

Academic Credit at Penn

All of Penn's undergraduate programs and many of its graduate and professional programs use course units (CUs) as a general measure of academic work and progress toward a degree. Penn's use of CUs conforms to the practices of peer institutions that use a similar system of academic credit including Brown, Duke, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. A CU is a general measure of academic work over a period of time, typically a term (semester or summer).

The Schools of Law, Dental Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine do not use CUs. The Law School uses credit hours in a way that is consistent with law schools in the United States. The Schools of Dental Medicine and Veterinary Medicine uses credit hours in ways that are consistent with professional education in those fields of study.

Definition of a Course Unit

A course unit (CU) is a general measure of academic work over a period of time, typically a term (semester or summer). A CU (or a fraction of a CU) represents different types of academic work across different types of academic programs and is the basic unit of progress toward a degree. One CU is usually converted to a four-semester-hour course. A degree from one of Penn's undergraduate programs requires the completion of 32 to 40 (or more) course units. Graduate and professional degrees vary in the number of years of study and the number of CUs required.

Transfer Credit and Converting Credit Units/Hours

At the University of Pennsylvania, faculty in individual departments and schools make decisions about awarding credit for external courses (courses taken at a college or university other than Penn). Each school has policies and procedures for evaluating and awarding external credit. When undergraduate academic credit is awarded for courses taken at other institutions, typically courses worth 3, 4, or 5 semester hours or 5 quarter hours are awarded one course unit (CU) at Penn. Courses worth 1 semester credit hour are generally not awarded academic credit at Penn.

Transfer Credit

At the University of Pennsylvania, faculty in individual departments and schools make decisions about awarding credit for external courses (courses taken at a college or university other than Penn). Judging both course content and student work, faculty determine whether external courses are equivalent to courses offered through their own departments and thus what credit, if any, to award. In awarding credit at Penn for external courses, faculty also determine how those credits may be used (e.g., whether they satisfy general education requirements or requirements in a major).

Each school has policies and procedures for evaluating and awarding external credit. Undergraduate schools use a web-based, password protected application called the [External Course Approval Tool, or XCAT](#). When academic credit is awarded for courses taken at other institutions, typically courses worth 3, 4, or 5 semester hours or worth 5 quarter hours are awarded one course unit (CU) at Penn.

Assignment of Academic Credit

The course unit (CU) value of a course determined by the faculty reflects their judgment regarding the expected work of a student completing that course. Factors that may be considered when assigning academic credit for a course include scheduled class time, expected time outside of class, the difficulty and range of materials covered, and the mastery of specific knowledge through written reports, exams, and other evaluations.

The assignment of academic credit for a course is formally approved by the curriculum committee (or similar body) of the school when a course is first proposed. It is reviewed formally by the faculty of a program, department, or school through periodic program reviews or curriculum revisions. Additionally, it is reviewed by the faculty of a program, department, or school informally as part of ongoing assessments of curriculum and teaching effectiveness.