

## Montana State University Billings Credit Hour Policy

### Credit Hour Guidelines, Face-to-Face Courses

The Board of Regents of Higher Education for the State of Montana has established a policy on Credit Hours (BOR Policy 309.1 – Course Credits: Short Courses and Workshops) that explicitly notes: “The method for awarding credit for short courses and workshops should be consistent with the method used in the regular academic program.” The policy then identifies guidelines for awarding credit hours:

“Credit recommendations are expressed in semester credit hours. In determining semester hour recommendations, evaluators use the following guidelines:

- A. One semester credit hour<sup>1</sup> for each 15 hours of classroom contact plus 30 hours of outside preparation or the equivalent; or
- B. One semester credit hour for each 30 hours of laboratory work plus necessary outside preparation or its equivalent, normally expected to be 15 hours; or
- C. One semester credit hour for not less than 45 hours (contact hours) or the equivalent for shop instruction, field and clinical experiences, internships and/or preceptorships.<sup>2</sup>

At Montana State University Billings the *credit hour* is used as a unit of instruction to quantify student learning. Following the Board of Regents policy outlined above, MSU Billings requires a minimum of 37.5 contact hours for a traditional 3-credit class (using, 60 minutes of traditional class-time instruction as a standard “hour”).

### Credit Hour Guidelines, Online Courses

While MSU Billings uses the policy above as a guideline for traditional face-to-face classes, the institution follows a competency-based policy for online and “blended” courses. This is in compliance with the US Department of Education acknowledgement that “seat time” is not an appropriate measure of all courses.<sup>3</sup> For online courses that have the same learning objectives as face-to-face courses, which follow the BOR standard above, the institution awards the same credit hours for satisfactory performance in the course however it is offered. This competency-based policy is assessed through the regular peer review processes as outlined in faculty labor agreements.

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<sup>1</sup> MSU Billings bases its class schedule on 60-minute classes, though notes that the US Department of Education has established “hours” as a general baseline: See Federal Register (Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66846): “We believe that it is unnecessary to define one hour as either 50 minutes or one clock hour because the primary purpose...of the proposed credit-hour definition is to provide institutions with a baseline, not an absolute value, for determining reasonable equivalencies or approximations for the amount of academic activity defined in [the policy].”

<sup>2</sup> See BOR Policy 309.1 – Course Credits: Short Courses and Workshops: <http://mus.edu/borpol/bor300/309-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Federal Register (Vol. 75, No. 209, p. 66846), “We believe that the definition of a credit hour in Sec. 600.2 in these final regulations emphasizes that institutions may award credit to courses for an amount of work represented by verifiable student achievement of institutionally established learning outcomes.”