

Information on the higher education system of South Africa: a guideline for interpreting "credits" and "grades" on Stellenbosch University academic transcripts

Context

Stellenbosch University is a public higher education institution that operates within the *National Qualifications Framework (NQF)* of South Africa. The NQF is a single integrated system for the "classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality assured national qualifications" as indicated in Section 4 of the NQF Act, 2008 (Act No 67 of 2008).

Within the field of higher education, the registration of academic programmes as qualifications on the NQF is governed by the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)*, as contemplated in the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997). The HEQSF consists of level descriptors, qualifications routes, qualification types and their descriptors, qualification standards and designated variants and qualifiers for qualification specialisations. (The revised HEQSF is available [here](#).)

Credits and workload

The credit-rating system of South Africa is explained in the HEQSF as follows:

The volume of learning required for a qualification on the NQF is specified in terms of the *total minimum number of credits* required, and in terms of the *minimum number of credits required at its specified exit level* on the qualifications framework ... The credit-rating system rates 10 *notional* study hours as equivalent to one credit. Credits represent a measure of all the learning activities engaged in by the student and include, among others, contact time, self-study, work-integrated-learning, assignments, projects and examinations. Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's Degree and Bachelor (Honours) Degree qualification types assume a 30-week full-time academic year. Master's Degree and Doctoral qualification types assume a 45-week full-time academic year. An average full-time equivalent student is expected to study for a 40-hour week, thus requiring a minimum credit-load of 120 credits per academic year for Certificates, Diplomas and Bachelor's Degrees, and 180 credits per academic year for Master's Degrees and Doctorates.

The South African credit system is based on a learning-centred quantification of workload and is not a measurement of the number of lectures and/or practical sessions per week. However, a simple shorthand for the transfer of credits would be as follows:

- 1 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) \approx 2 South African credits
- 1 United States of America (USA) credit \approx 4 South African credits

The standard workload for full-time enrolled undergraduate students is 60 credits per semester, i.e. 120 credits per year. A student enrolled for a three-year Bachelor's Degree therefore completes a minimum of 360 credits to obtain a qualification. (Four-year professional Bachelor's Degrees require a minimum of 480 credits.) On completion of a Bachelor's Degree in most fields, students would be required to complete a Bachelor Honours or a Postgraduate Diploma in order to qualify for admission to a Master's programme.



Master's programmes typically consist of one or two years of research beyond the Bachelor Honours Degree, culminating in an externally examined thesis (of up to 180 credits). Some Master's programmes are structured and contain a coursework component, with a less heavily weighted thesis or research assignment (of at least 60 credits).

Stellenbosch University offers general, formative Bachelor's Degrees, as well as a wide variety of four-year Professional Bachelor's Degrees (such as Bachelor of Engineering programmes). After completing a general, formative Bachelor's Degree, graduates can articulate to a Bachelor Honours Degree which prepares students for research-based postgraduate study. Alternatively, a Postgraduate Diploma is offered at the same level of complexity and is generally multi- or interdisciplinary in nature, serving to strengthen and deepen the student's knowledge in a particular discipline or profession. Graduates of a four-year Professional Bachelor's Degree can articulate to a Master's programme directly.

Summative Assessments and Grading

The most commonly used grading system for summative assessments is based on a mark given as a percentage. Modules (courses) offered at Stellenbosch University either make use of a test-and-examinations-based assessment system or a flexible assessment system (with a series of assessment opportunities). Both systems provide formative feedback, but the final summative marks are expressed as a percentage. Performance in terms of percentages can be interpreted as follows:

<50%	Fail
50%	Pass
51-59%	Average
60-74%	Good
≥75%	Distinction (Cum laude)

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