

Rice University Guidelines for Assigning Credit Hours to Courses

Rice University policy stipulates that the number of credit hours awarded depends on the course workload, amount of contact time with the instructor, and the amount of study time. A semester course typically requires two units of study time (e.g. preparation and reflection time) by the student for every one unit of contact time (synchronous or asynchronous) with the instructor. Rice Policy defines these units as follows:

The *contact hour*: equivalent to 50 minutes of student engagement in scheduled instruction with the instructor

The *study hour*: equivalent to 50 minutes of student engagement with coursework outside of contact time

A semester credit hour should reflect a minimum of 2100 minutes (35 hours) of student engagement during a semester, typically over a period of 14 weeks. The ratio of contact time versus study time may vary depending on the type of course and/or method of instruction. A standard lecture/seminar course with three contact hours (150 minutes) per week and six study hours per week (300 minutes) for 14 weeks will carry three credit hours. Lecture/seminar courses may be awarded more than 3 credit hours based on additional contact time, activities, or coursework incorporated into the course.

An equivalent amount of contact time and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration. Some courses involve meetings or work other than traditional classroom meetings, including laboratories, seminars, independent study courses, and experiential courses. **Credit hours for these courses are awarded based on work and contact time for these activities that is comparable to the time required for the academic credit hour.** Departments and instructors may also incorporate additional instructional elements to a course to justify adding an additional credit hour beyond the credit hours related to scheduled activities.

The guidelines below are arranged according to the course categories used by the Office of the Registrar. They are meant as a general guide to minimum standards for assigning credit hours, based on stated contact hours and reasonable expectation of the study time required. It is unavoidable that actual student study time may vary widely among students in the same course. Departments and schools should exercise discretion in interpreting the guidelines with regard to their established norms. An hour in the guidelines below refers to the 50 minute hour in the Rice Policy (as defined above).

Lecture, Seminar, Lab, and Studio Courses

Each credit hour awarded requires at least 3 hours of student engagement in class meetings and study per week for the duration of a 14 week semester. An equivalent amount of time in class meetings and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration.

For Lecture and Seminar courses, which meet for a specified number of hours, the typical time allocation is 1 contact hour and 2 study hours weekly per credit hour.

For Laboratory and Studio courses, it is expected that *at least* one hour of work per credit hour awarded will take place in the laboratory/studio and/or under direct supervision. Student preparation time for creative coursework in architecture, and the visual and performing arts should be calculated according to established department or school practice.

Lecture Lab Courses (LL) (Scheduled activities in addition to a lecture)

Lecture Lab Courses include a scheduled, related course component each week in addition to a lecture which justifies adding a credit hour to a course. This component is required of all students, and will generally take place at the same time every week, with the place, day, and time specified on the syllabus. *To add a credit hour to a three-credit course, instructors must require 3 hours of additional student work per week, at least one of which will generally involve some form of instructor contact.*

These scheduled course activities might include, but are not limited to:

- A. Laboratories (and Field research). In general, an additional credit-hour will reflect a total of three hours' work per week by the student, at least one of which will take place in the laboratory under direct supervision. Most laboratory courses will assign one additional credit hour for three hours additional work. Departments that offer a five credit-hour class, assigning two to the laboratory section, will expect proportionally more time in the lab or in preparatory work outside of the lab from students to justify awarding the additional credit-hour. Field research activities which are scheduled like a lab should be treated similarly.
- B. Event series (e.g. attendance at film screenings, musical performances, speaker series, etc.). In general, an additional credit-hour will reflect a total of three hours' work per week by the student that combines preparation before the event, the event itself, and work subsequent to the event, such as responses to assigned questions.

Independent Study (IND) and Research (RES) Courses

Independent study courses are a self-directed approach to the acquisition of knowledge and/or competence in which a student plans and carries out learning activities under the guidance of an instructor. They can include directed study, directed reading, design, and may include thesis and dissertation courses. *Research courses* are based on independent research and investigation, including directed research and/or research projects. These courses do not have scheduled class time, but rely on one-on-one arrangements between the instructor and student. Credit will be assigned on the basis of *at least 3 hours of work per week, for the duration of a 14 week semester, for 1 credit hour*. A 3-credit hour directed study would typically involve 9 hours of

research/meetings per week. An equivalent amount of time in class meetings and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration. It is expected to include both organized contact between the instructor and student, and agreed-upon readings and assignments.

1. There should be an initial meeting with the faculty advisor to design goals and outcomes of the study. Terms of evaluation should be reached and put in writing.
2. There should be periodic meetings between the student and faculty advisor throughout the semester.
3. There should be a final product that results (i.e. a paper, presentation, performance, etc.)

Departments may establish guidelines based on the type of product and/or number of pages of written work that would be produced for a given number of credit hours.

