



Credits and Credit Hours Policy

Purpose:

Credits, Credit Hours, Academic Programs, and Credit Length

At Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC), academic credits, credit hours, academic programs, and credit length are governed by policies, procedures, and processes established by the Minnesota State system of colleges and universities, specifically Minnesota State Board Policy 3.36 Academic Programs and its related procedure 3.36.1. What follows below are portions of the policy and procedure that define credits, credit hour parameters, academic programs and credit length, and related expectations of most concern to students and to faculty developing curriculum and academic programs. The full policy and procedure can be found at the links noted above.

Policy Language:

What are credits and credit hours?

As defined by Minnesota State Board procedure 3.36.1, a credit is “a unit of measure assigned to a course offering or an equivalent learning experience that takes into consideration achieved student learning outcomes and instructional time.” Not all credits are the same in type; for example, some credits are lecture credits and some are lab credits. The numbers of hours associated with a class is variable depending on the type of credits a student is taking. “Credit hour” is the term that describes the number of hours associated with a type of credit.

In simple terms, 1 lecture credit equals 1 credit hour of direct instruction in a classroom per week across a semester (at least 15 total hours). If a student takes a 3-credit lecture-based course, the student will spend 3 hours per week in the classroom (minimally 45 total hours in a semester). For every 1 lecture-based credit hour spent in the classroom, a student is expected to spend 2 hours studying outside of class. Non-lecture credits, generally referred to as “lab credits,” encompass lab credits (science), credits for internships and practica, studio credits (art), physical education credits (PE), and clinicals (nursing). One lab credit equals 2 credit hours per week across a semester. If a student is taking a 1-credit PE class, the student will spend 2 hours in the classroom per week across the semester; if a student is taking a 3-credit science class that is composed of 2 credits of lecture and 1 credit of lab, the student will be in the lecture classroom for 2 hours per week and in the lab for 2 hours per week. At FDLTCC, credit hours for credits delivered online, via distance (ITV), or in an accelerated term are not different from those delivered in a traditional classroom during a full semester. For example, students taking a 3-credit lecture-based course in a three-

week period will spend at least 45 hours in the classroom; students taking an 8-week summer science course with a 1-credit lab will spend four hours per week in the lab; and lecture-based courses presented online will meet the same learning goals and outcomes through the same content load as their classroom counterparts. (FDLTCC does not currently offer any online lab credits.)

At FDLTCC, credit type and associated hours are determined and monitored by faculty through the MSCF contract-mandated Academic Affairs and Standards Council's (AASC) curriculum approval process.

Academic programs, degrees, and credit length

FDLTCC defines and creates "degrees" and "academic programs" in a manner consistent with Minnesota State Board procedure 3.36.1. What are commonly referred to as "degrees" are more specifically defined in the language of higher education as "academic awards." There are three types of academic awards in the Minnesota State system: Certificate, diploma, and degree. Each has defined attributes, including credits, abridged descriptions of which are below:

- 1. Undergraduate Certificate.** An undergraduate certificate is awarded upon completion of a 9 to 30 credit academic program. An undergraduate certificate may have an occupational outcome or address a focused area of study. An undergraduate certificate less than 9 or more than 30 credits in length may be approved when the academic program prepares an individual for employment and the length or the designation as a certificate is (1) required by an employer, a licensing body or other regulatory agency, accrediting association, or board, or (2) based on a formal task analysis conducted within the previous three years and the results endorsed by an advisory committee.
- 2. Diploma.** A diploma is awarded upon completion of a 31 to 72 credit undergraduate academic program that prepares students for employment. A minimum of 24 credits shall be in occupational or technical courses. A diploma of more than 72 credits in length may be approved when the academic program prepares an individual for employment and the length is (1) required by an employer, a licensing body or other regulatory agency, accrediting association, or board, or (2) based on a formal task analysis conducted within the previous three years and the results endorsed by an advisory committee.
- 3. Associate of Arts Degree.** An associate of arts degree is awarded upon completion of a 60 credit academic program in the liberal arts and sciences without a named field of study. It is designed for transfer to baccalaureate degree-granting college or university. An associate of arts degree requires completion of at least a 40 credit curriculum that fulfills the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum goal areas.
- 4. Associate of Fine Arts Degree.** An associate of fine arts degree is a named degree awarded upon completion of a 60 credit academic program in particular disciplines in the fine arts. An associate of fine arts degree is designed to transfer in its entirety to a related fine arts discipline baccalaureate degree program. An associate of fine arts degree requires a minimum of 24 credits selected from at least six of the ten goal areas of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

- 5. Associate of Science Degree.** An associate of science degree is awarded upon completion of a 60 credit academic program in scientific, technological, or other professional fields. The associate of science degree is designed to transfer in its entirety to one or more related baccalaureate degree programs. An associate of science degree may address a single specialty or a set of allied specialties such as, but not limited to, (1) agriculture, (2) business, (3) computer and information sciences, (4) education, (5) engineering, (6) engineering technologies, (7) environmental sciences, (8) health sciences, and (9) natural sciences. The associate of science degree requires a minimum of 30 credits selected from at least six of the ten goal areas of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.
- 6. Associate of Applied Science Degree.** An associate of applied science degree is awarded upon completion of a 60 credit academic program in a named field of study in scientific, technological or other professional fields. An associate of applied science degree prepares students for employment in an occupation or range of occupations. An associate of applied science degree may also be accepted in transfer to a related baccalaureate program. An associate of applied science degree requires a minimum of 15 credits selected from at least three of the ten goal areas of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum. At least 30 credits shall be in the academic program's occupational or technical field of preparation.
- 7. Baccalaureate Degree.** A baccalaureate degree is awarded upon completion of a 120 credit academic program incorporating general education, major requirements and, as appropriate, a minor. The bachelor of arts degree is awarded upon completion of a curriculum with a major that focuses on study in the liberal or fine arts. The bachelor of science degree is awarded upon completion of a curriculum with a major that prepares individuals to apply knowledge and skills in areas other than the liberal or fine arts. Minnesota State Board procedure 3.36.1 limits academic programs that lead to an associate degree to a length of 60 credits; academic programs that lead to a baccalaureate degree are limited to 120 credits unless the chancellor grants a waiver based on industry or professional accreditation standards that require a greater number of credits. The chancellor of the Minnesota State system sets program credit length requirements and waiver criteria for undergraduate certificates, diplomas and graduate level awards.

Consistent with Minnesota State Board procedure 3.36.1, the creation of, changes to, and suspension or closure of academic programs at FDLTCC require the approval of the chancellor of the Minnesota State system. An approved academic program includes curricular requirements for earning an academic award, such as credits in general education, a major and/or minor, and all prerequisite courses. Prior to an FDLTCC academic program being approved by the Minnesota State system, the program and its curriculum must first be approved by the college's MSCF contract-mandated Academic Affairs and Standards Council's (AASC), which is led by the college's faculty and through which all academic curricula are approved.

FDLTCC reviews its academic programs on a three-year cycle, the elements of which include attention to program and student learning outcomes, retention and completion,

transfer, finances, labor markets, and planning. In the years between program reviews, programs receive an annual data update that includes a focus on the major indicators of student success.

Does This Policy Have a Procedure?

Yes - Imbedded within the policy.

List Related Policies, Procedures or Forms:

[Minnesota State Board Policy 3.36 Academic Programs](#)

Minnesota State Board [procedure 3.36.1](#).

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