approximately 14 weeks in length. Equivalencies should be established for standard law courses by adhering to the standards within the legal discipline that offer such courses.

Other Academic Activities (e.g. labs, internships, studio, hybrid, or online) One unit of credit is assigned to three hours of student work per week throughout one semester of approximately 14 weeks in length or approximately 40 hours of work, or an established equivalency to be determined by the department offering the course that reasonably approximates this same amount of work.

Periodic Review of Standard Courses and Other Academic Activities

As stated above, departments will establish and assess credit hours and their reasonable equivalencies for their curriculum. The Core Curriculum Committee will be accountable for the core curriculum. For quality assurance, the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives will periodically review departmental or core curricular assessments for student workload in standard courses and other academic activities.

Carnegie Foundation Context

In January 2015, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued a report entitled, The Carnegie Unit: A Century-old Standard in a Changing Education Landscape. In this report, the authors acknowledged that the clock-hour “in-seat” time as the defining feature of the standard (not labs, internships, etc.) credit hour is a very weak measure of student learning. Critics of the standard unit of time argue that program requirements should be based on standards met for student learning, rather than “seat-time” requirements. Current curricular development proponents recognize the need for “greater transparency and flexible educational designs,” and that many of the most innovative represent direct challenges to the Carnegie Unit.

The authors of The Carnegie Unit make the following claims: 1) the Carnegie Unit in terms of seat-time was never intended as a standard measure of student learning; 2) studies underway must empirically test variability in delivery and curricular structure, and outcomes-based models vs in-seat time; 3) the DoE and regional accreditors have already begun permitting flexible interpretations of the in-seat time “equivalents.” University of San Diego’s credit hour policy should reflect greater flexibility in accepting curricular variation, recognizing that such variations may happen for a variety of reasons, including disciplinary differences, innovative curricular practices, and changing delivery methods. However, USD should strive to establish clarity regarding equivalencies through assessment and other evidence-based processes.

Department of Education (DoE) Context

On October 29, 2010, the Department of Education issued new federal regulations regarding the definition and assignment of credit hours (ref. 75 FR 66832). Regulatory commissions use credit hours to determine the eligibility of the institution and its educational programs for participation in federal programs.

Following the issuance of new regulations, March 18, 2011, the DoE circulated a memo, dated March 18, 2011, from the Office of Postsecondary Education.
whose purpose was to provide “guidance to institutions and accrediting agencies regarding a credit hour as defined in the final [2010] regulations.” The issuance of new regulations was the DoE’s response to the increasing call for flexibility in interpreting the credit hour.

According to the DoE, a credit hour is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates some minimum amount of student work reflective of the amount of work expected in a Carnegie unit (one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester).

The federal credit-hour definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work (there is no requirement that a 3-semester hour course meet 3 hours per week during a semester). Indeed, the DoE states, “We recognize that complex institutions with multiple degree levels may not have rigidly uniform policies and procedures related to the credit hour across a variety of disciplines, degree levels, teaching/learning formats, and delivery modes.” However, all institutions are expected to evaluate credit hour equivalencies to ensure consistency in the integrity and quality of its degree programs in line with commonly accepted practice in higher education.

WSCUC (WASC) Context

In response to the DoE’s issuance of federal regulations on the credit hour and its interpretation, USD’s regional accrediting agency, WSCUC (WASC) adopted its own federal credit hour policy on September 2, 2011. It states that a credit hour is the amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement as the means of establishing institutional equivalencies. These should reasonably approximate:

1. One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter-hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time.
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 WSCUC reaccreditation visitation team reviewed USD’s credit hour policy and its associated elements prior to their visit Feb. 29-March 2, 2012. These elements included:

1. USD’s policy on the credit hour
2. An explanation of USD’s process for periodic review of the application of this policy, to assure that credit hour assignments are accurate and reliable (for example, program review, process for new course approval, periodic audits)
3. A list of the kinds of courses that are offered that do not require the standard amount of in-class seat time designated in the WASC policy (for example, online and hybrid courses, laboratory courses, studio work, clinical work, independent study, and internship courses)
4. A course schedule showing the weeks, hours and days when courses meet.
5. Three sample course syllabi (or the equivalent) for each kind of course that does not meet for the standard amount of in-class seat time required in the policy.

The team submitted its recommendations for reaccreditation, including review of federal policy regulations, and the Commission voted to “reaffirm the accreditation of the University of San Diego” as stated in its formal response.

