

College Credit Hour Policy

This policy documents the College's adherence to federal, state and university guidelines for the application of credit hours to undergraduate and graduate courses. It explains the history of the credit hour system within the College (and its precursors) and the current break-down of in-class contact hours and out-of-classroom work associated with various types of courses.

History of the College Course System and Credit Hours:

The credit hour policy for the College has been guided by basic principles established over 50 years ago. The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences approved the transition to a four-course system from the previous five-course system in January 1961, with final guidelines on the new system distributed later that year. The rationale for the system was that fewer courses per semester allowed students to develop a deeper understanding of course material, including working independently to increase their knowledge in these topics. The Faculty approved the following statement outlining the approved approach for allocating credit hours to courses.

“The ordinary unit of undergraduate instruction in the College is the course, which is defined as consisting of a coherent body of academic material requiring approximately 25% of the working time of the student during one term. Lecture and discussion courses normally meet for three fifty-minute or two seventy-five minute periods each week **with the equivalent of a fourth period being made up of enriched independent study, lecture, or discussion**. Laboratory courses ordinarily involve four fifty-minute class periods or their equivalent in laboratory sessions each week. For purposes of recording, computing grade averages, and reporting to the State Education Department, each course shall normally be assigned four hours of credit. This definition shall ordinarily apply to all courses in the College numbered between 100 and 399” (January 20, 1961, emphasis added).

In 1968, the New York State Education Department formally registered all majors within the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Engineering and Applied Science under this new system. As such, the College expected students to enroll in four, four-credit classes, or 16 credits total, per semester.

Course credit has evolved in the intervening period due to changes in the curriculum and the need for specialized courses. The standard course remains four credit hours, but the College has also introduced one- and two-credit courses in a variety of disciplines. These latter courses typically focus on applied skills (music, dance, student leadership opportunities) or relate to technical laboratory or workshop activities (CAD, micro-electric devices). In recent years, five- and six-credit courses have been also added to the curriculum in certain disciplines (chemistry, modern and classical languages). The increased credit hours for these courses reflect the additional student effort (inside and outside class) necessary for students to master this material.

Current Policy:

The College continues to operate on a four-credit per course system as outlined above, with credit hours allocated based on the University credit hour policy. The University credit hour policy follows United States Department of Education and New York State Education Department policies regarding credit hours (see Appendix B). These policies delineate the number of contacts hours and supplementary work required per credit hour.

Combined, these policies mandate that each credit hour consists of one hour of faculty-led instruction and two hours of out-of-class supplementary work per week throughout the semester. In the case of a two-credit course, for example, the course would have two hours of faculty-led instruction and four hours of supplementary work (readings, assignments, projects) every week, for six hours total each week. A four-credit course would double these amounts, with four hours of faculty-instruction and eight hours of supplementary work, for eight hours total. (Note that an “hour” of classroom-based instruction is defined as 50 minutes to allow for transit time between classes.)

In addition, these policies allow for “equivalent” academic activities to replace faculty-led instructional time. An equivalent academic activity can include formally defined activities such as recitations, studios and laboratory sessions; however, it may also include additional independent academic work completed outside of class in less structured settings. In this case, the faculty-led instructional time, equivalent instructional time and supplementary work must equal the hours per week associated with the course credit hours.

Supplementary student work refers to standard “homework” activities for students, which might include reading assignment, papers or essays, problem sets, group-work assignments, etc.

Courses within the College utilize a combination of faculty-led instruction, equivalent academic activities, and supplementary student work to meet the credit hour policy. The chart below outlines the typical distribution instructional and supplementary work for courses by credit hour.

Course Credit Hours	Faculty-led instructional time per week*	Equivalent activities time per week	Type of Activity	Supplementary Student Work per week	Average Total Course Work per week
One Credit	50 minutes	---	---	120 minutes	170 minutes
Two Credit	100 minutes	---	---	240 minutes	340 minutes
Four Credit	150 minutes	50 minutes	Recitation or out-of-class independent activities (see below)	480 minutes	680 minutes
Four Credit	150 minutes	50 minutes [#]	Lab; Lab/Lecture; Workshop	480 minutes [#]	680 minutes
Five Credit	150 minutes	100 minutes [#]	Lab; Lab/Lecture; Workshop	600 minutes [#]	850 minutes
Six Credit	300 minutes	---	---	720 minutes	1020 minutes

* For most courses, this will consist of a series of lectures provided in the classroom. These are based on a 50-minute “hour” as defined in the credit-hour policy.

[#] For laboratory-based courses, equivalent activities and out-of-class student work will be met in part through instructional time and/or independent work in the lab.

Credit Hour Policy on Course Syllabi:

All College course syllabi should reference how the course meets the College credit hour policy through regularly scheduled course sessions with the instructor (e.g. lectures, discussions). The syllabus should note the total number of hours of in-class instructional time per week during the semester.

Courses that meet less than the standard expected classroom instructional time for their number of credits should explain how students meet this time through regularly scheduled recitations or out-of-class independent activities. For example, the syllabus for a four-credit course that meets for 150 minutes (e.g. three 50-minute sessions or two 75-minute sessions) rather than 200 minutes should explain that the course follows the College credit hour policy and that students are expected to engage in recitations, independent study, or other activities for the difference in instructional time (50 minutes per week). The following is recommended syllabus language for such courses:

“This course follows the College credit hour policy for [*two/three/four*]-credit courses. This course meets [*once/twice/three times*] weekly for [*# of hours*] academic hours per week. The course also includes [*recitations/labs/workshops/independent out-of-class assignments*] for [*# of hours*] academic hours per week.”

