

PALO ALTO COLLEGE COLLEGE PROCEDURES

Procedure Number:	I 24.0
Procedure Title:	Definition of Credit Hour
Relevant Board/SACSCOC Policy:	SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement
Originating Unit:	Vice President for Academic Success
Maintenance Unit:	Vice President for Academic Success

- I. Purpose: To ensure that Palo Alto College's assignment of course credit hours adheres to the requirements of credit hours as outlined by federal and SACSCOC guidelines.
- II. Procedure statement: Palo Alto College adheres to the SACSCOC policy for credit hours and the associated requirements of the federal definition of credit hours. This procedure outlines the college's assignment of credit hours and its adherence to policy and federal definition.

- A. SACSCOC policy on credit hours:

The SACSCOC *Credit Hours* policy statement provides the following information regarding the assignment of credit hours, the Federal Definition of Credit Hour, and the federal guidelines for flexibility in the assignment of credit hours. (For this policy and the associated federal definition/guidelines refer to current *Credit Hours* policy posted on the [SACSCOC website](#)):

Academic credit has provided the basis for measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled not only in traditional classroom settings but also laboratories, studios, internships and other experiential learning, and distance and correspondence education. Students, institutions, employers, and others rely on the common currency of academic credit to support a wide range of activities, including the transfer of students from one institution to another. For several decades, the federal government has relied on credits as a measure of student academic engagement as a basis of awarding financial aid.

- B. Federal Definition of the Credit Hour:

For the purposes of the application of the SACSCOC policy and in accord with federal regulations, 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

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours 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 outlined in item 1 above 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 Guidelines for Flexibility in Interpretation:

An institution is responsible for determining the credit hours awarded for coursework in its programs in accordance with the definition of a credit hour for Federal program purposes. The definition does provide some flexibility for institutions in determining the appropriate amount of credit hours for student coursework.

- The institution determines the amount of credit for student work.
- A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a *Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education.
- The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.
- The definition does not dictate particular amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work.
- In determining the amount of work the institution's learning outcomes will entail, the institution may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.
- To the extent an institution believes that complying with the Federal definition of a credit hour would not be appropriate for academic and other institutional needs, it may adopt a separate measure for those purposes.

- Credits may be awarded on the basis of documentation of the amount of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified amount of academically engaged time, or on the basis of documented student learning calibrated to that amount of academically engaged time for a typical student.

The intent of the above flexibility as provided by Federal guidance is to recognize the differences across institutions, fields of study, types of coursework, and delivery methods, while providing a consistent measure of student work for purposes of Federal programs.

*Carnegie unit: The Carnegie unit was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is the basis for awarding academic credit that is dependent upon how much time students spent in direct contact with a classroom teacher. The standard Carnegie unit is defined as 120 hours of contact time with an instructor.

C. Palo Alto College Definition and Procedure for Assigning Credit Hours:

As a public community college authorized by the state of Texas, all courses offered by Palo Alto College that receive state funding must be listed in and approved by either the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Academic Course Guide Manual ([ACGM](#)) or the THECB Workforce Education Course Manual ([WECM](#)). These manuals assign the semester credit hours and allowable contact hours for all courses, including lectures, labs, clinicals, internships, practica, and cooperative education, and adhere to SACSCOC policy and the federal definition of credit hour in this assignment. Each course offered by the college is listed in one of these manuals and adheres to the contact hour and the credit hour assignments.

PAC ensures that all courses offered by the college require an amount of student work that conforms to the Federal Definition of Credit Hour and remains within the federal guidelines for flexibility in the interpretation of this definition.

D. Palo Alto College Adherence to the Federal Definition and Associated Guidelines:

1. For all on-site, face-to-face courses offered by the college during a 16-week fall or spring term, for each credit hour assigned to the course, the class meets for not less than one contact hour of direct faculty instruction each week for 15 weeks, requires also two hours for a final

exam or other assessment activity during the sixteenth week, and requires at least two hours of out-of-class student work each week. Contact hours and student work outside of class specifically address the learning outcomes for the course.

2. For on-site, face-to-face courses offered by the institution during terms of different length, the number of contact hours and hours of required student work outside of class remains the same as that required for the same course offered during the 16-week term. The same learning outcomes are addressed during those required hours.
3. For courses delivered through online, hybrid, and other modes of instruction, faculty require of each student the quantity of academically engaged time that is reasonably equivalent to the contact hour and outside student work requirements of the same course delivered onsite and face-to-face. This work addresses the same learning outcomes, at the same depth and rigor of coverage, as the onsite course.

E. Course Numbers

All credit-bearing courses offered by the college are listed in the college catalog and are identified by a discipline rubric and a four-digit number. The first digit identifies the course level (developmental, freshman, or sophomore), the second digit identifies the semester credit hours awarded, and the last two digits uniquely identify the course within that discipline. As an example, MATH 1314 College Algebra. The “1” in the number 1314 identifies the course as freshman level, the “3” identifies the three semester credit hours assigned to the course, and the “14” uniquely identifies this math course as College Algebra.

Attachments:

Date Created:

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Approved:

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