**Standards for Credit Hour Calculations**

Credit hour calculations are governed by the standards in Title 5, §§ 55002(a)(2)(B), 55002(b)(2)(B) and 55002.5, which collectively provide the definitions and parameters for credit hour calculations for most courses. Title 5, §§ 55002(a)(2)(B)-(b)(2)(B) grant district governing boards the authority to specify the relationship between units of credit and hours of classroom instruction, state the minimum weekly hours for one unit of credit, and provide for prorating hours of in-class to outside-of-class work appropriate to term length and instructional format. The calculation of units of credit for cooperative work experience programs is established in Title 5, § 55256.5.

**Standard Formula**

The standard formula for credit hour calculations applies to the majority of courses and course types and is derived from Title 5, § 55002.5. Colleges are required to define one unit of credit as a minimum of 48 total hours of student work, inclusive of all contact hours plus outside-of-class, or homework, hours pursuant to Title 5, § 55002.5(a). This is based on the assumption of 3 hours of student work per week over a 16-week term, for 1 unit of credit. The Chancellor’s Office recommends the use of 54 total hours of student work (18 weeks x 3 hours) for this calculation, rather than the minimum 48. As a result, all examples in this section use 54 hours as the basis for this calculation. In practice, local districts may use a number or a range between 48 and 54, depending on local practices, but must apply this

number consistently in credit hour calculations. This number is referred to as the “hours-per- unit divisor” in the sections below. The total of all contact hours and outside-of-class hours, as described below, is referred to as “total student learning hours” and is the dividend in the credit calculation formula.

Courses not classified as cooperative work experience, clock hour, or open entry/open exit use the following method for calculating units of credit:

Divide total student learning hours by the hours-per-unit divisor, round down to the nearest increment of credit awarded by the college. Expressed as an equation:

(Total Contract Hours + Outside-of-class Hours)

Hours-per-unit Divisor

= Units of Credit

The result of this calculation is then rounded down to the nearest .5 increment or to the nearest fractional unit award used by the district, if smaller than .5. This formula applies to both semester and quarter credit calculations. While this formula can yield a value below the lowest increment of credit awarded by the college, zero-unit courses are not permissible.

**Definitions**

The following definitions are used in the application of this formula:

**Total Contact Hours:** The total time per term that a student is under the direct supervision of an instructor or other qualified employee as defined in Title 5, §§ 58050, 58051 and 58161. This number is the sum of all contact hours for the course in all calculations categories,

including lecture, recitation, discussion, seminar, laboratory, clinical, studio, practica, activity, to-be-arranged, etc. Contact hours for courses may include hours assigned to more than one instructional category, e.g., lecture and laboratory, lecture and activity, lecture and clinical.

**Outside-of-class Hours:** Hours students are expected to engage in course work outside of the classroom. Federal and state regulations for credit hour calculations are based on the total time a student spends on learning, including outside-of-class hours. As a matter of standard practice in higher education, lecture and related course formats require two hours of student work outsid¬e-of-class for every hour in-class. All other academic work, including laboratory, activity, studio, clinical, practica, To Be Arranged (TBA) etc., must provide an equivalent total number of student learning hours as typically required for lecture, with the ratio of in-class to outside-of-class work prorated appropriately for the instructional category.

Traditionally, these ratios are expressed as shown in the following table:

**Table 5 — In-class to Out-of-class Hours Ratio**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Instructional Category** | **In-Class Hours** | **Outside-of- Class Hours** |
| Lecture  (Lecture, Discussion, Seminar and Related Work) | 1 | 2 |
| Activity  (Activity, Lab w/ Homework, Studio, and Similar) | 2 | 1 |
| Laboratory  (Traditional Lab, Natural Science Lab, Clinical, and Similar) | 3 | 0 |

Other categories or ratios for inside- to outside-of-class hours are possible, but should fall within the parameters for one unit of credit as described in the above. Standard expectations in higher education for credit hour calculations generally align with the in-class to outside-of- class ratios as described in this table. Deviations from these widely accepted standards, while permitted, can negatively affect course transferability and articulation; therefore, should

be used with caution. Since TBA hours are required to be listed separately on the COR, any outside-of-class hours expected of students in relationship to TBA contact hours, must be included in the total student learning hours for the calculation.

**Hours-per-unit Divisor:** This is the value or value range used by the college to define the number of hours required to award each unit of credit. The value must be minimum of 48 and maximum of 54 hours for colleges on the semester system and a minimum of 33 and maximum of 36 for colleges on the quarter system. This number represents the total student learning hours for which the college awards one unit of credit. Colleges may use any divisor within this range, but should maintain consistency between the divisor and the dividend. For example, if a college uses the 51 = 1 unit calculation to determine the hours of lecture and

outside-of-class work in the dividend, they should use 51 as the divisor. Colleges that indicate the minimum and maximum range of 48–54 should show that same range for the dividend in the equation and resulting unit calculation.

**Term Length and Hours-per-unit Divisor:** Colleges must exercise caution in determining the hours-per-unit divisor for credit hour calculations. California finance laws assume that primary terms average 17.5-weeks on the semester system and 11⅔-weeks on the quarter system (the two semesters or three quarters equal the traditional 35-week academic year), and because student attendance and related apportionment state compliance auditing is based on the student contact hours delineated in the official COR, the Chancellor’s Office

strongly recommends that colleges use the 18-week semester or 12-week quarter as the basis for the student contact hour calculation used in the COR, even if a college has been approved to use a compressed academic calendar. The 18-week semester or 12-week quarter primary term provides the greatest flexibility in terms of contact hours, and colleges do not risk an audit finding for excessive apportionment claims such as they might experience using a 16- week semester basis for the contact-hour calculation. It is also important to note the flexible calendar program is designed around the 35-week traditional academic calendar, so basing contact hour targets around an 18-week semester assures that instructional hours lost to “flex” activities will not result in the district not providing the minimum number of hours required by Title 5, § 55002.5 to award a unit of credit.