Internship/Practicum Courses (INT)

Experiential learning courses (e.g. internships, practicums and community-based work) provide the student with hands-on experiences that should be related to the knowledge gained through classroom instruction. These courses may include a mix of the traditional lecture and added experiential work. An internship course usually involves a career-related learning experience of limited duration in which an individual takes on responsible roles outside of the traditional university environment where training and supervision are included. Credit will be assigned on the basis of *at least 3 hours of work per week, for the duration of a 14 week semester, for 1 credit hour*. An equivalent amount of time in class meetings and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration. It is expected that these hours will include some organized contact with an instructor to discuss/report on/enhance the experience. This contact need not occur during regular class times, and may occur on a one-on-one basis or as a group. The nature of the contact with the instructor should be outlined in the course syllabus.

Internship courses typically include a mixture of three components:

- Work as an intern
- Meetings with the instructor
- Research and writing assignments (either as directed study or a classroom assignment)

Activity Courses (ACT)

Activity courses are courses that include activity during which the student learns a sport, trade, hobby, or other skill through hands-on practice. Activity courses are typically Physical Activity Program (LPAP) courses. Each credit hour awarded requires at least 3 hours of student engagement per week for the duration of a 14 week semester. An equivalent amount of time in class meetings and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration.

Intensive Learning Experience Courses (ILE) (applies to Jones School Management program only)

Condensed workshops designed to immerse students in practical situations using simulations and case analysis. Credit hours will be assigned on the basis of at least 3 hours of work per week, for the duration of a 14 week semester, for 1 credit hour. An equivalent amount of time in class meetings and preparation is required for shorter semesters or course duration.

Online Courses (Currently, Summer Sessions only)

Online courses may consist, at one extreme, of watching an on-campus lecture course at a distance (in which case the credit hours awarded would be the same as that calculated for the on-campus course) to a completely asynchronous online course where the student's contact time is indeterminate (in which case the calculation of credit hours is more difficult).

Whenever there is an analogous course taught in a traditional format the online course number of credits would be computed the same as the on-campus course. With unique online courses the following factors need to be considered in calculating contact and preparation time required and/or expected during the course and documented for submission to the Office of the Registrar:

1. Time spent in synchronous or instructor-led online time;
2. Time spent in on-campus learning (for blended or hybrid courses);
3. Time spent on asynchronous viewing of online materials (Run-time on viewing online media);
4. Time spent to read and study asynchronous online screens and materials including simulations, self-paced instructional videos, and instructional games; and
5. Time spent in online instructional assignments and activities including:
 - a. Postings to group discussion sites/bulletin boards,
 - b. Online group project work,
 - c. Use of social media sites for group discussion/participation, and
 - d. Student-teacher interaction.

For all new online courses and revisions to existing online courses without an analogous traditional course these estimates need to be documented for determining the credit hours to be assigned to the course and reviewed by the Office of the Registrar.

Additional Credit Hours beyond Contact Hours “Plus” Components

Departments and instructors can justify adding a credit hour to a course when additional pedagogical components are added that take place outside of scheduled meeting times. These additional components must be required of all students, included in the syllabus, and require significant instructional and preparation time, equivalent to 3 hours of work per week for the duration of a 14 week semester. Students should commit to participate in these required events at the beginning of the term. These additional components might include (but are not limited to) activities such as the following:

1. Periodic events, field research, or field trips. Students may be required to attend a series of events or field trips over the course of the semester. These events need not occur on a weekly basis, but should involve at least 42 hours of preparation, additional assignments and meetings over the semester. These events should be related to and enhance students' learning of the course topic. Students should be required to complete assignments related to these events, or to incorporate information from these events into existing assignments. These events or field trips can be planned jointly for several courses with related topics. Instructors will need to work with students and develop appropriate plans for students who are unable to attend all the events scheduled outside of scheduled times.
2. Recitations, discussion sections or tutorials. Instructors may schedule additional class sessions for discussion, problem sets or other activities that involve additional scheduled contact hours. Alternatively, instructors may set up weekly tutorials for individual or small group meetings. These would not be scheduled for the whole class, but would be scheduled on the individual or group level.
3. Community-based programs or other Theory-Practice-Learning activities. Community service that is connected with a class or course of study would also be eligible for credit under the auspices of experiential learning. We note there is an expectation that the community work would be linked with the academic content of the course, and that there would be some organized instructor contact/reporting. This mechanism for instructor contact/reporting should be outlined in the course syllabus.
4. Online activities, such as debates or discussions, in which the members of the class are not physically assembled but are **preferably signed in with the instructor at a designated and scheduled time** every week, whose conduct of the activity will itself have pedagogical value and be relevant to the achievement of the goals of the course. On average, an additional credit hour will reflect three hours' work per week by the student. Asynchronous on-line activities involving guided discussion or debate may be included, but these must be more than an online assignment and should provide instructor interaction and clear expectations about the nature and extent of student participation.
5. Other. Instructors or departments may propose other pedagogical activities that have not been included in this document. In the course proposal, when describing those activities justifying an additional credit hour, the nature of the activities, the oversight by the instructor and time required should be taken into consideration.