



Credit and Contact Hour and Instructional Equivalencies Guidelines

Division of Academic Affairs

www.valdosta.edu/academics/academic-affairs/

This document provides general guidelines for faculty and administrators concerning:

- *credit and contact hours,*
- *course section formats/instruction types,*
- *course section technology utilization, and*
- *instructional activity equivalencies for online teaching.*

Valdosta State University awards credit hours (units) for coursework according to the Federal Definition of the Credit Hour as set forth in 34 CFR Part 600.2, University System of Georgia [Policy Manual Section 3.4](#),¹ and VSU's [Determination of Credit Hours for Courses Policy](#)² which all use the Carnegie unit for contact time (750 minutes per term for each credit awarded) as the foundation.

- **One credit hour (unit)** should involve an input of approximately three hours per week, or the equivalent amount of work for other instructional formats, for the average student (e.g., one hour of scheduled class and two hours of out-of-class preparation).
 - Typically, a three semester credit hour course meets for three 50-minute (or two 75-minute) sessions per week for fifteen weeks. Irrespective of course instruction type or delivery method, all courses require a **minimum of 2,250 engaged minutes per semester hour**. This basic measure may be adjusted proportionately to reflect modified academic calendars and formats of study. Regardless of the format of course content delivery, course workload expectations must align to the stated learning outcomes for students.
- A **contact hour** represents the measure of scheduled instruction given to students and is dependent on the instructional format for the course. The contact hours should be calculated on a per week basis. For example, one contact hour per week of lecture for 15 weeks equals one credit hour (e.g., a three semester credit hour course meets for 45 contact hours).

¹ http://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section3/C339/#p3.4.1_semester_system

² <http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/sacs/documents/determination-of-credit-hours-policy.pdf>

VSU categorizes course section offerings by the teaching approach employed. In Table 1, session instructional types are defined with the corresponding contact/credit hour ratios.

Table 1: University System of Georgia (USG) Session Instruction Type Code and Definitions

Course Format	USG Instruction Type Code in Banner	Definition	Contact/Credit Hour Ratio (based on a 15-week term)
Lecture	Lecture-10	A course requiring the extended expression of thought supported by generally-accepted principals or theorems of a field or discipline by an expert or qualified representative of the field or discipline.	1 contact hour = 1 credit hour (1:1)
Lecture with Laboratory/ Clinical	Lecture/ Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-11	A course requiring the combined attributes of a lecture course and a lab/clinical.	Contact hours should be an aggregate of the contact hours for a lecture course and lab/clinical based on the existing lecture and lab contact hour guidelines.
Seminar	Seminar-20	A course requiring students to participate in structured conversation or debate focused on assigned readings, current or historical events, or shared experiences led by an expert or qualified representative of the field or discipline.	1 contact hour = 1 credit hour (1:1)
Clinical	Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-30	A course requiring medical- or healthcare-focused experiential work where students test, observe, experiment, or practice a field or discipline in a hands-on or simulated environment.	Credit and contact hours vary depending on the requirements for the clinical experience, but the minimum standard of 750 contact minutes per semester per credit applies.

Course Format	USG Instruction Type Code in Banner	Definition	Contact/Credit Hour Ratio (based on a 15-week term)
Laboratory	Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-30	Laboratory describes a class in which all students are practicing an application of a scientific or technical nature that, for the most part, has already been delivered in the lecture class. It is a course requiring scientific or research focused experiential work where students test, observe, experiment, or practice a field or discipline in a hands-on environment. Content in a lab is based on theory or content from an associated course. Further, all the students in the room are following a similar set of instructions. Because it is instruction-based, it requires less minute-to-minute responsibility for the faculty member to interact with individual students than in a studio. The role is facilitation of students in an exercise-oriented activity for which there is a single goal or outcome.	For completely self-contained laboratories (does not require outside preparation by student), 3 contact hours = 1 credit hour (3:1) For non self-contained laboratories (require outside preparation by student), 2 contact hours = 1 credit hour (2:1)
Physical Activity	Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-30	A course requiring students to participate in physical training, physical conditioning, or other physical exercise activities, sports, or games. The physical activity develops fundamental psychomotor skills and health-related fitness components.	2 contact hours = 1 credit hour (2:1)
Recital, Performance, Ensemble	Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-30	A course requiring recital-, performance-, or ensemble-focused experiential work, including individual lessons, where students, through practice or rehearsal, engage in the creative and artistic act of performing works of music, dance, or theatre for a jury or audience.	Credit and contact hours vary, but the minimum standard of 750 contact minutes per semester per credit applies.

