

**CREDIT HOUR ISSUES (Sec. 600.2; 602.24; 603.24; 668.8)  
(FR pp. 66946-7; 66949-50)**

*One change made to definition; no changes in accreditation and state approval of public postsecondary vocational institutions; technical change to clock to credit hour conversion.*

**Rationale for Regulation:** The Department’s Inspector General (IG) believes there should be a standard federal definition of credit hour because credit hours are the basis on which federal student aid is awarded. Accreditation reviews are the primary means by which the Department intends to assure compliance, and regulatory language is strengthened accordingly.

In addition, the regulations attempt to ensure that students taking short-term courses measured in credit hours are not receiving more student aid than is proportionate to the actual course time requirement.

**Key Provisions of the Regulation:**

#1 – It establishes a federal definition of credit hour to mean “an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement” that is determined by an institution to be equivalent to either a Carnegie unit or an equivalent amount of work over time.

#2 - It require accreditation agencies to review and evaluate the reliability and accuracy of an institution’s assignment of credit hours.

#3 – It require States that review public postsecondary vocational education institutions to examine the reliability and accuracy of the assignment of credit hours by these institutions. [Four States that have such agencies: New York, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Puerto Rico.]

#4 – It revises the method of converting clock hours to credit hours for short-term, undergraduate, non-degree programs that measure time in credit hours. Despite the use of credit hours, these programs (for various reasons) are considered clock-hour programs. The regulations specify that the credit hours must be converted through a specified conversion formula to determine if the course contains the requisite number of clock hours.

**Regulatory Language:**

**#1 – Definition of “credit hour”**

**§600.2 Definitions. [FR page 66946]**

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**Credit hour:** Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), 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 trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, 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.

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## **#2 – Accreditation provisions [FR page 66947]**

### **§602.24 Additional procedures certain institutional accreditors must have.**

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(f) Credit-hour policies. The accrediting agency, as part of its review of an institution for initial accreditation or preaccreditation or renewal of accreditation, must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours.

(1) The accrediting agency meets this requirement if--  
(i) It reviews the institution's--  
(A) Policies and procedures for determining the credit hours, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2, that the institution awards for courses and programs; and  
(B) The application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; and

(ii) Makes a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education.

(2) In reviewing and evaluating an institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hour assignments, an accrediting agency may use sampling or other methods in the evaluation, sufficient to comply with paragraph (f)(1)(i)(B) of this section.

(3) The accrediting agency must take such actions that it deems appropriate to address any deficiencies that it identifies at an institution as part of its reviews and

evaluations under paragraph (f)(1)(i) and (ii) of this section, as it does in relation to other deficiencies it may identify, subject to the requirements of this part.

(4) If, following the institutional review process under this paragraph (f), the agency finds systemic noncompliance with the agency's policies or significant noncompliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, the agency must promptly notify the Secretary.

### **#3 – State Public Postsecondary Educational Institution Review Agencies**

#### **§603.24 Criteria for State agencies. [FR page 66947]**

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(c) Credit-hour policies. The State agency, as part of its review of an institution for initial approval or renewal of approval, must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours.

(1) The State agency meets this requirement if--

(i) It reviews the institution's--

(A) Policies and procedures for determining the credit hours, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2, that the institution awards for courses and programs; and

(B) The application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; and

(ii) Makes a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education.

(2) In reviewing and evaluating an institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hour assignments, a State agency may use sampling or other methods in the evaluation, sufficient to comply with paragraph (c)(1)(i)(B) of this section.

(3) The State agency must take such actions that it deems appropriate to address any deficiencies that it identifies at an institution as part of its reviews and evaluations under paragraph (c)(1)(i) and (ii) of this section, as it does in relation to other deficiencies it may identify, subject to the requirements of this part.

(4) If, following the institutional review process under this paragraph (c), the agency finds systemic noncompliance with the agency's policies or significant noncompliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, the agency must promptly notify the Secretary.

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*(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1094(c)(4))*

### **#4 - Eligible Program and Clock to Credit Hour Conversion**

#### **§668.8 Eligible program. [FR pp. 66949-50]**

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(k) Undergraduate educational program in credit hours. (1) Except as provided in paragraph (k)(2) of this section, if an institution offers an undergraduate educational program in credit hours, the institution must use the formula contained in paragraph (l) of this section to determine whether that program satisfies the requirements contained in paragraph (c)(3) or (d) of this section, and the number of credit hours in that educational program for purposes of the title IV, HEA programs, unless—

(i) The program is at least two academic years in length and provides an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, a professional degree, or an equivalent degree as determined by the Secretary; or

(ii) Each course within the program is acceptable for full credit toward that institution's associate degree, bachelor's degree, professional degree, or equivalent degree as determined by the Secretary provided that--

(A) The institution's degree requires at least two academic years of study; and

(B) The institution demonstrates that students enroll in, and graduate from, the degree program.

(2) A program is considered to be a clock-hour program for purposes of the title IV, HEA programs if--

(i) Except as provided in paragraph (k)(3) of this section, a program is required to measure student progress in clock hours when--

(A) Receiving Federal or State approval or licensure to offer the program; or

(B) Completing clock hours is a requirement for graduates to apply for licensure or the authorization to practice the occupation that the student is intending to pursue;

(ii) The credit hours awarded for the program are not in compliance with the definition of a credit hour in 34 CFR 600.2; or

(iii) The institution does not provide the clock hours that are the basis for the credit hours awarded for the program or each course in the program and, except as provided in §668.4(e), requires attendance in the clock hours that are the basis for the credit hours awarded.

(3) The requirements of paragraph (k)(2)(i) of this section do not apply to a program if there is a State or Federal approval or licensure requirement that a limited component of the program must include a practicum, internship, or clinical experience component of the program that must include a minimum number of clock hours.

(l) Formula. (1) Except as provided in paragraph (l)(2) of this section, for purposes of determining whether a program described in paragraph (k) of this section satisfies the requirements contained in paragraph (c)(3) or (d) of this section, and of determining the number of credit hours in that educational program with regard to the title IV, HEA programs--

(i) A semester hour must include at least 37.5 clock hours of instruction;

(ii) A trimester hour must include at least 37.5 clock hours of instruction; and

(iii) A quarter hour must include at least 25 clock hours of instruction.

(2) The institution's conversions to establish a minimum number of clock hours of instruction per credit may be less than those specified in paragraph (1)(1) of this section, if the institution's designated accrediting agency, or recognized State agency for the approval of public postsecondary vocational institutions, for participation in the title IV, HEA programs has identified any deficiencies with the institution's policies and procedures, or their implementation, for determining the credit hours, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2, that the institution awards for programs and courses, in accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(f), or, if applicable, 34 CFR 603.24(c), so long as--

(i) The institution's student work outside of class combined with the clock-hours of instruction meet or exceed the numeric requirements in paragraph (1)(1) of this section; and

(ii)(A) A semester hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction;

(B) A trimester hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction; and

(C) A quarter hour must include at least 20 hours of instruction.

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