



State University of New York

Memorandum to all  
X Credit/Contact Hours

## Memorandum to Presidents

Date: June 30, 1976

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From: Office of the Vice Chancellor for  
Academic Programs

Subject: Credit/Contact Hour Relationship

The State University of New York, like most of American higher education, has adopted a variant of the traditional "Carnegie Unit" as a measure of academic credit. This unit is known in the State University by the familiar term, "semester credit hour," and is the primary academic measure by which progress toward a degree is gauged. It is recognized that such a unit measures only a part, albeit a major part, of a composite learning experience based upon formally structured and informal interactions among faculty and students.

Over the past several years, for academic purposes, some faculties have allowed modifications of the classical Carnegie definition of a semester credit hour, which has stipulated that one semester credit hour be awarded for fifteen sessions of 50 minutes duration in classroom lecture-recitation each requiring two hours of outside preparation by the student. Today there are many types of educational experiences with which credit hour assignment may properly be associated.

In the interest of accurate academic measurement and cross-campus comparability, the following definitions and practices apply in controlling the relationship between contact and credit hours. These definitions constitute a formalization of current and historic policy in order to ensure consistency throughout the State University of New York. Courses may be composed of any combination of elements described, as for example, a lecture course which also has required laboratory periods or a lecture course having an additional requirement for supervised independent study or tutorial activity.

A semester credit hour is normally granted for satisfactory completion of one 50-minute session of classroom instruction per week for a semester of not less than fifteen weeks. This basic measure may be adjusted proportionately to reflect modified academic calendars and formats of study. Semester credit hours are granted for various types of instruction as follows:

1. Lecture, seminar, quiz, discussion, recitation.

A semester credit hour is an academic unit earned for fifteen 50-minute sessions of classroom instruction with a normal expectation of two hours of outside study for each class session. Typically, a three semester credit hour course meets three 50-minute sessions per week for fifteen weeks for a total of 45 sessions.

2. Activity supervised as a group.

(Laboratory, field trip, practicum, workshop, group studio).

A semester credit hour is awarded for the equivalent of fifteen periods of such activity, where each activity period is 150 minutes or more in duration with little or no outside preparation expected. Forty-five 50-minute sessions of such activity would also normally earn one semester credit hour. Where such activity involves substantial outside preparation by the student, the equivalent of fifteen periods of 100 minutes duration each will earn one semester credit hour.

3. Supervised individual activity.

(Independent study, individual studio, tutorial).

- (a) One credit for independent study (defined as study given initial guidance, criticism, review and final evaluation of student performance by a faculty member) will be awarded for the equivalent of forty-five 50-minute sessions of student academic activity.
- (b) Credit for tutorial study (defined as study which is given initial faculty guidance followed by repeated, regularly scheduled individual student conferences with a faculty member, and periodic as well as final evaluation of student performance) will be awarded on the basis of one semester hour credit for each equivalent of fifteen contact hours of regularly scheduled instructional sessions.

4. Full-time Independent Study.

(Student teaching, practicum).

If a student's academic activity is essentially full time (as in student teaching), one semester credit hour may be awarded for each week of work.

5. Experiential Learning.

At its discretion an institution may award credit hours for learning acquired outside the institution which is an integral part of a program of study.

When life or work experience is to be credited as a concurrent portion of an academic program design, as in an internship, one semester credit hour will be awarded for each 40-45 clock-hour week of supervised academic activity that provides the learning considered necessary to program study.

6. Credit by Examination.

At its discretion an institution may award semester hour credits for mastery demonstrated through credit by examination. When such credit by examination is allowed, it may be used to satisfy degree requirements or to reduce the total number of remaining hours required for a degree.

7. Short Sessions.

Credit hours may be earned in short sessions (summer sessions, intersessions, etc.) proportionately to those earned for the same activity during a regular term of the institution, normally at no more than one credit per week of full-time study.

8. Appeal and Review.

Institutions may present educational justification for departures from these policy provisions to this office, which will be responsible for their interpretation. Credit hours to be earned in approved overseas academic programs will continue to be considered on an individual basis following established procedures. Other special arrangements suggested by campuses will be considered on an individual basis by this office.

  
Bruce Dearing

cc: Chancellor Boyer

This memorandum addressed to:  
Presidents, State-operated Colleges  
Deans, Statutory Colleges  
Presidents, Community Colleges

Copies for information only to:  
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