

University of South Dakota School of Law
Credit Hour Policy*

The University of South Dakota School of Law is implementing these policies and procedures that will determine the number of credit hours that we may award throughout the curriculum, pursuant to American Bar Association (“ABA”) Standard 310 and the explanatory guidance. The language of the Standard is below:

Standard 310. DETERMINATION OF CREDIT HOURS FOR COURSEWORK

(a) A law school shall adopt, publish, and adhere to written policies and procedures for determining the credit hours that it awards for coursework.

(b) A “credit hour” is an amount of work that reasonably approximates:

(1) not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and two hours of out-of-class student work per week for fifteen weeks, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

(2) at least an equivalent amount of work as required in subparagraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including simulation, field placement, clinical, co-curricular, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Interpretation 310-1

For purposes of this Standard, fifty minutes suffices for one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction. An “hour” for out-of-class student work is sixty minutes. The fifteen-week period may include one week for a final examination.

Interpretation 310-2

A school may award credit hours for coursework that extends over any period of time, if the coursework entails no less than the minimum total amounts of classroom or direct faculty instruction and of out-of-class student work specified in Standard 310(b).

The Managing Director’s Guidance Memo regarding Standard 310 clarifies the ABA expectation for law schools. The following reflects the expectations set forth in the Standard, the Interpretations, and the Guidance Memo.

Credit Hour Policy

The University of South Dakota School of Law operates on a 14-week semester. The ABA, however, requires us to perform the instruction/homework calculation based on a 15-week semester, regardless of the amount of time that we allocate for students to complete those hours.

* This policy, adopted in March 2019, replaces the Interim Credit Hour Policy that the Law School implemented in August 2018.

In order to meet our requirements, courses that schedule a final examination may treat the week of the exam as the 15th week for purposes of the instruction/homework calculation. Credit-bearing activities that do *not* schedule a final examination (e.g., the LITC, externships, simulation courses, seminars, co-curricular activities, and any other such courses) must schedule the equivalent of 15 weeks of instruction and homework in order to justify the stated award of academic credit.

Credit Hour Standards

All credit-bearing activities are subject to the following requirements:

Credits	Faculty Engagement/week	Faculty Engagement/Semester	Out-of-class work/week	Out-of-class work/semester	Engagement totals
1	50 minutes	750 minutes	120 minutes	1800 minutes	2550 minutes ¹
2	100 minutes	1500 minutes	240 minutes	3600 minutes	5100 minutes ²
3	150 minutes	2250 minutes	360 minutes	5400 minutes	7650 minutes ³
4	200 minutes	3000 minutes	480 minutes	7200 minutes	10,200 minutes ⁴

These totals assume a complete, 15-week semester.

Classes Subject to a Final Examination

If a class is subject to a final examination, the week of the exam counts in the allocation of instruction and time. Therefore, if a professor teaches a 1-credit examination course, he or she would engage in classroom or direct faculty instruction for 700 minutes over 14 weeks; for a 2-credit course, engagement in classroom or direct faculty instruction would last for 1400 minutes over 14 weeks; for a 3-credit course, engagement in classroom or direct faculty instruction would last for 2100 minutes over 14 weeks; for a 4-credit course, engagement in classroom or direct faculty instruction would last for 2800 minutes over 14 weeks. (See the corresponding amounts of homework that instructors should assign per credit in the above chart.) Presumed study during the week of the exam and the *length* of the exam would account for the remainder of the time during the 15th week. The ABA is willing to be flexible regarding the breakdown here; e.g., if you taught a 1-credit exam class that offered slightly less than 700 minutes of instruction over 14 weeks, that would be okay as long as the remaining time was accounted for in a corresponding increase in out-of-class activity. In addition, if you do not assign the perfectly corresponding amount of homework each *week*, the most important thing to do is ensure that you assign the total amount of homework the rule requires over the *semester*. Nonetheless, the breakdowns provided here are the general rules on which you should rely. This same understanding should apply to all of the credit-bearing activities.

¹ This is the equivalent of 42.5 hours.

² This is the equivalent of 85 hours.

³ This is the equivalent of 127.5 hours.

⁴ This is the equivalent of 170 hours.

Classes That Are Not Subject to a Final Examination (Excluding Clinics, Externships, Practicum Courses, and Independent Study)

If a class is not subject to a final examination, the instructor must ensure that the combination of both classroom instruction and direct faculty instruction, in addition to assigned out-of-class work, meets the requirements set forth above. The Guidance Memo recognizes that seminar courses, for instance, often allocate more credits than standard “seat time” would typically allow, in recognition of the fact that students spend a great deal of time out of class in order to prepare a substantial written product. Standard 310 permits this, as long as instructors ensure that the course meets the necessary equivalent of the total engagement/out-of-class work requirements.

