

# ACC POLICY ON CREDIT HOURS

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## Overview

The Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC) of Western Washington University is responsible for ensuring that every approved course at Western is assigned an appropriate number of credit hours. Western's definition of a credit hour is in full accordance with the definition provided in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), as well as the "Credit Hour Policy" of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. For the WAC definition, see [WAC 250-61-050 \(19\)](#).

## Total student work per credit (unit of student work)

Western Washington University defines an academic credit hour as a unit of student work.

- A single credit hour at Western equals approximately three hours of work each week over the course of a 10-week quarter, thus equaling a total of approximately 30 hours of work for any given credit hour in any given course, whatever the actual calendar length of the course.
- All courses must demonstrate that the expectations for student time meet this standard. How this time is allocated should be reviewed in the course syllabus and in any course proposals that require credit hour review.

## Regular and substantive interaction (RSI)

All Western courses must include regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and the student.

Contact hours are a measure and means of demonstrating the amount of regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and the students. Activities that contribute to contact hours must be required of all students in the class and involve substantive interaction between the students and the instructor.

For Hybrid, Online (Synchronous, Asynchronous, and Mixed), and Online Summer Only modalities, please refer to the [Guidance Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI\) document](#) for information on how to communicate RSI to students in course syllabi.

## The standard calculation of a credit hour

At Western, a credit hour is typically based on the calculation of:

- **(a)** one hour of instructor contact time (as, for example, in a lecture, seminar, or discussion) and two hours of additional independent work per week.
- **(b)** two hours of instructor contact time (as, for example, in laboratory, studio, rehearsal, applied performance, or field work) and one hour of additional independent work per week, or
- **(c)** an intermediate format between (a) and (b) (as, for example lecture/lab courses) depending on specific class activities and the amount of additional out-of-class work.

In current practice, an hour of contact time at Western equals approximately 50 minutes. Within the parameters outlined here, the specific schedule of class meeting times is at the discretion of individual faculty members and

their respective departments, programs, and colleges as long as the total unit of work per single credit hour equals approximately 30 hours per course.

## Variations on the standard calculation of a credit hour

Western also approves variations on the typical calculation of a credit hour, as long as the total unit of work requirements are met. There are several categories of courses approved for academic credit at Western in which variation can be approved or for which special considerations apply:

- **Practicum/Internship Courses:** In the case of practicum or internship courses, up to 40 hours of work per credit may be appropriate.
- **Intensive Courses:** One credit per week is typical for an intensive course, and generally no more than about 9 hours of student work should be scheduled per day.
- **Other exceptions to contact hour expectation:** Less than 10 hours of contact time per credit hour per course may be allowed in research seminars, independent study courses, thesis-writing courses, internships, and courses without set meeting times that effectively demonstrate regular and substantive interaction proportionate to student work requirements.

## Demonstrating regular and substantive interaction (RSI)

RSI can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. High-engagement RSI is when there is live instructor-initiated interaction with students individually or in the classroom setting. Medium-engagement RSI is when there is instructor-initiated engagement through online platforms, such as a Canvas Discussion Board. Low-engagement RSI is when the interaction is passive, initiated by the instructor but without substantive engagement (for example, requiring students to view recorded lectures) and should be minimized and limited to no more than 20% of total contact hours. Demonstrating RSI in your syllabus can be done in the following ways:

- **a) Contact Time Based on Scheduled Class Meetings:** Any course can demonstrate compliance with the credit hour policy by supplying an accounting of instructor initiated scheduled contact time appropriate for the number of credits as described in the standard calculation of a standard credit hour, and an account of student work and assessment, similar to what is found in a standard course syllabus.
- **b) Contact Time Based on Learning Activities:** As an alternative to scheduled meetings, courses may provide an account of the nature and frequency of interaction paired with an estimated tally of student hours spent in the required learning activities and appropriate to the number of credits (3 hours per week per credit for a 10-week course). In such instances, it is necessary to demonstrate:
  1. that interaction occurs regularly, at least on a weekly basis, and opportunities for interaction are predictably scheduled and initiated by the instructor. Office hours are not RSI.
  2. how instructors are actively monitoring the engagement of students in the class and substantively engaging with them on the basis of that monitoring, and
  3. students are spending an appropriate amount of time in course activities.

## Review of Credit Hour Requirement

The ACC will review all new courses and course revisions including a change in credit hours, a significant change in course content, or a change in modality, to ensure they meet the student unit of work expectation and the regular and substantive interaction requirement through either scheduled or learning activity-based contact.

A syllabus, with credits, course meeting times (if applicable), and a schedule of required work provides a sufficiently detailed account. If course meeting times do not include about 50 minutes per week per credit, additional activities that contribute to contact hours and/or regular and substantive interaction should be clearly documented in the syllabus.

All courses should include an account of work consisting of a weekly schedule (or list of learning activities) including topics covered and a description of expected assignments. The work should be tailored to meet the overall expectation of 30 hours per credit per term (3 hours per credit per week for a 10-week term) for each student. While a somewhat detailed time accounting is necessary to evaluate credit hours, especially those using learning activities instead of live class meetings, instructors may choose to provide a more general description of time expectation to students in recognition of the wide variance in actual time investment by individual students.

## Further Examples and Guidance for Application of the Policy

Please see the [Guidance Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI\) document](#) for further examples. Examples of activities that can contribute to RSI contact time include:

- live class meetings (face-to-face or via video conference)
- guided live study/work groups
- faculty moderated video viewing and discussion
- faculty mediated online discussion
- live required communication with the instructor
- recorded video lectures (must be accompanied by additional substantive interaction on the lecture material)

## Summer Session

Because Summer Session courses are generally either 6 or 9 weeks long, activities and weekly contact hours need to be adjusted to account for coverage of material that would normally be taught over 10 weeks. In a 6-week session, for example, the expectation is about 83 minutes per week per credit rather than about 50 minutes per week per credit of contact time for a 10-week course. The following chart provides examples of potential meeting schedules for a 6-week summer session course:

Credits	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Total course meeting minutes per week (6 weeks)</b>	415	330	250	160	80
<b>Potential meeting schema (number of meetings per week x minutes)</b>	5x80	5x65	5x50		
	4x100	4x80	4x60	4x40	
	3x140	3x110	3x80	3x60	
			2x125	2x80	2x40
					1x80