Rigor & Instructional Time

A complete breakdown of course credit hours/nominal hours to minutes of required class time by course type and duration (e.g., credit-to-contact ratio) is located on Curriculum Services’ Scheduling Courses in the Term web page. Expectation for coursework outside of class is in the Definition of Semester Credit Hour on Curriculum Services’ Definition of Instructional Time web page.

Asynchronous Courses

What does this mean for asynchronous online courses, where there is no “in class” and “outside of class” time? It’s easiest to approach online course rigor for fully asynchronous courses by thinking about the total amount of time students will spend completing the course.

Example: 3-Credit Hour, 15-Week Course

For example, in an online, 3-credit hour, 15-week course, students should spend approximately 7.5 hours each week on online course activities, including interacting with materials, assignments, quizzes, etc. Although online classes do not have physical classrooms, many online activities can be equated to the classroom experience.

- **Activities.** Calculate how much time students will spend each week on activities and materials that have “set times” such as watching lectures and/or videos. Estimated time for student note taking, whether notes are shared with the instructor or not, might be included as well.

- **Readings.** Review the required reading in the course and calculate the approximate time students will spend reading. As a baseline estimate, an adult reads about 250 words per minute on average. Keep in mind that the number of words per minute will decrease as the material grows more complex and the material will be new to students; they will be both reading to understand and working to apply this information in assignments.

- **Communications.** Estimate the amount of time that will be spent on course communication, including synchronous virtual meetings or asynchronous communication for such activities as office hours, group recitations, assignment and/or assessment feedback, etc.

- **Assignments & Assessments.** Estimate the amount of time students will spend on assignments, projects, labs, quizzes, and tests. If possible, include an anonymous survey at the end of each week/module to collect student feedback on how long it took them to complete the assigned work. This information can be extremely valuable for future revisions to the course.
Optional Materials

Try to guard against the temptation to “stuff” an online course with materials that students are required to interact with. Best practice is to only select materials that support and focus learner time on successfully achieving the course learning outcomes. If additional activities/materials are included, be sure to mark them as optional so students know what to focus on first.

Regular and Substantive Interaction

Note: Per federal regulation 34 C.F.R. 600.2, online courses must include “regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between the students and the instructor” that is initiated by the instructor and is scheduled and predictable. It is highly recommended when calculating online course rigor to also mark activities that meet the RSI requirement, that include two of the following: direct instruction; coursework assessment or feedback; information about the course content: group discussion of the course content; or other instructional methods approved by the institution’s accreditor.