LITC, Externship, Practicum Courses

Similarly, the Low Income Tax Clinic, externship courses, and practicum courses have set their own standards regarding the receipt of credit, but at a minimum, students must receive 2550 minutes (42.5 hours) of combined faculty instruction and out-of-class assigned work per credit. Students are responsible for keeping track of their hours, and the receipt of credit is subject to approval by faculty instructors. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will house for three years copies of the final records demonstrating the manner in which students earned credit, as completed by the end of the semester and approved by the faculty member.

Directed Research/Independent Study

Students enrolled in a directed research/independent study course must keep a log of their work and submit it to their faculty supervisors for approval at the end of the semester. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will house for three years copies of the final records demonstrating the manner in which students earned credit, as completed by the end of the semester and approved by the faculty member.

Credit for Co-Curricular Activities (Law Review, Moot Court, ADR Board, Trial Team)

Student participants in these co-curricular activities are eligible for credit, subject to Law School academic policies. In order to receive that credit, however, students must keep a log of the time they spend engaged in activities that will count for credit. The advisor for each of these activities must approve the time spent as appropriate for the receipt of credit. At the end of the semester, the advisor must verify for the Law School Registrar which students will receive the credit. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will house for three years copies of the final records demonstrating the manner in which students earned credit, as completed by the end of the semester and approved by the faculty member.

How to make determinations regarding the assignment of out-of-class work per credit:

Out-of-class work includes any work assigned by a faculty member that facilitates learning in the course, as well as the achievement of the course learning outcomes or objectives, and which the student is expected to complete prior to coming to class. Any such work may include, but is not limited to, the following: reading assignments (including materials in casebooks, Restatements, statutory supplements, hornbooks, etc.), case briefing, additional preparation and revision of notes, outlining, completion of assigned questions, completion of problem sets (e.g., West Assessment quizzes, CALI questions, problems in the casebook, etc.), watching or listening to live or recorded events (e.g., live trials, videos, podcasts, films, etc.), research assignments,

writing projects (e.g., writing and/or editing students' own work, reviewing/editing other student written work if required by the professor, etc.), any class-related work that students must complete in a group-work setting (e.g., out-of-class simulations), practice exams, journal submissions, quizzes, participation in online discussion groups, study in preparation for midterms, final exams, or other assessments, and all other course-related work as assigned.

The faculty member has the sole responsibility for determining the amount and kind of work to assign per credit. Instructors may direct students to complete assignments of the sort described in the non-exclusive list above, alone or in combination with each other, in order to meet the credit allocation requirement.

The following represents some specific guidance faculty should follow when assigning out-of-class work.

Type of Activity	Amount of Work Presumed Done in 1 Hour
Casebook reading	5 pages of engaged reading/hour
Non-research based writing	1 page written/hour
Research-based writing	1/3 of a page written /hour (i.e., 1 page written in 3 hours)

Another way of framing these work-to-time ratios is to think about it per credit:

Exam Courses

	1 credit	2 credits	3 credits	4 credits
Casebook reading ⁵	140 pages/semester	280 pages/semester	420 pages/semester	560 pages/semester
Non-research based writing ⁶	28 pages/semester	56 pages/semester	84 pages/semester	112 pages/semester
Research-based writing	9 1/3 pages/semester	18 2/3 pages/semester	28 pages/semester	37 1/3 pages/semester

⁵ The totals for casebook reading were based on a tool provided by the RICE Center for Teaching Excellence called the Course Workload Estimator. The tool suggests that students who encounter many new concepts while highly engaged in reading a textbook will read at the pace of 5 pages/hour. Even though this tool is geared toward college students, it is a viable measure of reading pace. The workload estimator is located here: <http://cte.rice.edu/workload/>.

⁶ These totals, of course, assume that an instructor gives only writing assignments for the semester. The number of pages students should produce will correspondingly decrease when combined with other kinds of homework. Therefore, in a one-credit class with two hours of required homework each week, for example, it would be appropriate to assign 5 pages of reading and 1 page of written reflection for one night of homework. The same analysis holds true for research-based writing.

Non-Exam Courses

	1 credit	2 credits	3 credits	4 credits
Casebook reading	150 pages/semester	300 pages/semester	450 pages/semester	600 pages/semester
Non-research based writing	30 pages/semester	60 pages/semester	90 pages/semester	120 pages/semester
Research-based writing	10 pages/semester	20 pages/semester	30 pages/semester	40 pages/semester

Insofar as other kinds of activities are concerned, please use your best professional estimate when considering the amount of time the students ought to take when completing an assignment.

Procedures for Verifying Compliance with the Credit Hour Policy

Faculty must submit their syllabi, listing the assignments, to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs prior to the beginning of each semester in order to verify compliance.

The Academic Affairs and Curriculum Committee will not approve any new course proposals that do not demonstrate the manner in which the instructor plans to comply with this policy. Proposals for experimental courses submitted to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for approval and scheduling shall not proceed without demonstrating compliance with this policy.