

Credit Hour Policy

Pacific Lutheran University operates on a semester calendar with 15-week fall and spring semesters, a 4-week January term, and summer sessions ranging from 4 to 12 weeks. The University awards academic credit on a semester credit hour basis at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. The unit of credit applies to all semesters and terms and is consistent with Federal, State, and regional accrediting requirements.

Pacific Lutheran University Credit Hours

Four semester credit classes are offered three times per week in 65-minute time blocks or twice per week in 105-minute time blocks. Other academic experiences such as labs, clinicals, discussions, independent study, field work, internships, and hybrid/online courses are largely held outside of the standard schedule, but all adhere to the credit hour policy (see Periodic Review below).

One unit of credit represents three hours of learning per week where each hour spent with direct faculty instruction requires at least two hours of class preparation or subsequent reading and study. For experiences where direct instruction is not the primary mode of learning, an amount equivalent to the minimum three hours per week is required for a credit hour.

Because the pace of reading, writing, and other study activities varies considerably among students, time spent in each of these areas may be different depending on the course, the instructor, and the individual student's learning. Activities assigned for completion outside of class should be reasonably expected by the instructor to, on average, meet or exceed the minimum standard set in the credit hour policy.

Specific Credit Situations

Traditional Semester Classes

One unit of credit in lecture, seminar, and associated discussion, lab, studio, or clinical work should approximate one hour of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work per week through the 15-week fall or spring semester.

January Term, Summer Session, and Hybrid/Online Classes

Classes held in terms shorter than 15 weeks and/or outside of the traditional schedule due to the method of delivery are equivalent to the standard 3 hours of combined direct instruction and preparation time. January and Summer term classes have longer class periods, meet more frequently during the week, but have a shorter total duration. These classes meet 4-5 days per week for 140 – 170 minutes per meeting. Hybrid and fully online classes, where in-person interaction is less common than in traditional classes supplement direct instruction time with virtual lectures and discussions, experiential learning activities, and other additional assignments.

Laboratory and Studio Classes

Labs are offered both for-credit and as zero credit supplements to lecture classes. For-credit labs, including music instruction, are scheduled between 100 and 220 minutes per week during the semester for 1 credit hour. Zero credit labs meet up to 220 minutes per week and are considered part of the learning experience that takes place outside of the standard lecture periods of each class. Studio art classes conform to University standards requiring at least 45 hours per semester of student learning per credit.

Clinical, Practicum, and Field Work Experiences

These experiential learning activities are defined as part of the program that allows for observation, participation, studies of individual pupils or clients, individual work, and practica both on and off campus. These experiences may be assigned a range of credit, including being attached to standard courses as zero credit options. Across all programs, a minimum of 45 participation hours during the semester is required per unit of credit. Credit in some programs is further determined in accordance with recommendations of specific accrediting bodies or applicable state regulations.

Internships

Internships and other professional practice are career related educational experiences that generate credit on a student's record. These experiences may take place on the Pacific Lutheran University campus or in the field with local businesses, government, or other agencies. Credit is awarded based on hours spent in the working environment and the depth of projects associated with the course of study. Direct contact time ranges from 1.5 to 15 hours per week for one unit of internship credit. The expectation of required student work outside of supervised instruction is such that the weekly learning time is comparable to standard classes and consistent with the University's credit hour practices.

Independent Study

Credit bearing courses where students are working independently on projects with varying degrees of faculty supervision are expected to conform to the standard minimum of three hours per week of student learning.

Periodic Review

Prior to each term the Provost Office convenes a committee to review the course schedule and verify compliance with the student credit hour policy. New courses added to the University curriculum are adopted through a faculty governance process that ensures compliance with the student credit hour policy. Written records of proposals for new courses are maintained by the Office of the Provost. Written records of existing courses are maintained by each academic unit, as well as the Office of the Registrar via the University catalog. The Office of the Registrar also maintains a current and historical course schedule showing the days, weeks, and times that courses meet, as well as the associated credit hour information.

Definition of Credit Hour

Federal regulations effective July 1, 2011, mandate that all candidate and accredited institutions comply with the definition of the credit hour as set forth in Section 600.2 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which defines the credit hour as:

Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), 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 hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve 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 paragraph (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.

In response to the Federal mandate, new credit hour policy requirements were published by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities ([NWCCU](#)) in November 2012.

One semester credit hour equals one hour* of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of student work outside of class per week for a 15 week semester. Generally, one semester credit hour is awarded for a minimum of 45 hours of student work.

*This definition of a credit hour refers to the 50 minute "Carnegie Hour". This is a standard calculation in U.S. higher education equaling 750 minutes (12.5 clock hours) of direct instruction per 15 week semester.