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Area Institutional Effectiveness

Credit Hour and Course Level Policy

Policy Statement

This policy provides a framework for understanding and navigating the curriculum with an understanding of credit hours and course levels. The policy also serves as a means of providing for the appropriate application and assignment of courses per commonly accepted practices in higher education.

Reason for Policy/Purpose

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) has established standard 10.7 of the Principles of Accreditation: "The institution publishes and implements policies for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for its courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. These policies require oversight by persons academically qualified to make the necessary judgments. In educational programs not based on credit hours (e.g., direct assessment programs), the institution has a sound means for determining credit equivalencies. (Policies for awarding credit)." This policy ensures compliance with standard 10.7 of the Principles of Accreditation.

Who Needs to Know This Policy

All members of The University of Southern Mississippi community.

Definitions

Example Term	Definition
N/A	N/A

Policy/Procedures

Credit Hours

The University of Southern Mississippi applies the policy of the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) in the definition of a standard credit hour:

IHL 506 COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The number of weeks must meet Federal financial aid requirements *and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges requirements*. (BT Minutes, 5/92; 1/98; 7/2004; 3/2008)”

Note: IHL Policies and Bylaws (as amended through February 18, 2021), page 81 shows a strike-through and omits the language in italics. However, the IHL board minutes from November 19, 2020 illustrate approval of 506 with the provided modifications above.

http://www.mississippi.edu/board/downloads/bdnov_2020.pdf

The Course requirements listed above align with the federal definition of a credit hour as expressed in the [CREDIT HOURS Policy Statement \(December 2023\) of SACSCOC. “Federal Definition of the Credit Hour.](#)

For purposes of the application of this 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.” (<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/Credit-Hours.pdf>).

The University of Southern Mississippi defines an hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction time as not less than 50 contact minutes but not more than 60 contact minutes.

In addition, the University of Southern Mississippi establishes the following minimum contact minute guidelines for all courses regardless of format, level, or mode of delivery and includes the scheduled final examination period.

- 1 credit hour = 750 classroom minutes (12.5 contact hour (60 minute hour)) minimum
- 2 credit hours = 1,500 classroom minutes (25 contact hour (60 minute hour)) minimum
- 3 credit hours = 2,250 classroom minutes (37.5 contact hour (60 minute hour)) minimum
- Each additional credit hour adds 750 classroom minutes (12.5 contact hour (60 minute hour))

minimum

- Laboratory, Studio, or Activity Course contact minutes are at least twice those listed above per credit hour
- All new course proposals and course modification proposals submitted to the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils must justify the requested credit hours for the proposed course.
- Courses that do not utilize traditional lecture classroom formats, such as dissertation, thesis, internship, clinical, or practicum type courses, must justify their credit hour requirements based on a reasonable approximation of the contact hour minimum expectations listed above.

Course Level

The University of Southern Mississippi utilizes a course numbering system such that the first digit of the number establishes the course level. All remaining digits represent course placeholders and do not indicate level. The following level definitions apply (example: CHE 101 would indicate a Freshman-level chemistry course)

First Digit of Course Number	Level Definition
0	Remedial-level coursework. Provides no quality points in GPA calculation and can not be applied to university or program hour requirements. Courses at this level focus on preparing students for success in college or remediating student deficiencies in college readiness.
1	Freshman-level coursework (lower-division). Generally have no course prerequisite requirements for non-sequenced courses. Courses at this level are considered entry-point courses. Placement requirements, such as standardized test scores, may be present. Courses at this level are typically survey-type courses.
2	Sophomore-level coursework (lower-division). Courses at this level are intermediate courses that may have course prerequisites. Courses at this level are typically devoted to surveys of a particular area of a discipline.
3	Junior-level coursework (upper-division). Courses at this level are advanced courses that may have course prerequisites or major-standing requirements. These are often considered courses that are major-specific.
4	Senior-level coursework (upper-division). Courses at this level are typically advanced major-specific courses and may have course prerequisites or major-standing requirements.
5	Master's-level coursework (graduate). Courses at this level typically require admission to a graduate program and are introductory survey-type courses. Courses at this level can be applied to master's and doctoral degrees and may have a research and/or appropriate professional practice and training component.
6	Master's-level coursework (graduate). Courses at this level require admission to a graduate program and are intermediate graduate courses. Courses at this level may have course prerequisites and can be applied to

First Digit of Course Number	Level Definition
	master's and doctoral degrees. Courses at this level may expect students to have a significant level of independence and may have a research and/or appropriate professional practice and training component.
7	Doctoral-level coursework (graduate). Courses at this level typically require admission to a doctoral program and are advanced graduate courses. Courses at this level may have course prerequisites or major-specific standing. Courses at this level may expect students to have a significant level of independence and may have a research and/or appropriate professional practice and training component.
8	Doctoral-level coursework (graduate). Courses at this level typically require admission to a doctoral program and are highly advanced and specialized graduate courses. Courses at this level may have course prerequisites or major-specific standing. Courses at this level expect students to have a significant level of independence and may have a research and/or appropriate professional practice and training component.

All new course proposals and course modification proposals submitted to the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils must justify the requested credit level for the proposed course. The University of Southern Mississippi requires an appropriate level of rigor that generally aligns with the level definitions outlined above. Course proposals are to include a draft syllabus. The relevant council will use the draft syllabus to determine the appropriateness of the level requested.

Review

The Director of Institutional Effectiveness is responsible for reviewing this policy every four years (or whenever circumstances require immediate review).

Forms/Instructions

N/A

Appendices

N/A

Related Information

[MS IHL Policies and Bylaws](#)

[SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation](#)

All Revision Dates

07/2024

Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date
General Counsel	Jon Weathers: General Counsel	07/2024
Director of Compliance and Ethics	Paul Walters: Dir Compl & Ethics/Asc Gen Col	07/2024
Senior Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness	Douglas Masterson: Sr Asc Prv Inst'l Succe & Prof	07/2024
Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs	Kelly Lester: Asc Provost Fac Success & Prof	07/2024
Associate Director of Compliance and Ethics	Jennifer Lewis: Asc Dir Compl & Ethics	07/2024

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