I. PURPOSE & INTENT

Academic credit provides the basis for quantifying the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student enrolled in traditional classroom settings, laboratories, studios, internships and other forms of experiential learning, and distance and Correspondence Education.

This Policy is intended to ensure that all credit-bearing courses and programs offered by the University of South Florida System (USF System) meet the requirements of the Federal definition of a credit hour and the Credit Hours Policy Statement issued by the SACSCOC.

II. STATEMENT OF POLICY

Credit hours are a measure of learning, and support a wide range of activities, including the transfer of students from one institution to another, awarding financial aid, and credentialing for employment. Because of the significance of awarding credit hours, an institution is obligated to ensure that credit hours for courses and programs conform to the commonly accepted standards of higher education, as stated in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Federal Requirements 4.9 (Definition of Credit Hour) and the SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

A. Correspondence Education: “Correspondence education is a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced.”
B. **Direct Faculty Instruction or Traditional Class/Program:** Instruction in a traditional classroom setting in which the faculty member is physically present with students enrolled in the course for which the credit is being awarded.

C. **Distance Education:** “A formal educational process where greater than 50% of instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A Distance Education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD’s, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.”

D. **Federal Definition of a Student Credit Hour:** 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 the following: (1) not less than 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 item (1) above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, cooperative education, practica, studio work, independent research, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

E. **Online Learning:** Credit-bearing courses and programs where greater than 50% of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) is delivered via the internet, and students and instructors are not in the same place. Online Learning is a form of Distance Education. This definition for Online Learning differs from the definition referenced in [BOG Regulation 7.003](#) which authorizes universities to assess distance learning fees on courses where at least 80% of the direct instruction of the course is delivered using some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space, or both.

IV. **SPECIFIC PROVISIONS:**

A. Credit hours awarded to students enrolled in USF System courses must meet the Federal Definition of a Student Credit Hour.

B. Student learning outcomes at the University of South Florida are designed for the formative evaluation of programs. They are also a means of gauging the quality of education independent of traditional seat time.
C. The USF System has a Policy regarding Academic Learning Compacts and Student Learning Outcomes which may be accessed at http://regulationspolicies.usf.edu/policies-and-procedures/pdfs/policy-10-060.pdf.

D. In all cases, but particularly in cases such as Online Learning where seat time is non-verifiable, credit hours are awarded on the basis of documented student learning outcomes that reflect the amount of academically engaged time for a typical student in a traditional format, and on the basis of documentation of the amount and type of work a typical student is expected to complete within a specified period of academically engaged time.

E. The number of credit hours awarded is based on the number and/or rigor of student learning outcomes, with the higher number of credit hours awarded yielding greater number and/or rigor of outcomes.

F. The appropriate Undergraduate or Graduate Council (or the Curriculum Committees for the MD, DPT, PA and Pharmacy programs) approves and awards credit hours for the online delivery of an approved, traditional course/program, or a new course/program seeking approval for online delivery, based on the following:

1. Comparability of student learning outcomes to the traditional delivery of the course/program, or an identified, comparable course/program.

2. Comparability of academically engaged time of students to the traditional delivery of the course/program, or an identified, comparable course/program.

3. A methodology for assessing and reporting on comparability of student learning outcomes for the online course/program and the traditional course/program, or a comparable traditional course/program.

4. A plan for use of assessment results as the basis for ongoing design of the online course/program to ensure comparability with the traditional delivery of the course/program.

G. Approved proposals, along with approved student learning outcomes and plans for academically engaging students in the online course/program, serve as the blueprint for designing and developing the online course/program.

H. See USF System Policy—Regulation 34.0046.0025: Veteran Students’ Services for Students and Award of Academic Credit for more information regarding academic credit for military training and education.

Current Responsible Office*: Academic Affairs
*Refer to the appropriate Responsible Office website for a current name of the Vice President or other Responsible Officer.

History: New 2-25-14 Amended 5-3-17 (technical).