Course Format	USG Instruction Type Code in Banner	Definition	Contact/Credit Hour Ratio (based on a 15-week term)
Studio	Supervised Laboratory/ Clinic-30	Studio describes a class in which all students are engaged in creative or artistic activities which are new and unique and not formulated in a lecture setting. Every student in the room is performing a creative activity to obtain a specific outcome. It is a course requiring visual- or aesthetic-focused experiential work where students test, observe, experiment, or practice a field or discipline in a hands-on environment. Because it is not instruction-based, this requires more minute-to-minute responsibility for the faculty member to engage individual students towards their goal.	2 contact hours = 1 credit hour (2:1)
Directed Study	Directed Study-55	A course requiring students to participate in individualized, independent, directed, or guided studies under the supervision of an expert or qualified representative of the field or discipline. Content material is not normally found in established courses offered by the department or will allow a student to explore in more detail a topic which is normally covered. Contract and/or syllabus required.	Variable: Credit and contact hours are determined on an individual student basis with the assigned faculty member and department head.
Practice Teaching / Student Teaching	Practice Teaching-60	A course requiring students to instruct or teach at an entity external to the institution, generally as part of the culminating curriculum of a teacher education or certification program.	10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours
Practicum	Internship/ Practicum-81	A course requiring students to participate in an approved project or proposal that practically applies previously studied theory of the field or discipline under the supervision of an expert or qualified representative of the field or discipline.	10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours

Course Format	USG Instruction Type Code in Banner	Definition	Contact/Credit Hour Ratio (based on a 15-week term)
Internship	Internship/ Practicum-81	A course requiring students to participate in a partnership, professional employment, work experience, or cooperative education with an entity external to the institution, generally under the supervision of an employee of the given external entity. Contract and/or syllabus required.	Variable: Credit and contact hours are determined on an individual student basis with the assigned faculty member and department head. Generally: 10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours
Field Work / Field Experience	Internship/ Practicum-81	A course requiring students to participate in a partnership, professional employment, work experience, or cooperative education with an entity external to the institution, generally under the supervision of an employee of the given external entity.	Variable: Credit and contact hours are determined on an individual student basis with the assigned faculty member and department head. Generally: 10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours

Course Format	USG Instruction Type Code in Banner	Definition	Contact/Credit Hour Ratio (based on a 15-week term)
Thesis	Thesis-91	Faculty-supervised student development, completion, and defense of an original research project in the student's major area.	Variable: Credit and contact hours are determined on an individual student basis with the assigned faculty member. Generally: 10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours
Dissertation	Dissertation-92	Faculty-supervised student development and completion of an original research topic in the student's major area and defense of the dissertation proposal and the dissertation.	Variable: Credit and contact hours are determined on an individual student basis with the assigned faculty member. Generally: 10 contact hours (1/4 time) = 3 credit hours 20 contact hours (1/2 time) = 6 credit hours 30 contact hours (3/4 time) = 9 credit hours 40 contact hours (full-time) = 12 credit hours

Source: USG Enterprise Data Warehouse *Data Element Dictionary*, 2017.

NC State University Credit/Contact Hour Guidelines, 2017, for general definitions in column three and examples in column four.

Note: USG codes 12 (Lecture/Unsupervised Laboratory), 40 (Unsupervised Laboratory/Clinic), 50 (Independent Study), and 57 (Asynchronous Instruction) are excluded from the table because VSU does not routinely use them.

In addition to the session instruction types listed in Table 1, VSU classifies course section offerings by the degree to which the instructional content is delivered using technology. University System of Georgia delivery codes are described in Table 2.

Table 2: USG Program Instructional Categories for Academic Programs (Effective Spring 2024)

ON CAMPUS	A program of study leading to a degree completed with 50% or more of courses offered consistently on-site in a classroom setting at a campus, center or instructional site. <i>(Consistent with SACSCOC requirements concerning notification of changes in delivery mode.)</i>
HYBRID	A program of study leading to a degree completed with more than 50% offered consistently online, but some courses in the program will require on-site attendance at a campus, center or instructional site.
ONLINE	A program of study which can be completed entirely at a distance. No campus visits are required for coursework. Students may be required to attend program orientations or to complete coursework in a specified instructional setting (clinical, internship, practicum).

