

Guidelines for Instructional Time Equivalencies Across Formats

While Misericordia University is committed to an outcome-based approach to curriculum and assessment in accordance with its accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and other discipline based national accrediting associations, it also complies with and endorses the requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Education on what constitutes a semester credit hour of instruction as set forth in Chapter 31.21 on curricula as amended. The standard states that “a semester hour represents a unit of curricular material that can normally be taught in a minimum of 14 hours of classroom instruction, plus outside preparation or the equivalent as determined by the faculty.” Thus, a three credit course represents the equivalent of 42 hours of classroom instruction or its equivalent, not including final examination or homework as normally interpreted. The following guidelines are intended to assure compliance with standard across the various course delivery formats offered by the institution, a consistency in when and how the equivalency is applied across formats, and the maximum opportunity for faculty to exercise academic freedom in meeting the extant standard while achieving the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the specific course.

Traditional Semester Format

Ordinarily, courses offered within a traditional semester format will meet the 14 hours of classroom instruction per credit hour (i.e., 42 hours for a three credit course, 56 hours for a four credit course, etc.). However, if a class or classes in a course must be cancelled due, for example, to the closing of the University for inclement weather or the illness or other appropriate unavailability of the faculty member, then additional structured instructional activity (or activities) would be required to meet the equivalency standard. For example, if classroom instruction turns out to be 38 hours face-to-face, four additional hours of appropriate “out of classroom” instructional activity would be required to meet the semester standard as determined equivalent by the faculty. Wherever possible, this contingency should be explained in the syllabus and documented accordingly.

Alternative Formats

There are a number of outcome based formats at the University in which “face-to-face” instructional time is less than the 14 hours per one semester credit, but meet the equivalency standard set forth in the regulation. In these alternative formats, the face-to-face instructional time and the additional outside of classroom structured instructional activities must meet the one semester credit hour per 14 hours classroom instruction or its equivalent as determined by the faculty (i.e., 42 hours for a three credit course; 56 for a four credit course, etc.). For example, if a three semester course in weekend college format meets for 32 hours of classroom-based instruction, an additional and integrated 10 hours of structured instructional activities are required to meet the standard; for the same course in a seven-week format that meets face-to-face for 28 hours, an additional 14 hours of structured instructional activities are required; for a five-week course that meets 20 hours face-to-face, an additional 22 hours of structured instructional activities would be needed; and, strictly online courses would require 42 hours of appropriate structured online activities to meet the minimum threshold. The syllabus for the course should reflect the type of activities to be utilized.

Instructional Related Learning Activities

An array of instructional related or student engagement activities can be utilized to achieve the equivalent of the 14 hours per credit of classroom-based instruction, not including a final, are part of the standard. Choosing a particular “learning outside the classroom” activity or combination of activities is the responsibility of the faculty in terms of achieving the stated goals, objectives, and outcomes of the course, enhancing cooperative and collaborative learning in an instructor-mediated environment, demonstrating an awareness of the various learning styles and experiences of the students, and in the determining of equivalency to a semester of credit. The following examples are *some*, but by no means, all of the options that may be considered for utilization:

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- Discussion Board structured to provide guided or instructor-mediated threaded discussion with specified timeframes and expectations for participation;
- Chat rooms for class or group projects that provide opportunities for collaborative learning and that have specific expectations for participation and feedback;
- Case studies and problem solving scenarios relative to course goals and objectives and utilizing higher order analytical skills with instructor and class designed feedback;
- Blogs, journals, or logs in which students share the most relevant aspects with instructor and classmates;
- Web Quest activities in which students find Internet sites that address specific course objectives and are shared with class and instructor mediated;
- Library research in which instructor directs students to locate certain information or resources either online or in situ and relate them to course objectives and present them to class in a designated manner;
- Lecture materials--written transcripts or audio recordings--from which students are expected to develop questions, comments, or observations shared with class and instructor through discussion board postings or participation in chat rooms;
- Instructional CDs to be utilized in one way or another;
- Field trips or tours in which students may participate as an individual or group in analyzing an activity (concert, museum, art exhibit, religious service, political debate, etc.) and prepare a paper or presentation to share with instructor and class;
- Final group projects which represent a culmination of learning objectives and by which students collaborate via e-mail, chat rooms, discussion boards, and "face-to-face" contact to research, analyze, synthesize, and prepare project with instructor receiving periodic updates and providing guidance to group.

Instructors should establish and control the learning-based interactions (when, where, and why), including frequency, duration, evaluation and assessment techniques. These guidelines recognize the need for the faculty to actively manage the learning space, both in and outside the traditional classroom.

In order to ensure consistency for students and faculty in meeting PDE requirements and good pedagogy, Misericordia University has developed a rubric that establishes a standard amount time for setting equivalencies to hours of classroom instruction for various online and "out of the classroom" instructor-mediated activities in the various formats.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed certain parameters to assist in developing curricular content that is equivalent to classroom-based instruction. According to PDE clarification, equivalent content:

- should be related directly to the objectives of the course/program,
- should be measurable for grading purposes.
- should have the direct oversight or supervision of the faculty member teaching the course
- should in some form be equivalent of an activity conducted in the classroom.

PDE states that equivalent content may not be:

- homework assignments
- focused on "time spent," that is, the amount of time the student spends accomplishing the task

The Center for Adult & Continuing Education, the IT Department, and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning provide a variety of professional development workshops and individual consultation opportunities for faculty to assist in the design, development, and effective utilization of appropriate instructional options and activities.