

Course Credit Guidelines

The Provost Office and Graduate College offer helpful guidelines on determining the appropriate course credit to offer based on contact hours. This document provides both sets of guidelines.

Provost Office Guidelines

There are no rigid ratios between course credit hours and class meeting time for all instruction types. It is customary for courses to meet 14 to 20 hours per semester for each hour of credit earned. (Example: a traditional 3 credit-hour course usually meets 3 times a week for 50 minutes each session resulting in 43 total contact hours for the semester.) This ratio should be observed for organized instruction, which excludes laboratory, independent study, special problems, and thesis research courses.

Useful guidance is provided in [Article 3, Part 7, § 3-704 \(b\)](#) of the *Student Code* and Graduate College Course Credit and Contact Hour Expectations (below). They call attention to an important distinction between ‘contact’ and ‘clock’ hours (not numerically the same). The former represents true meeting time which is to be accounted for in course syllabi and is often used for program accreditation purposes.

Graduate College Guidelines – applies only to courses awarding graduate credit

B. Graduate Course Credit and Contact Hour Expectations*

1. Credit
 - a. Course proposals should justify why the course warrants graduate credit in terms of level of content, previous knowledge required, relevance to current research, methodology, etc. (See [Criteria](#), above.)
 - b. If credit for graduate students is different than credit for undergraduate students, the extra work required should be of a concrete nature, included in calculation of the final grade, and listed explicitly. For example in a class with 3 hours of undergraduate credit and 4 hours of graduate credit, it is necessary to state, ‘graduate students must lead one class discussion, write weekly summaries that will be graded, and turn in a 25 page paper instead of a 15 page paper,’ than to simply say, ‘graduate students will be held to demonstrating graduate level depth in class discussions and assignments.’ Demonstration of graduate level depth in class discussions and assignments however should be expected of graduate students if credit for graduate and undergraduate students is equal.
 - c. If variable credit is to be offered to graduate students, e.g., 3 or 4 hours, the higher credit should be justified by describing the extra work required and how it will be factored into the final grade.

2. Contact hours*

The Graduate College has not established rigid ratios between course credit hours and

class contact hours*. However, in recognition of desired variability associated with subject matter and modes of teaching, the following issues are relevant for consideration:

- a. The number of class contact hours* in organized instruction between instructor and student is one factor affecting the quality of instruction. It is customary for graduate courses that carry either 3 or 4 hours of credit to meet in organized instruction for 43 to 58 contact hours* per term (3 to 4 contact hours* per week in fall or spring) including examinations. These ratios should be observed for organized instruction, which excludes laboratory, independent study, special problems, and thesis research courses. An additional laboratory that meets for two to three hours per week can justify one additional hour of credit.
- b. Substantial deviation from these ratios should be justified by the department proposing the course. Each case will be judged on its merits as detailed in the course proposal.

* The distinction between a contact hour and a clock hour is as follows:

- A class contact hour is defined as one 50-minute session, that is, the traditional meeting time within a clock hour, allowing for the mandatory 10-minute passing period beginning at X:50 of the hour.
- If a class session extends past one clock hour, or meets “off-clock,” the total session minutes divided by 50 determines the contact hours for the session. Thus, three 50-minute or two 75-minute sessions per week constitute three contact hours per week.

Guidelines References

Provost Website, Course Detail, Item 13. Course Credit:

<http://www.provost.illinois.edu/programs/cps/proposingcourses.html>

Graduate College Website, Policy for Proposed New and Revised Courses that Carry Graduate Credit, Section B:

<http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/2/chaptervi>