



## Credit Hour

### Context and Assumptions

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) defines a credit hour as “a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements for a course taken at an educational institution. At its most basic, a credit hour is a proxy measure of a quantity of student learning.” The credit hour as defined by the Carnegie unit has been used in higher education to establish a standard measure of faculty workloads, costs of instruction, and rates of educational efficiencies as well as a measure of student work for transfer students.

The Carnegie Unit equates one semester unit of undergraduate credit with 15 clock hours (one hour a week for a 15 week semester) of face-to-face instruction plus up to two hours of outside class learning each week of the 15 week semester (or a total of up to 30 clock hours of engaged learning time). Thus a student in a 3 unit course would typically spend up to 135 clock hours over the course of the semester engaged in learning for the course. At the graduate level, 3 clock hours of outside engagement is more typical, thus a graduate student taking a 3 unit course could be expected to spend as much as 180 clock hours of engaged learning time on coursework.

The U.S. Department of Education statement providing [guidance to institutions and accrediting agencies regarding a credit hour](#) defines a credit hour for Federal purposes as “a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor, and time requirements for course taken at an educational institution. At its most basic, a credit hour is a proxy measure of a quantity of student learning.” This publication recognizes the Carnegie unit as a longstanding standard in higher education.

### CBU Definition of a Credit Hour

The CBU definition of a credit hour falls within the guidelines set to by Carnegie and the Department of Education. CBU defines an **undergraduate** credit hour as 37.5-45 hours of engaged learning time over the course of a semester. Therefore, the typical 3-unit undergraduate course will have the equivalent of 112.5- 135 clock hours of engaged time over the course of the semester. This engaged learning time may be in face-to-face meetings, in a

prescribed lab or internship/practicum setting, in synchronous or asynchronous online learning activities, or in independent reading, research, or writing activities.

Although the DOE does not differentiate between graduate and undergraduate education, the more specific demands of various graduate programs may call for more latitude in defining the amount of engaged time required for a given program. CBU defines a **graduate** credit hour as 45-60 hours of engaged learning time in a semester. Therefore, the typical 3-unit graduate course will have the equivalent of 135-180 clock hours of engaged time over the course of the term. This engaged learning time may be in face-to-face meetings, in a prescribed lab or internship/practicum setting, in synchronous or asynchronous online learning activities, or in independent reading, research, or writing activities.