

403 – Definition of a Semester Credit Hour

Purpose:

The purpose of this operational procedure is to define a semester credit hour (hereafter referred to simply as a credit hour) at Bismarck State College (BSC), in accordance with Higher Learning Commission and federal Department of Education requirements.

Procedure:

Bismarck State College defines a credit hour as an amount of work, measured in intended learning outcomes, and verified by evidence of student achievement that reasonably approximates:

1. Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class work each week for a semester the duration of which has been established by the NDUS common academic year calendar.
2. At least an equivalent amount of work as outlined in item 1 above for other academic activities including, but not limited to; laboratory work, shop work, studio work, internships, service learning, and seminars leading to the awarding of credit hours.
3. For the purposes of this definition, one “hour” of instruction is defined as 50 to 60 minutes of scheduled faculty-student engagement per week. Laboratory or other academic activities may require 2–3 hours per week for each credit hour awarded, depending on the nature of the work.

This operational procedure applies to all courses offered for credit by BSC regardless of format, delivery modes, course length and technological enhancements. These formats and delivery modes include, but are not limited to, the following: traditional, interactive video networking, online, hybrid, seminar, and independent study, as well as laboratory, shop and studio classes. Technological enhancements may include such things as audio and video recorded lectures and demonstrations, electronic texts and other learning materials, and self-paced learning modules. The amount of work required in courses lasting less than the full semester shall be consistent with that required in a full semester. The expectation is that regardless of new technologies and pedagogical techniques employed by the instructor the average student workload will remain consistent with the definition approved by the college.

The College understands and embraces that the amount of work required of a given student to earn a specified grade in a class can be highly variable, depending on factors such as course content, student aptitude, background, and motivation. Therefore, the definition is meant to represent the amount of effort required for an average student to achieve an average grade

while mastering course content and meeting the expected learning outcomes. Individual students may spend more or less time achieving the same levels of mastery.

The large majority of courses currently offered by BSC were developed for traditional face-to-face delivery on campus in a standard classroom, laboratory, or shop. This body of work establishes for BSC the foundation for determining the amount of work required of students to earn a credit hour.

Each traditional course that has been converted to a different format is expected to maintain the same learning outcomes and level of student achievement in the new format or delivery mode, and thus, meets the definition of a credit hour. In cases where BSC courses are developed only for online delivery, academic units will compare online-only courses to similar courses offered in traditional and online modes to ensure the definition of a credit hour is met.

The BSC Faculty, in cooperation with academic leadership, will maintain the standards set forth in this operational procedure through the Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate as new courses are proposed and approved. Academic units will evaluate their curricula to ensure these standards are followed as needed.

For purposes of awarding transfer credit to students bringing coursework with them from other regionally accredited institutions, BSC will award semester credit on a 1-to-1 basis where semester credit was earned. Quarter hour credit will be awarded at a rate of 1 quarter hour being equal to 2/3 semester hour. These equivalencies assume similar levels of academic rigor at other regionally accredited institutions.

References:

History of This Procedure:

First policy draft approved by the Faculty Senate on April 2, 2015, reviewed by the Operations Council on April 8, 2015, and approved by the Executive Council on May 28, 2015; October 18, 2016. Converted to Operational Procedure: July 31, 2025. Approved by the Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs on July 30, 2025.

Non-substantive changes approved by the Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs on October 8, 2025.