University of San Diego: Traditional Context for Credit Hour

The University of San Diego has seven academic divisions: the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Law, the Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering, the School of Business, the School of Leadership and Education Sciences, the Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science, and the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. USD offers 41 bachelor's degree programs, 28 master's degrees programs, 3 law degree programs, and 3 doctoral degree programs (in nursing and leadership studies). In addition, the Division of Professional and Continuing Education offers several master’s programs in conjunction with the other graduate academic units, and hosts a variety of professional programs and services that extend the University's reach to the San Diego business community, international corporations, and educators in California and beyond. Continuing Education programs include a variety of workshops, seminars, in-house training, English-language services, graduate level extension classes and certifications and non-degree credit classes.

USD operates on a semester system, with additional sessions offered between semesters (Interession) and during the summer.

Traditionally, standard courses offered during the semester in undergraduate and graduate degree programs (except Law) use class contact hours that have been designed around the (Carnegie like) standard for a 3-unit class over a 15-week semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days of the week</th>
<th>Days per semester</th>
<th>Minutes/day</th>
<th>Total minutes per semester</th>
<th>Total hours per semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MWF</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTh</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As implemented at USD, 3-unit classes meet for more time during each class session but for one less week over the semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days of the week</th>
<th>Days per semester</th>
<th>Minutes/day</th>
<th>Total minutes per semester</th>
<th>Total hours per semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MWF</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2255</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2240</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>160*</td>
<td>2240</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 10-minute break not included

This distribution translates to 12.5 contact hours over the semester for a 1-unit class meeting MWF. The Law School operates under a different calendar and is governed by ABA guidelines of 700 minutes of class-time per credit hour (or 50 minutes per week for 14 weeks). Three unit classes meet twice a week for 75 minutes each over a 14-week semester (2100=75x2x14). The Law School adheres to the national standard instituting out-of-class hours is 3 hours for every 1 hour of class in the first year of law study and after that (years 2 &3) 2 to 1.

Traditional Assignments for Other Academic Activities (generally follow 1 unit for 3 hours a week or 39-42 hours per semester)

For classes listed below, traditional credit hour assignments are given with the understanding that if classes do not adhere to traditional standards, equivalencies must be established through assessment of student achievement to justify the “reasonable approximation” rule.

Laboratory Work

Typically, one unit of credit has been assigned for 2 hours and fifty minutes or more of laboratory work per week throughout one semester.

Team-Taught Honors or Living Learning Community (LLC) Honors Courses
One unit of credit has been assigned to 55 minutes of classroom time per week with a minimum of three hours of out-of-classroom time spent studying and doing homework or research per week throughout one semester (Many Honors Courses meet within the schedule for 3-unit classes but award 4 units of credit. In order to comply then the expectation for out-of-class time must be raised from 2 units to 3 units for every hour in class).

Internship Courses
One unit of credit has been assigned to at least 40 hours of internship work throughout the course of one semester. (Source: anthropology (3 hours a week for approximately 13 weeks) communication (40), history (3 units is 9 hours per week for 13.5 weeks and involves 120 hours of work) sociology (40), math and cs (40), psychology (40), MARS (45), SBA UG 96 for 3-units plus 3 class meetings, SBA grad 120 units plus two class meetings).

Studio Work
One unit of credit has been assigned to 123.33 minutes per week throughout the semester. (Source Visual Arts: 3 hours and 5 minutes 2-times per week for 3-units of credit)

Southeast San Diego Tutoring Project
One unit of credit has been assigned for tutoring for 3 hours per week throughout one semester (ENGL 298 and 498).

Clinical Nursing Work
One unit of credit has been assigned for practicing in a clinic for 3 hours per week throughout the semester (which is 16 weeks according to regulations by the Board of Registered Nursing of California).

Independent Study Courses
One unit of credit has been assigned to the equivalent amount of work to 55 minutes of classroom time per week with a minimum of two hours of out-of-classroom time studying and doing homework or research per week throughout one semester.

Independent study courses must be approved by the faculty supervisor, the department chair and the dean.

LLC Scholastic Assistants
One unit of credit has been assigned to 20 to 25 hours of work during the fall semester plus 15 hours of pre-Torero Days training.

Practica
One unit of credit...From Communication Studies VISTA and USDtv, standard practices are unclear.

Online and Hybrid Courses
One unit of credit has been assigned at least 12.5 hours of contact time either through direct classroom discussion or through online video presentations, quizzes, and discussions (Source MSGL 2-unit course). So if the student spends 2.2 hours out-of-class for each contact hour this would amount to 40 hours of work over the term of the course.