**Calculation Categories and Outside-of-class Hours**: As outlined in the sample table on page 53, colleges can use a variety of calculation categories to describe configurations and expectations for contact to outside-of-class hours. The traditional credit hour model for

classroom instruction (lecture, discussion, recitation, etc.) assumes one hour in the classroom and two hours of outside work each week for the length of the primary term for one unit of credit. All other categories must provide at least as much time, with the in-class to outside-

of-class hours reflecting standard practices and expectations for that academic activity. The sample table provides the three most common configurations and names for these categories, but practices and nomenclature may vary among institutions.

The activity or laboratory with homework category, described in the table as an expectation of two hours in the classroom and one hour of outside-of-class work, should be used with caution. In the natural sciences and other disciplines, it is standard practice to base the number of units awarded for laboratory solely on contact hours, even though there may

be some expectation of student work or preparation outside-of-class. Any alteration of this relationship for laboratory courses in the natural sciences and clinical hours in many allied health fields can jeopardize programmatic accreditation and acceptability in meeting major or GE requirements when transferred to a baccalaureate degree-granting institution. Use of this category should be restricted to only those instructional areas where it is clearly aligned

with accepted practices in higher education. This category is commonly found in the visual and performing arts, physical education, CTE fields, and other disciplines. The term “activity” as used in this context is not intended to limit or define the use of this term locally. Some colleges use this term and related credit calculations interchangeably with laboratory.

The COR must include both in-class hours and outside-of-class hours.

While most courses fall into one of the calculation categories listed above, some courses use a combination of categories, such as lecture combined with lab, activity, TBA, studio, or clinical hours on a single COR. Guidance for alignment with standard practices in higher education and sample calculation tables for common course formats and combinations of calculation categories are contained in guidance from the Chancellor’s Office.

**Fractional Unit Awards and Minimum Thresholds**

Title 5, § 55002.5(c) and (d) govern the awarding of fractional units of credit. Specifically, section (c) permits the college to award units of credit in a minimum of .5 increments; whereas section (d) permits colleges to award units in increments smaller than .5 if established by local policy.

Calculations for each increment of credit awarded by the college represent the minimum threshold for awarding that increment of credit. Students are awarded the next increment of credit only when they pass the next minimum threshold. For example, if a course is designed to require 180 total student learning hours (108 contact hours and 72 outside-of-class hours), the calculation of units works as follows:

180 / 54 = 3.33

1. units of credit

In this example, the college would not award 3.5 units until the total student learning hours reached the 189-hour minimum threshold for 3.5 units. However, if a college offers credit

in .25 increments, this example would yield a 3.25-unit course. Another example is a course offered for 36 contact hours, with 4 hours of homework, resulting in 40 total student learning hours. In a district that awards credit in .5 increments, 40 total student learning hours divided by 54 is .75, which meets the minimum threshold for .5 units of credit, but does not pass the minimum threshold for 1 unit of credit. In this example, 40 total student learning hours (36 contact and 4 outside-of-class) would award .5 units of credit. This is similar to the award of grades where, for example, a student earns a “B” for any percentage between 80 and 89. The student is only awarded an “A” when they reach the minimum threshold of 90 percent.

**Cooperative Work Experience Formula**

Credit hour calculations for work experience are governed by the regulations set forth in Title 5, § 55256.5. In Title 5, § 55256.5(c)(1-2) the following requirements are specified:

* Each 75 hours of paid work equals one semester credit or 50 hours equals one quarter credit.
* Each 60 hours of non-paid work equals one semester credit or 40 hours equals one quarter credit.

**Clock Hour Programs**

The definition of a clock hour program and standards for awarding of units of credit for these programs is defined in 34 Code of Federal Regulations §§ 668.8(k)(2)(i)(A) and 668.8(l), respectively. In this regulation, a program is considered to be a clock-hour program for purposes of the Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) program if a program is required to measure student progress in clock hours when:

* Receiving Federal or State approval or licensure to offer the program; or
* Completing clock hours is a requirement for graduates to apply for licensure or the authorization to practice the occupation that the student is intending to pursue.

Programs that meet this definition are required to use a federal formula for determining the appropriate awarding of credit that is outlined in 34 Code of Federal Regulations § 668.8(l). Compliance with this credit hour calculation is a component of regional accreditation review; however, Title 5 regulations do not include specific guidance or methods for calculating credit in clock hour programs.

**Local Policy**

Annually, the College Chief Education Officer, Chief Instructional Officer, Academic Senate President, and Curriculum Chair sign an affidavit certifying that all curriculum was approved in accordance with Title 5 and Chancellor’s Office requirements. The certification requires that districts have district governing board policy on awarding credit. This policy must specify the accepted relationship between contact hours, outside-of-class hours, and credit for calculating credit hours to ensure consistency in awarding units of credit. The creation of a standing policy or formal calculation document helps districts fulfill the responsibility for district governing boards under California Code of Regulations, Title 5, § 55002 to establish the relationship between units and hours for the local curriculum development and approval process.