Policy on Credit Hours

Credit hour policy – A new federal requirement requires that institutions have policies in place for determining the credit hours of the courses they offer. While BOR policy 3.4.1 specifies 750 instructional minutes for each semester credit hour, this policy is not complete enough to satisfy the new requirements. Moreover, the policy is only appropriate for traditional lecture-based courses.

Proposed Policy 133: Determination of Credit Hours for Courses

Lecture-based courses:

Traditional lecture-based courses that meet only in a face-to-face format must meet for 750 minutes for each semester credit hour, whether offered in a full-semester or half-semester format. In addition, it is expected that students will spend two hours in out-of-class preparation for every hour spent in class. Therefore, a one-credit-hour course must require a minimum of 750 class meeting minutes and 1500 out-of-class preparation minutes. It is expected that all courses will require a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes per semester hour.

When lecture-based courses are offered in hybrid or fully online format, 2250 engaged minutes are still required and expected for each lecture-hour of credit. Since it is difficult to measure engaged minutes for courses offered in hybrid or online formats, course content and learning outcomes should be matched to those established in face-to-face sections of the same courses.

Laboratory courses:

Standard academic practice specifies that a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes must be required for each semester credit hour. In the case of laboratory courses, most of these engaged minutes will be spent in the actual execution of the laboratory exercises. Most laboratory courses meet for approximately three hours a week for a one-credit course. Students may also be expected to spend out-of-class time preparing for laboratory exercises. In all cases, class time plus expected out-of-class preparation time must add up to a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes per semester credit hour for the specified course.

Courses that mix activity/laboratory/clinical and lecture components:

Courses that mix lecture components with laboratory or clinical components pose challenges in making the correct credit hour determination. The standard remains that a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes must be required for each semester credit hour. There are four components in this type of course:

Lecture component
Out-of-class preparation for the lecture component
Activity/laboratory/clinical component
Out-of-class preparation for the activity/laboratory/clinical component

In general, it is appropriate to expect that students will spend at least two hours in out-of-class preparation for every one hour spent in the lecture component of the class.

The activity/laboratory/clinical component may exist with or without an expectation of out-of-class preparation. When out-of-class preparation is expected for the activity/laboratory/clinical component of a course, the stated expectation should not exceed one hour of out-of-class preparation for each hour spent in the activity/laboratory/clinical component unless special permission is granted by the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

In determining whether the requirement for a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes per semester hour of credit has been met, minutes expected to be spent in class lectures, out-of-class preparation for the lecture component, the activity/laboratory/clinical component, and preparation for the activity/laboratory/clinical component should be added together.

Ensuring compliance with the credit hour policy:

All courses will be listed in a GPC Credit Hour Manual. This manual will specify the expected class minutes and out-of-class preparation minutes for every course offered at GPC. In courses that mix activity/laboratory/clinical and lecture components, minutes expected for lecture, out-of-class preparation for lecture, the activity/laboratory/clinical component of the course, and preparation for the activity/laboratory/clinical component of the course will be specified.

In classes with online components, course content and learning outcomes must be comparable to those expected when the course is taught in a traditional or face-to-face format to ensure that these courses are comparable in terms of appropriateness of credits awarded for the course.

Scheduling to ensure compliance with the credit hour policy:

In creating a class schedule, it is important that college-developed scheduling codes be used. These codes have been carefully developed to ensure that the number of class minutes for lecture- and laboratory-based courses have been accounted for.

Courses that mix activity/laboratory/clinical and lecture components must specify, in the course notes in the schedule of classes, the expectations for hours to be spent in class, in activity/laboratory/clinical components, and in preparation for both of these. These expectations should be aligned with the requirements stated in the GPC Credit Hour Manual. Any deviations from the formulas stated in the manual must be approved in writing by the Vice President of Academic
Affairs, and must still account for the expectation that a minimum of 2250 engaged minutes will be required for every semester hour of credit assigned to the course.

In cases of courses with variable credits, the credits for each instance of the course must be specified in the schedule of classes. The course notes (in the schedule of classes) must specify, as appropriate to the course, expectations for hours to be spent in class, in activity/laboratory/clinical components, and in preparation for both of these. The Vice President of Academic Affairs must approve the credit to be awarded and the distribution of engaged minutes every time a variable-credit course is offered.