294 Credit Hours

Approved by President

Sidney A. McPhee, President

Effective Date:
Responsible Division: Academic Affairs
Responsible Office: Office of the University Provost
Responsible Officer: Vice Provost for Academic Programs

I. Purpose

This policy establishes that Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU or University) complies with federal regulations and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) policies and standards when determining the amount and level of credit for its courses and programs. The policy includes the federal definition of the credit hour, the University’s procedures and criteria for determining credit, and the means by which this information is communicated to University constituencies.

II. General Statement

MTSU’s credit-bearing courses shall adhere to the federal definition of the credit hour and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Policy Statement on Credit Hours. A credit hour is defined as an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement regardless of level, format, or method of delivery.

III. Definitions

A. Credit Hour. In the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 34 Section 600.2, the US Department of Education defines the credit hour as 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 of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two (2) hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen (15) weeks for one (1) semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten (10) to twelve (12) 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 in Section III.A.1. of this definition 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.

B. Curriculum Committees. Committees responsible for review and approval of proposals for new courses and programs or modifications of existing courses and programs. MTSU curriculum committees include departmental curriculum committees, college curriculum committees, the General Education Committee, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and Graduate Council. All proposals for curriculum committee review must include the amount and level of credit awarded for a course.

IV. Procedures

A. Assigning Credit. MTSU defines a credit hour unit as one (1) hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two (2) hours of out-of-class student work each week for fifteen (15) weeks, or equivalent academic activities, to achieve the student learning outcomes for the credit hour. Laboratory and studio classes usually earn one (1) credit for each two (2) hours of attendance or the equivalent for a semester unless otherwise indicated.

Faculty developing new courses and programs propose specific credit hour assignments, which are reviewed and approved by the appropriate curriculum committees: department curriculum committee, college curriculum committee, General Education Committee, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and Graduate Council. Faculty may modify credit hour assignments for existing courses and programs through the same curricular proposal and approval processes.

B. Criteria. Faculty and the University’s curriculum committees determine the amount and level of credit awarded for courses through established curricular processes, consistent with commonly accepted practices for undergraduate and graduate degrees in their disciplines and policies of MTSU, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the SACSCOC. These may include:

1. Discipline-specific best practices;
2. Purpose and goals of a course or program;
3. Course or program level (undergraduate lower or upper division, graduate master’s or doctoral);
4. Intellectual/learning outcomes;
5. Course content and assignments;

6. Course type, such as lecture, laboratory, or studio; internship, clinical, practicum, or field placement; independent study, thesis, or dissertation;

7. Articulation and transferability of credit to other institutions;

8. Other factors as appropriate.

C. Exceptions. A program’s degree requirements may include course(s) with zero (0) earned hours of academic credit:

i. To facilitate student scheduling and success when
   1. The zero credit-hour course is a co-requisite lecture, laboratory, or clinical course for a credit-bearing co-requisite course;
   2. Contact hours and grades earned in the zero-credit hour lecture, laboratory, or clinical course are included in the award of academic credit and grades earned for the co-requisite course;

ii. To facilitate program assessment and accreditation requirements, such as
   1. a zero-credit hour course for submission of a capstone project for the purpose of program assessment;
   2. a zero credit-hour course to demonstrate that students meet co-curricular personal or professional learning experiences, such as attendance at performances or professional events, to meet the standards of a programmatic accreditor or for professional licensure/certification;

iii. To avoid placing an undue burden of cost and program length on students whose program of study must meet the standards of multiple programmatic accreditors and licensure/certification bodies, such as
   1. a zero credit-hour course in a performing arts discipline offered concurrently with a credit-bearing course of the same title, content, and outcomes required for students in that major who are also pursuing teacher licensure.
Course(s) with zero (0) credit hours are subject to the same procedures for proposal, review, and approval as those for credit-bearing courses.

D. Responsibility. The responsibility of ensuring that credit hour requirements for time and student learning outcomes are met lies with the faculty member instructing the class and with the academic department chair. The student learning outcomes for a course must be the same regardless of whether the credit hour(s) is delivered in a traditional format or through equivalent academic activities.

In situations where a credit hour(s) is offered in a non-traditional format and no class section is offered in the traditional format, department chairs will consult with the instructor to ensure that credit hour(s) requirements are similar to those for the same course offered in a traditional format. This includes but is not limited to internships, independent studies, experiential learning activities, and online courses.

E. Institutional Communication. The University provides the definition of the credit hour to institutional constituencies in the annual catalog and in the Faculty Handbook.

F. External Review. Program reviewers and accreditation reviewers regularly assess MTSU’s educational programs, including credit hours awarded for courses and programs. MTSU provides its policy and procedures for awarding credit to comply with SACSCOC standards and federal regulations.

Forms: None.

Revisions: September 15, 2021 (original).

Last Reviewed: September 2021.

References: (CFR) 34 Section 600.2.; SACSCOC Policy Statement on Credit Hours.