Credits - Definition and Guidelines

The OSU Catalog states that “One credit is generally given for three hours per week of work in and out of class. For example, each hour of class lecture is generally expected to require two hours of work out of class.” Thus, one quarter credit represents 30 hours of work.

The following guidelines come from C.J. Quann’s “A Handbook of Policies and Procedures”:

“Academic credit is a measure of the total time commitment required of a typical student in a particular course of study. Total time consists of three components: (1) time spent in class; (2) time spent in laboratory, studio, fieldwork, or other scheduled activity; (3) time devoted to reading, studying, problem solving, writing, or preparation.

One quarter credit is assigned in the following ratio of component hours per week devoted to the course of study: (1) lecture courses—one contact hour for each credit (two hours of outside work implied); (2) laboratory or studio course—at least two contact hours for each credit (one hour of outside preparation implied); (3) independent study—at least three hours of work per week for each credit.”

While there may be natural diversity among academic units in administering these standards, they should be carefully considered when assigning credits to new (or existing) courses. For example, one- or two-day workshops, field trips, etc., will not qualify for academic credit unless there are extensive pre- or post-workshop trips or assignments to provide the required 30 hours of work per credit. Also, the extensive outside work required of some laboratory or studio classes should be taken into account in assigning credits.

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Academic Glossary

Credit: The academic value assigned to a course based on the type and level of the subject material, as well as the expected number of hours spent on class preparation. One credit is generally given for three hours of work per week, in and out of class.


Among the larger issues that dominated the agenda of the Council during the year were:

(c) The number of credits for courses. University accreditation documents offer a “gold standard” for the assignment of credits for courses, defining 1 credit as 30 hours of work, in and out of class, per quarter. This definition allows flexibility between disciplines but adds a subjective element to the process, that is, the estimation of the number of hours students are spending outside of class on a given course. Widely differing standards for the assignment of credits to courses, even within closely related disciplines, exist and probably such decisions are influenced by the role of student credit hours in determining University budget allocations.