



Policy on Academic Rigor and Contact Hours

Calculating Contact Hours

All credit bearing courses at Central Seminary, regardless of delivery method, require the same number of contact hours or the equivalent thereof. The hours are calculated in the following fashion:

- One contact hour = fifty (50) minutes of classroom instruction
- One semester credit = fifteen (15) contact hours
- Online credit = is based on the amount of material that would be covered in a face-to-face classroom-based contact hour, even though methods for determining whether or not the student has actually completed the reading assignments and forums that sometimes replace in-class discussion related to that material could require an online student to dedicate more time to the course than might be the case in a face-to-face classroom setting.
- Central Seminary's has the following policies regulating participation and contact time spent in the class:
 - Participation in course synchronous class meetings, discussion boards, group projects, and other required online group activities is necessary to pass the course.
 - Central Seminary has attendance requirements for all classes, including those offered online. In a face-to-face class a student who misses more than 20% of a course's contact hours fails the class. The same principle is true for online courses.
 - The learning management systems (LMS) used by Central monitors when a student participates, how much he or she participates, and whether or not that student has participated at all in an online assignment. Deciding not to participate in such exercises is not an option.
 - While it is possible occasionally to miss a group participation activity and still pass the course, failing to participate in more than 20% will result in automatic failure. This means that the student must participate and must do so on a regular basis. (In other words, a student is not allowed to wait until the end of the course and try to do all the work last minute. The student must participate throughout the semester to satisfy attendance requirements).

Academic Rigor

Academic rigor relates to the level and amount of coursework students engage in their courses and programs of study. The seminary expects courses and programs of study to require a sufficient amount of academic rigor to earn credits. Various entities, including accreditation agencies and governments, expect that the school's programs meet a minimum standard of quality in relation to requirements for earning degrees.

This document outlines the academic rigor expectations for courses and programs.

Definitions

Asynchronous - Required classroom activities that are not conducted live, such as online forums or wikis

Contact hour - 1 contact hour is the equivalent of 50 minutes of required classroom activities

Course completion - A minimum level of course requirements have been met and a passing grade has been achieved

Credit hour - 1 credit hour requires the completion of 15 contact hours

Distance education - Any course through which a majority of contact hours are completed when the professor and student are not in the same physical space

Program completion - All required classes and program requirements have been completed, and the required minimum cumulative GPA has been achieved

Synchronous - Required classroom activities that use real-time interaction between professors and students where the professor and student are in the same physical space or meeting live through web, video and/or audio conferencing

Classroom vs. Homework

There is a critical distinction between the classroom and homework. Classroom instruction is:

- any required synchronous meetings
- any required asynchronous activities necessitating professor-student interaction
- any required asynchronous activities necessitating student-student interaction

The calculation of contact hours is based solely on activities that are categorized as classroom instruction. The amount of homework assigned in a course does not impact the awarding of credits. However, the seminary does expect that faculty members will assign homework that is appropriate to the program level. Faculty should use the following ratios for calculating their coursework:

PROGRAM LEVEL	CONTACT HOURS PER CREDIT	ACTUAL MEETING TIME PER CREDIT	HOMEWORK HOURS PER CREDIT	TOTAL HOURS PER CREDIT
Diploma	15	12.5	25	37.5
Master's/Graduate Certificate	15	12.5	37.5	50
Doctoral	15	12.5	50	62.5

Examples of activities that should be counted as homework includes:

- completing required readings individually

- student gatherings/study groups that would not normally be considered classroom activity
- researching for and preparing written or oral assignments
- exams that would be considered “take home”

Though approximating homework hours is not always clear, faculty members should share their expectations with students in written form. Outlining in writing expected homework activities and the expected time given to each activity is a helpful tool for students, even though the time needed for each activity varies based on student ability.

Physical Presence vs. Online Presence

Counting “in-class” hours for distance education courses can be more complicated than classes that only require physical presence, especially when distance education courses can use varying amounts of asynchronous activities. When determining contact hours that are physical presence vs. online presence, the key point is that persons must be in the same physical location to consider any activity physical presence contact hours.