Table 3: USG Course Instructional Delivery Codes and Definitions

USG Instructional Delivery Code	Description	Definition
E	Entirely at a distance	All of the class sessions are delivered via technology. The course does not require students to travel to a site to attend an orientation, to take exams, or to participate in other on-site experiences. (This is equivalent to delivering 100 percent of sessions via technology.)
F	Fully at a distance	Nearly all of the class sessions are delivered via technology. The course does not require students to travel to a classroom for instruction; however, it might require students to travel to a site to attend an orientation, to take exams, or to participate in other on-site experiences. (This is generally equivalent to delivering more than 95 percent of sessions via technology.)
H	Hybrid	Technology is used to deliver 50 percent or less of class sessions, but at least one class session is replaced by technology.
P	Partially at a distance	Technology is used to deliver more than 50 percent of class sessions, but visits to a classroom (or similar site) are required. Note: Courses offered through two-way interactive video (GVNS), are coded as partially at a distance because students must meet at a designated location to attend classes.
T	Technology enhanced	Technology is used in delivering instruction, but no class sessions are replaced by technology.
(Null)	No technology	No technology is used in delivering instruction.

Source: USG Enterprise Data Warehouse *Data Element Dictionary*, 2017.
 VSU [Center for eLearning](#), 2017.

For course sections delivered using technology, the institution must ensure that students are engaged for a **minimum of 2,250 minutes per semester hour** of course credit. Table 4 provides examples of educational activities and their instructional time equivalencies to guide faculty in the development of curricula and course syllabi. Online courses should provide an equivalent amount of work and equivalent student learning outcomes as traditional courses.

Table 4: Instructional Equivalencies Chart for Calculating Instructional Hours/Engaged Minutes

Instructional Activity	Description of Instructional Activity	Rate of Equivalency
Active learning strategies	With instructor facilitation, students (in small groups/pairs) engage in cohort-based, professionally-focused learning, examining concepts via professional experience. Facilitators lead students in evaluating course concepts/objectives in light of experience, enhancing the depth and breadth of content by intensely-focused group activities in class.	1 active learning strategy = 1 hour instruction
Blogs, journals, logs	Instructor guides students in applying learned concepts or reflecting on learning experiences; learned concepts to be shared with instructor and/or classmates for thoughtful analysis, feedback, and assessment.	1 private post = ½ hour instruction 1 shared post (incl. reading all classmates' posts) = 1 hour instruction
Case studies and problem solving scenarios	Instructor leads students in performing In-depth analysis utilizing higher-order analytical skills, which relate to course objectives. Analysis is shared with instructor and/or classmates for feedback and assessment.	1 case study analysis and post = 1-2 hours
		1 case study analysis and post = 2-hours instruction
Chat rooms for class or group projects	Instructor directs students in collaborative, synchronous discussion with specific expectations for participation and feedback. (Chats are retained within course for further review.)	1 hour chat = 1 hour instruction
Conferences (group)	Under instructor's guidance, students participate in collaborative, synchronous learning with specific expectations for participation and feedback (including required exam reviews). When possible, calls or online meetings are recorded for review.	½ hour conference = ½ hour instruction 1 hour conference = 1 hour instruction

Instructional Activity	Description of Instructional Activity	Rate of Equivalency
Conferences (in-depth individual)	Instructor engages students in collaborative, one-to-one synchronous learning experience; student will need to submit materials for prior review and meet specific participation and feedback expectations. When possible, calls or online meetings are recorded for review.	20 minute conference = 1 hour instruction (based on practice for independent studies)
Discussion board	Instructor guides/mediates threaded discussion, engaging learners with content that directly relates to course objectives and that has specified timeframes, expectations for participation, and thoughtful analysis.	<p>Initial post – min. 250 words (requires reading all posts) = ½ hour instruction 1 post/reply (requires reading all posts and responding to minimum of 3) = 1 hour instruction; must meet specified criteria Equivalencies may vary further based on specific course expectations/content</p> <p>2 posts (requires reading all posts and responding to a minimum of 2) = 2 hours instruction Posts may require citation, which would impact rate of equivalency.</p>
Field trips or tours (includes virtual tours)	Instructor provides leadership as students (individuals or in groups) analyze an activity and prepare a paper or presentation, to be shared in whole or in part with instructor and/or classmates.	Instructor-led 1 hour tour = 1 hour instruction Student(s) without instructor: 1 hour tour and reflection paper = 1 hour instruction
Guided project	Instructors lead students in a summative individual project with specific learning objectives; student and instructor collaborate via email, chat, discussion board, and/or in person to research, analyze, synthesize, and prepare project. Instructor receives periodic updates and provides guidance and feedback.	1 hour of instruction per week for duration of project (based on practice for independent studies)
Instruction and presentations	Instructors provide students with instruction, including presentations in a virtual classroom setting.	1 hour = 1 hour instruction
Instructional CDs, PowerPoints, videos	Instructor-mediated content is made available in an alternative delivery format for students to view/interact with in order to expand upon and clarify course concepts and objectives.	Student reviews and posts response to 1 unit of content = 1 hour instruction

