

AO 5: Credit Hours

5.1 Federal and Accreditation Regulations

NS measures student learning in alignment with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Credit Hour Policy, which relies on federal regulations on the definition and assignment of credit hours.

Federal regulations mandate that accredited institutions comply with the definition of the credit hour in 34 CFR Section 600.2, which defines the credit hour as:

...an amount of student work...as approved by the institution's accrediting agency...that is consistent with commonly accepted practice in postsecondary education and that:

- 1. Reasonably approximates not less than:*
 - a. One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester...hour of credit...or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or*
 - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in [1 above]... for other academic activities...including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours; and*
- 2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to account for a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.*

Credit value for courses is governed by the Academic Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee and the NSHE Common Course Numbering system. Course approval requests should include a justification of the credit value. Periodic review of course credit values will be incorporated into each school's curriculum review schedule to ensure they accurately reflect the amount of work required in the course. Course schedules for all classes are adjusted as needed to ensure contact time for instruction is equivalent to the federal guidelines noted above.

Instructional time per credit is defined to provide a consistent minimum expectation for students and faculty. For lecture, seminar, lab, or equivalent courses, students are expected to spend at least two hours outside of the classroom each week for each credit of classroom learning. For example, if weekly instructional time is 50 minutes, then students should engage in approximately two hours of work outside the classroom. For courses scheduled during shorter terms (such as summer or 8-week sessions), hours per

week should be adjusted proportionately. For SON, 1 credit hour for a full-length term would equal 3 hours in lab or clinical settings.

5.2 Course Formats/Modalities

In-person courses meet at a predetermined and designated physical location. Online courses meet entirely over the internet as either a self-paced class (asynchronous) or with scheduled meeting times (synchronous). A hybrid course melds in-person and online components; at least 25% of total contact time must be met online. Syllabi for hybrid courses must clearly articulate expectations for when students must meet in person and when they must meet or complete work online. Students pay a distance education fee for hybrid and online courses.

Instructors cannot change the modality of a course (from in-person to online, etc.) after students begin enrolling for the term without dean approval. Approved changes must be communicated to students, the Office of the Registrar, and the Cashier's Office as soon as possible so any changes to student fees can be posted to students' accounts. Modality changes are not made after the first day of a term except in an emergency.

5.3 Clinical Hours, Supervised Field Experience, or Student Teaching

Clinical experiences allow for observation, participation, studies of individual students or clients, individual field work, and practicums, both on and off campus. Credit for clinical experiences is determined based on recommendations of relevant accrediting bodies or state regulations.

To earn credits, the amount of time must be reasonably equivalent to the federal standard in 5.1 above.

5.4 Meeting Contact Time

The Office of the Registrar audits the course schedule to ensure that the meeting times for each course meet the minimum contact time for the credits earned. Faculty members retain primary responsibility and discretion for meeting the required instructional contact time for their course.

In the event of instructor absence, faculty members shall determine appropriate alternative instructional activities or make-up arrangements in a manner consistent with course learning outcomes and credit-hour requirements. Such alternatives may include, but are not limited to, recorded lectures, alternative assignments, online instructional activities, or rescheduled class meetings. Online activities may be substituted for up to one week of 15-week in-person course meetings (or the equivalent in shorter terms); this is not considered a modality change. Longer shifts to online work may impact federal definitions of a course and must be reviewed by the Dean and the Registrar to confirm any impacts for federal course designation thresholds before approval.

5.5 Related Information

- [NWCCU Credit Hour Policy](#)
- [NWCCU Distance Education and Correspondence Education Policy](#)
- 34 CFR 600.2

5.5.1 Revision History

- Approved by Dr. Raul Tapia, Chair of Academic Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Committee, 3/09/2026; Deans Council (6 for, 0 against), 3/28/2026; Berna Rhodes-Ford, General Counsel, 7/22/2026; Dr. Gwen Sharp, Interim Provost, 7/22/2026; and Dr. Amber Lopez Lasater, Acting President, 7/29/2026.