

Oberlin College and Conservatory
Credit-Hour Policy Statement*

Background

Institutions participating in Title IV federal financial-aid programs must comply with the federal credit-hour definition. Oberlin College's compliance is monitored by the Higher Learning Commission, its regional accrediting agency.

As defined in the Code of Federal Regulations ([34 CFR 600.2](#)), 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 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.”

(NB – a 50-minute instructional hour constitutes one hour of classroom time.)

Credit hours at Oberlin

Courses at Oberlin generally adhere to the guidelines outlined in paragraph (1) of this definition – namely, by requiring one hour (i.e., 50 minutes) of classroom and/or direct instruction time, plus a minimum of two hours of indirect (out-of-class) student work, per credit hour each week for approximately fifteen weeks, or an equivalent amount of work over a different period of time.

Alternately, in keeping with paragraph (2) of the federal credit-hour definition, some Oberlin courses require a total of at least three hours of established academic activities each week, for approximately fifteen weeks, per credit hour (= at least 45 total hours of academic activities per credit hour).

Classroom time is one form of direct instruction offered at Oberlin. Other types of direct instruction offering students significant interaction with faculty member or qualified instructors include, but are not limited to:

- participation in field trips
- attendance at required colloquia or speaker series
- departmental brownbag events
- library sessions held outside of regular class time
- discussion sections outside of regular class time

* Approved and adopted by the General Faculty at a meeting on May 16, 2018

- mandatory participation on discussion boards moderated by faculty members
- required viewing or listening to different forms of media (videos, films, albums, and the like) outside of regular class time
- office hours with faculty
- review sessions
- detailed feedback on student writing and other work
- rehearsals with faculty members
- coaching sessions
- masterclasses
- required community service activities

Types of indirect or out-of-class student work include, but are not limited to, various sorts of reading, writing, and research activities; student visits to Oberlin's Writing Center, its Center for Learning, Education, and Research in the Sciences (CLEAR), the Cooper International Learning Center (CILC) for foreign-language study, or similar campus units; and private rehearsal and practice.

Examples

All full academic courses at Oberlin are 4.0 credit hours or more. In accordance with the federal definition of a credit hour, such courses require at least twelve hours (i.e., three hours of work per credit * four credits per course = twelve hours) of classroom, direct instruction, and/or indirect or out-of-class student work per week for fifteen weeks, for a total of 180 hours per semester.

Generally, this amount of work might break down as follows:

For 4.0-credit classes that meet three hours per week (e.g., three hour-long sessions or two 1.5-hour sessions)

<u>Classroom time</u>	<u>Direct instruction</u>	<u>Indirect work</u>	=	
3 hrs./week	1 hr./week	8 hrs./week		12 hrs./week
				x 15 weeks/semester
				=====
				180 hrs./semester

For 4.0-credit seminars that meet once per week

<u>Classroom time</u>	<u>Direct instruction</u>	<u>Indirect work</u>	=	
2 hrs./week	1 hr./week	9 hrs./week		12 hrs./week
				x 15 weeks/semester
				=====
				180 hrs./semester

Private- and applied-study courses (including performance ensembles) in the Conservatory of Music follow a similar breakdown. For such courses, classroom time and direct instruction might include one-on-one private study with a faculty member, rehearsals conducted or directed by faculty members, weekly studio classes, masterclasses, and/or faculty coachings, while indirect or out-of-class work might include students' private practice or rehearsal, among other forms of academic activity.

The following examples illustrate how workloads in private- and applied-study courses in the Conservatory comport with the federal credit-hour definition:

For 6.0-credit private applied-study courses

<u>Classroom time</u>	<u>Direct instruction</u>	<u>Indirect work</u>
2 hrs./week		16 hrs./week =
		18 hrs./week
		x 15 weeks/semester
		=====
		270 hrs./semester

In the above example, “classroom time” includes a weekly hour-long private lesson with a faculty member plus a weekly hour-long studio class, while “indirect work” constitutes daily private practice.

For 2.0-credit applied-study courses

<u>Classroom time</u>	<u>Direct instruction</u>	<u>Indirect work</u>
6 hrs./week		=
		6 hrs./week
		x 15 weeks/semester
		=====
		90 hrs./semester

In this example, “classroom time” constitutes scheduled, mandatory rehearsals with faculty members. Such courses would also include periodic performances throughout the semester, not reflected in the calculus above.

The above examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to illustrate some of the ways that academic, private-study, and applied-study courses at Oberlin College and Conservatory adhere to the federal credit-hour definition.