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MEMORANDUM

TO: Presidents

FROM: Ephraim P. Smith 
Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer

SUBJECT: CSU Definition of Credit Hour

Historically, the California State University has used the equivalent of the Carnegie Unit for measuring and awarding academic credit that represents student work and achievement. In the CSU, the credit hour measure we have used has also been consistent with requirements of our accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

As of July 1, 2011 federal law (600.2 and 600.4) now requires all accredited institutions to comply with the federal definition of the credit hour, which appears below. The federal definition is consistent with CSU practice, but is defined systemwide for the first time. Effective immediately, for all CSU degree programs and courses bearing academic credit, the “credit hour” is defined as “the 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,

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Channel Islands
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Dominguez Hills
East Bay

Fresno
Fullerton
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Los Angeles
Maritime Academy

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Pomona
Sacramento
San Bernardino
San Diego

San Francisco
San José
San Luis Obispo
San Marcos
Sonoma
Stanislaus

internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.”

As in the past, a credit hour is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period. In courses, such as those offered online, in which “seat time” does not apply, a credit hour may be measured by an equivalent amount of work, as demonstrated by student achievement. WASC shall require its accredited institutions to comply with this definition of the credit hour; and it shall review periodically the application of this credit-hour policy across the institution, to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable, appropriate to degree level, and that they conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education.

ES/clm

cc: Charles B. Reed, Chancellor
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