



**Policy Number:** 200.5  
**Policy Title:** Credit Hour  
**Subject:** Section 200 – Academic Affairs  
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**Approved by:**



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**POLICY STATEMENT:**

The United States Department of Education requires that each institution develop a written credit hour policy that defines what constitutes a credit hour of instruction at the institution. Helena College uses either “seat time” or “competency based” criteria to define what constitutes one credit hour of instruction. See the attached definitions and procedures for the details of how the criteria are applied/evaluated.

All Helena College policies shall adhere to and be consistent with relevant federal and state laws, rules, and regulations and with Board of Regents’ policies and procedures. (This paragraph updated 12/29/2020)

## Background on the Need for a Credit Hour Policy

The United States Department of Education requires that each institution develop a written credit hour policy that defines what constitutes a credit hour of instruction at the institution. The basic definition of a credit hour is outlined in the Federal Register (75 FR 66832 p. 66946):

*...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 not less than:*

1. *One (1) hour<sup>1</sup> of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of (2) two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately (15) fifteen weeks for one semester ..., or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or*
2. *At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.*

## Process

The U.S. D.O.E. has authorized regional accrediting bodies (such as the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities) to ensure institutions are in compliance and to review and approve their credit hour policies. At Helena College the *credit hour* is used as a unit of instruction to quantify student learning. Under its authority as a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC) is charged with ensuring that all courses offered are in compliance with this standard.

All current courses offered by the College have been reviewed by ASCRC and found to be compliant. All future courses proposed must demonstrate compliance with this policy by adhering to one of the definitions shown below.

## Definitions:

### 1. Traditional, Seat-Time-Based Approach

The credit hour is defined as a minimum of three student learning hours of a specified type each week during a 15-week (minimum) semester. Using a seat-time approach, one **lecture** credit of instruction is approximated by 45 hours of combined direct instruction (counting an hour of direct instruction plus 2 hours of independent student preparation/work each week).

Similarly, using a seat-time approach, one **lab** credit of instruction is approximated by 45 hours of combined direct instruction (counting 2 hours of lab time plus 1 hour of student preparation/work each week).

Using a seat-time approach, one **clinical** credit of instruction should be approximated by 45 hours of direct instruction, with 2 hours of outside student preparation/work to occur per credit.

Finally, using a seat-time approach, one **shop/clinical** credit of instruction should be approximated by 45 hours of direct instruction, with minimal outside student preparation/work to occur.

- If the learning experience is offered in a different time frame (e.g., six-week summer session), the student time required to complete the course should reasonably approximate 45 hours of combined direct instruction and student work per credit.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 One hour is not necessarily intended to represent 60 minutes of instruction in this context. This was noted in the Federal Register (Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66846), "We believe that it is unnecessary to define one hour as either 50 minutes or one clock hour..."

- If direct instruction is not the principal mode of learning for an academic experience (e.g., internships, studio work, some on-line courses), the student time required to complete the course should reasonably approximate 45 hours of student work per credit.

## 2. **Alternative, Outcomes-Based Approach**

While it is rare at Helena College, credit may also be awarded for an amount of learning “equivalent” to learning in a seat-time-based course as documented by intended learning outcomes and verified by assessment of student achievement.

**Example:** A traditional three-credit course (3 lectures plus 6 hours of on-their-own student work per week) is converted to a competency-based course. Since the course learning outcomes are identical for the two modes of delivery, students successfully completing the competency-based course would be awarded three credits. Successful completion of the competency-based course would be documented by direct assessment of student accomplishment of the course learning outcomes.

When there is no equivalent seat-time-based course for comparison, the equivalent effort required for the proposed number of credits must be established by the instructor when the new competency-based course is proposed. The equivalency will be reviewed and must be affirmed by the ASCRC before the course is approved.