Direct Faculty Instruction in Online Courses

Like most higher education institutions, UMass Lowell uses the credit system as a framework for “measuring the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student” (NECHE). Here is the language from the UML website, which comes directly from the federal guidelines for awarding credit:

*The University of Massachusetts Lowell adheres to the Federal regulation which defines a credit hour as an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutional established equivalence that reasonably approximates not less than*

1. **One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work** each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

2. **At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.**

So for a typical 3-credit on campus course, a student will spend 3 hours per week in class participating in “direct faculty instruction”, and at least 6 hours per week outside of class on “out-of-class student work”.

The table below provides a breakdown of this based on term length and credit number:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>15-week course</th>
<th>10-week course</th>
<th>8-week course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Credit = 15 hours “direct faculty instruction”</td>
<td>2 Credits = 30 hours of “direct faculty instruction”</td>
<td>3 Credits = 45 hours of “direct faculty instruction”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Credit</td>
<td>1 hour of “direct faculty instruction” 2 hours out-of-class student work = 3 hours total per week</td>
<td>2 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 4 hours out-of-class student work = 6 hours total per week</td>
<td>3 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 6 hours out-of-class student work = 9 hours total per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Credits</td>
<td>1.5 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 3 hours out-of-class student work = 4.5 hours total per week</td>
<td>3 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 6 hours out-of-class student work = 9 hours total per week</td>
<td>4.5 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 9 hours out-of-class student work = 13.5 hours total per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Credits</td>
<td>1.875 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 3.75 hours out-of-class student work = 5.625 hours total per week</td>
<td>3.75 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 7.5 hours out-of-class student work = 11.25 hours total per week</td>
<td>5.625 hours of “direct faculty instruction” 11.25 hours out-of-class student work = 16.875 hours total per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 6-week course | 2.5 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
5 hours out-of-class student work  
= 7.5 hours total per week | 5 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
10 hours out-of-class student work  
= 15 hours total per week | 7.5 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
15 hours out-of-class student work  
= 22.5 hours total per week |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3-week course | 5 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
10 hours out-of-class student work  
= 15 hours total per week | 10 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
20 hours out-of-class student work  
= 30 hours total per week | 15 hours of “direct faculty instruction”  
30 hours out-of-class student work  
= 45 hours total per week |

In an online course, the “out of class student work” aspect of this requirement really does not change much. Online students spend this time reading, studying, working independently through assignments and doing homework. *What is significantly different with online courses, and needs some consideration, is “direct faculty instruction.”* In a campus course (or a virtual class for that matter), you show up (or login to Zoom) and provide “direct faculty instruction” for your students during a set duration of time. This might be lectures, discussions, exam reviews, facilitated group discussions, presentations, labs, exams, etc... *In your 100% online asynchronous course, where there is no set time or place, how will you facilitate “direct faculty instruction?”*

There are online activities that are widely considered to be equivalent to “direct faculty instruction” that you should be planning as a part of your online course design and content creation. This is not an exhaustive list, but a few examples to help with your course design:

**Online activities that may count as “direct faculty contact”:**

- Recorded lectures, presentations and videos
- Instructor-facilitated discussion forums
- Class announcements and emails, including those that address logistics and class details
- Weekly written class notes
- Guest lecturer or interview
- Class-wide and general feedback on assignments
- Exams
- Generally, any activity that you would normally conduct in a classroom and you are now facilitating online
- *For Live Online courses only:* Required and regularly scheduled class sessions via Zoom count towards direct faculty contact, but you may reduce your time in Zoom by using some of the above activities.

**Online activities that do not count towards “direct faculty contact”:**

- Optional weekly Chats or Office Hours
- Discussion forums that are not facilitated by the instructor
- Weekly readings
- Grading and individual feedback to students

Does this mean you should record 3 hours of online lecture videos every week? No, but a video lecture or text-based course notes each week may wind up making up a significant portion of your direct
contact time. Most faculty will have a combination of content, learning activities, and class communications each week that help make up their direct faculty instruction hours.

Wake Forest University has developed a useful Course Workload Estimator that they designed to provide estimates for common classroom activities. Included in this is discussion posts, and they offer that a single post of 250 words takes a student about 1 hour. Now imagine that students are also reading their peer’s postings and probably needing to respond as well. A lively and facilitated discussion forum takes more time than many think.

Lastly, GPS is not expecting you to count your hours, nor are we going to do that. This information is meant purely as a framework and for your consideration as you begin designing an asynchronous online course.

References and Additional Resources Related to Direct Faculty Contact:

https://annenberg.usc.edu/faculty-and-staff-resources/calculating-contact-hours-online-and-hybrid-classes

https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/course-design/online-courses/time-task

https://annenberg.usc.edu/faculty-and-staff-resources/calculating-contact-hours-online-and-hybrid-classes

