

Policy on the University of North Carolina Academic Calendar and Credit Requirements

I. Purpose. A critical responsibility of all University of North Carolina (UNC) institutions¹ is to ensure appropriate rigor and integrity in their academic programs and instructional courses. This policy outlines the requirements of the constituent institutions regarding academic calendar and credit hour requirements.

II. Academic Calendar Requirements. UNC institutions shall develop academic calendars and course offerings that are structured to ensure consistent academic rigor and learning outcomes, regardless of their duration. Institutions shall publish academic calendars, grading policies, and other related materials in a manner publicly available to students and the public, and ensure that they are widely distributed. In setting the academic calendar for each term, institutions may set holiday periods, study days, and final examinations appropriate to accommodate the scheduled classes.

A. The traditional fall and spring semesters serve as the foundation and core of the academic calendar for all UNC institutions. This academic year is defined as at least 30 weeks of instructional time, typically divided into two equivalent semesters, which is based on the period that begins on the first day of classes in the academic year and ends on the last day of classes or examinations. A week of instructional time is any period of seven consecutive days in which at least one day of regularly scheduled instruction, examination, or (after the last day of classes) at least one scheduled day of study for examinations occurs. Instructional time does not include periods of orientation, counseling, homework, vacation, or other activity not related to class preparation or examination. Therefore, the weeks of instructional time may be less than the number of calendar weeks that elapse between the first day of classes and the last day of classes or examinations.

B. Weeks of instructional time cannot overlap, and a UNC institution cannot use a single day of scheduled instruction, exams, or study time to create more than one week of instruction. Weeks of instructional time may begin and end on a day other than Monday, provided that each week of instructional time comprises a seven consecutive day period (for example, a Wednesday through the following Tuesday), which includes at least one day of scheduled instruction, exams, or study time.

C. Institutions are encouraged to consider and develop additional instructional terms, such as summer sessions, intercessions, and accelerated formats that support and enhance efforts to improve student success metrics and service of transfer students, adult students, returning students, military-affiliated students, and other non-traditional student groups. All courses are expected to ensure the academic credit hour requirements listed below, regardless of the length of the instructional term.

III. Academic Credit Hour Requirements

A. All UNC institutions must ensure that every course offered for academic credit adheres to the standards advanced by the United States Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. 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 one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out of class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester of credit, to result in a minimum of 750-scheduled minutes of instructional time or the equivalent per credit hour.

B. The UNC institution may identify an equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time, or at least an equivalent amount of work 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.

C. The time may include required examination periods but may not include study days. In no case may an institution set a calendar that has optional final examinations, if that time is considered a part of the required minimum class time.

IV. External Requirements. UNC institutions are expected to adhere to all calendar and curricular requirements advanced by the United States Department of Education, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and other relevant organizations.

V. Other Matters

A. Effective Date. The requirements of this policy shall be effective on the date of adoption of this policy by the Board of Governors.

B. Relation to State Laws. The foregoing policies as adopted by the Board of Governors are meant to supplement, and do not purport to supplant or modify, those statutory enactments which may govern the activities of public officials.

C. Regulations and Guidelines. These policies shall be implemented and applied in accordance with such regulations and guidelines as may be adopted from time to time by the president.

¹This policy applies only to work at the baccalaureate level and above, and therefore does not apply to the North Carolina School for Science and Mathematics, the University of North Carolina School of the Arts for its high school programs, or to any lab schools operated by a constituent institution. Secondary instruction at those institutions is subject to separate regulations under various General Statutes.