For courses that require independent out-of-class assignments, the syllabus language below should be added:

“In this course, students will complete [*independent study/group activities*] using readings and other course materials. These activities include [*generally specify activities and/or assignments to be completed over the course of the semester*].”

Instructors using this language may draw on the examples below to specify how students will meet the requirement for additional out-of-class independent activities.

Examples of Independent Activities and/or Assignments Expected of Students Outside of Class:

- Additional non-class time with instructor and/or teaching assistants (e.g. required office hours)
- Student-led discussion groups or workshops
- Team-based work on a project or assignments
- Defined reading assignments (e.g. large and/or difficult novel, special set of academic papers)
- Community activities (e.g. participant observation with community group, participation in an activity, interviewing staff or researching a topic)
- Laboratory work (e.g. prep for experiment, lab notes or experiment write-up)
- Special events (preparation for and participation in poster sessions, presentations, colloquia, panel discussions, etc.)
- Special assignments (e.g. thesis or capstone project, student-led instruction in the class)

These activities should not be considered “additional” or “extra” activities within the course; instead, the goal is to select relatively discrete, *existing* activities (or sets of activities) that describe what students should focus their effort on as part of this additional instructional time.

If upon review, an instructor feel that the course does not have enough material to justify the assigned credit hours, the instructor should undertake a more thorough evaluation of the course. This review should include consultation with the academic department and the Associate Dean of the College, as needed, to ensure that credit hours and course materials are adjusted appropriately.

Examples:

Professor X teaches a 4-credit course on MWF 9-9:50. Her in-class instruction totals 3 academic hours (of 50 minutes each). Her course also has a recitation, which meets once a week for 50 minutes. This satisfies the credit hour policy as a 4-credit course by providing 3 hours of in-class instruction per week and an additional hour of equivalent instruction per week. Additionally, the students are assumed to complete 8 hours of supplementary work per week for this course. (3 in-class hours + 1 hour of recitation + 8 hours of supplementary assignments = 12 hours/week)

Professor X would add to her syllabus: "This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets three times weekly for three academic hours per week. The course also includes a recitation for one academic hour per week."

Professor Y teaches a 4-credit course on TR 11:05-12:20. His in-class instruction totals 3 academic hours (of 50 minutes each). His course does not have a lab, recitation or workshop. However, the course has a set of group projects that require students to meet outside of class for an additional hour of work per week. This satisfies the credit hour policy as a 4-credit course by providing 3 hours of in-class instruction per week and an additional hour of equivalent instruction through this independent out-of-class assignment per week. Additionally, the students are also assumed to complete an additional 8 hours of supplementary work per week. (3 in-class hours + 1 hour of independent out-of-class assignments + 8 hours of supplementary assignments = 12 hours/week)

Professor X would add to his syllabus: "This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets two times weekly for three academic hours per week. The course also includes independent out-of-class assignments for an average of one academic hour per week. In this course, students will complete the group activities using readings and other class materials. These activities include [*generally specify activities, e.g. development of a survey instrument to determine if there are changing attitudes towards climate change among students from their first to final year in the College.*]

Professor Z teaches a 4-credit course on MWF 11:50-12:40. Her in-class instruction totals 3 academic hours (of 50 minutes each). Her course also has a lab that meets M 4:50-7:30 and a workshop that meets M 7:40-10:20. These meeting times satisfy the credit hour policy as a 4-credit course by providing 3 hours of in-class instruction per week and equivalent instruction of over 5-1/3 hours per week. Students would be expected to complete an additional 3-2/3 hours per week for this course. (3 in-class hours + 5-1/3 hours of lab and workshop + 3-2/3 hours of supplementary assignments = 12 hours/week)

Professor Z would add to her syllabus: “This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets three times weekly for three academic hours per week. The course also includes labs and workshops that meet for approximately five academic hours per week.”

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Appendix A: Full Text of Credit Hour Policy (1961)

The ordinary unit of undergraduate instruction in the College is the course, which is defined as consisting of a coherent body of academic material requiring approximately 25% of the working time of the student during one term. Lecture and discussion courses normally meet for three fifty-minute or two seventy-five minute periods each week with the equivalent of a fourth period being made up of enriched independent study, lecture, or discussion. Laboratory courses ordinarily involve four fifty-minute class periods or their equivalent in laboratory sessions each week. For purposes of recording, computing grade averages, and reporting to the State Education Department, each course shall normally be assigned four hours of credit. This definition shall ordinarily apply to all courses in the College numbered between 100 and 399.

1. Partial-credit courses, with the exceptions noted below, may be used to meet degree requirements. These two-credit courses may last for one-half of a semester, or take one-half of the usual course time but last the entire semester. (Partial courses may also carry one credit hour.)
2. Students not majoring in Music shall be permitted to submit for degree credit no more than 16 credits of Applied Music, and no more than 8 credits of vocal or instrumental ensemble on the River Campus. All courses listed in the Undergraduate Bulletin as being taught at the Eastman School shall be awarded credit according to the system used at the Eastman School of Music.
3. Work in Naval Science courses may be credited toward the fulfillment of the requirements of the B.A. or B.S. degree to the maximum extent of five academic courses.
4. A student who passes a course by independent study without registering for it, and who passes an examination in that course, may receive degree credit for it upon petition to the Administrative Committee.
5. No more than three courses in a major or two courses in a minor may be used toward a separate major or minor. Allied field courses used to fulfill the requirements of the major are included in the set of courses subject to this restriction. However, prerequisite courses required for the major and non-departmental ancillary course requirements (such as chemistry for biology majors) are not subject to this restriction.