

Academic Credit Hours

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA 2016-2017 UNDERGRADUATE CATALOG

[USF Policy 10-065 / Florida Administrative Rule 6A-10.033](#)

Academic credit provides the basis for quantifying the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled in traditional classroom settings, laboratories, studios, internships and other forms of experiential learning, and distance and correspondence education. Credit hours are a measure of learning, and support a wide range of activities, including the transfer of students from one institution to another, awarding financial aid, and credentialing for employment. Because of the significance of awarding credit hours, an institution is obligated to ensure that credit hours for courses and programs conform to the commonly accepted standards of higher education, as stated in the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges \(SACSCOC\) Federal Requirements 4.9 \(Definition of Credit Hour\)](#) and the SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement. This Policy is intended to ensure that all credit-bearing courses and programs offered by the University of South Florida System (USF System) meet the requirements of the Federal definition of a credit hour and the Credit Hours Policy Statement issued by the SACSCOC.

In determining the maximum number of credits that may be assigned to a course, the following guidelines apply.

- For courses taught in a “traditional” classroom format in a 15-week semester, the maximum number of credits to be assigned is limited to the weekly number of 50-minute contact periods (or their equivalent) with the instructor. Underlying this statement is an assumption that each 50-minute contact period requires a minimum additional two hours of student work outside of the class involving reading, exercises, etc. Where this assumption does not hold true (as may be the case with some laboratories, for example), then the maximum number of credits may be significantly less than the weekly number of 50-minute contact periods.
 - For a lecture class, one unit is considered to be one hour of lecture class time and two hours per week of homework. For the typical three-unit class, a student spends three hours per week in class and should do six hours per week of homework. The total number of class contact hours per semester equals the credit hours multiplied by 15 weeks.
 - For a laboratory class, the hours per week are considered to be all in class with no outside assignments. Thus, one unit is three hours per week of laboratory time.
 - Where a course includes “by arrangement lab hours,” these generally take the place of the hours assigned to homework, since the student is required to use supervised college facilities to do assignments related to homework. An example might be a 3-unit lecture course which requires the student also to work two hours per week in the computer lab. There would be only four hours per week of additional homework required.
- In all cases, but particularly in cases such as online learning where seat time is non-verifiable, credit hours are awarded on the basis of documented student learning outcomes that reflect the amount of academically engaged time for a typical student in a traditional format, and on the basis of documentation of the amount and type of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified period of academically engaged time. The number of credit hours awarded is based on the number and/or rigor of student learning outcomes, with the higher number of credit hours awarded yielding greater number and/or rigor of outcomes.