Instructional Activity	Description of Instructional Activity	Rate of Equivalency
Learning Teams/ Group project	Instructors engage students in a mediated, culminating activity with specific learning objectives. With faculty guidance, students collaborate via email, chat rooms, discussion boards, and/or face-to-face contact to research and then analyze, synthesize, and prepare project, with instructor receiving periodic updates and providing guidance to group.	1 hour of instruction per week for duration of project
Lecture activity - video, written or audio	In response to direction from instructor, students develop questions, comments, or observations to be shared with classmates and instructor through discussion boards or participation in chat rooms.	Student reviews 1 lecture and posts response = 1 hour instruction
Library research	Instructor guides students through in-depth research of scholarly articles or professional journals that relate to course objectives; results of research are to be shared with class in a designated manner.	1 five (5) page project = 1 hour instruction 1 three-five (3-5) page paper = 1-2 hours instruction
Modeling	Under instructor guidance, students compute, analyze, and/or interpret data and/or generate appropriate visual aids (using tools like Excel, SPSS, etc.).	Student completes data analysis for one unit of study post = ½ hour instruction Detailed evaluative response to class on assessment from instructor post = ½ hour instruction Student completes data analysis for one unit of study post = 1 hour instruction Detailed evaluative response to class on assessment from instructor post = 1 hour instruction
Online quizzes	Instructor-created quiz through in which students demonstrate subject knowledge to provide faculty with feedback on students' progress (formative or summative quizzes).	1 hour test = 1 hour of instruction <i>(cannot include final exam)</i>
Peer Review/ assessment	Employing instructor-designated criteria, students evaluate each other's work.	Student review of peer assessment and follow up response post/email to student/teacher = 0.5-2 hours of instruction based on scope and estimated number of hours of review/interaction

Instructional Activity	Description of Instructional Activity	Rate of Equivalency
Portfolio Preparation	Instructors guide learners through compilation, evaluation, and production of learning portfolios prepared according to course /program rubrics and aligned with specific learning outcomes.	Portfolio conferencing with final presentation of completed portfolio = 1 instructional hour, or equivalent to length of the exercise.
Project Assignment	Instructor assigns a project (written, physical, computer) related to a specific aspect of the course.	1 hour of instruction per week for duration of project (based on practice for independent studies)
Reflection paper or article review	Instructor-guided activity whereby students apply learned concepts to personal experiences or apply higher order analytic skills in assessing scholarly articles or professional journals.	1 private post = ½ hour instruction 2 shared posts (required to read all classmates' posts) = 1.5-2 hours instruction Posts may require citations which would impact equivalency rate.
Service-learning project	Instructor leads students in completion of service project with specific learning objectives that integrates community service with academic study; faculty provides guidance, support, and feedback to students; student shares experience and reflection with classmates via emails, chats, discussion boards, and/or face-to-face.	1 hour of instruction per week for duration of project
Virtual Laboratory and Lab Reports	Instructor provides students with computer-simulation or online laboratories in blended lab-based courses or in order to replace missed laboratories. Instructors require students to submit, share, or post lab reports produced and assess work according to course rubric.	1 hour of virtual laboratory = 1 instructional hour, or equivalent to length of the exercise 1 lab report post and review with response to classmates posts = ½ hour instruction
Web-conferencing	Instructor engages students in desktop-to-desktop or classroom video streaming instruction for collaborative, synchronous learning with specific expectations for participation and feedback (i.e., WebEx, Wimba, Skype, GoToMeeting).	1 hour webinar = 1 hour instruction
Web-Quest (Internet research)	Under instructor guidance, students research information via Internet that enhances learning and addresses specific course outcomes; findings are shared with the instructor and classmates.	1 in-depth post = 1 hour instruction

Instructional Activity	Description of Instructional Activity	Rate of Equivalency
Workplace Integration	Guided by course instructor, cohort students engaged in a structured, professional program make intentional application of classroom knowledge within the workplace and evaluate that experience in conjunction with instructor and cohort members.	1 hour of instruction per week for duration of project (a maximum of 2 hours per week)

Source: Shared by Kennesaw State University (March 2013).

Revisions:

03/08/2022: Corrected URL, updated VSU logo

04/08/2024: Added new USG course instructional delivery codes