Guidelines for Determining Time on Task (TOT) in Online Education

Time on task (TOT) is the total learning time spent by a student in a Baylor course, including instructional time as well as time spent studying and completing course assignments (e.g., reading, research, writing, individual and group projects). Regardless of the delivery method or the particular learning activities employed, the amount of learning time in any Baylor course must be consistent with the Credit Hour Policy. In general, online or webinar courses should require 45 hours of learning activities including instructional time (i.e., TOT) per semester credit hour.

The Semester credit hour unit is defined in accordance with the Federal Definition of the Semester Credit Hour, which states:

A semester credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates:

1. *Not less than one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours 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 outlined in item 1 above 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.*

Baylor College of Medicine adopts the Federal Definition of the semester credit hour unit. Where applicable, calculations to derive alternative unit equivalency to semester credit hours for each School are detailed in the procedures of the Credit Hour Policy.

Each school's Curriculum Committee approves and assigns credit hours to online courses using the Guidelines for Determining Time on Task in Online Education.

"Instruction" is provided differently in online courses than in classroom-based courses. Despite the difference in methodology and activities, however, the total "learning time" online can usually be counted. Rather than try to distinguish between "in-class" and "outside-class" time for students, the faculty member developing and/or teaching the online course should calculate how much time a student doing satisfactory work would take to complete the work of the course, including:

- Reading course presentations/"lectures"
- Reading other materials
- Participation in online discussions
- Doing research

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- Writing papers or other assignments
- Completing all other assignments (e.g., projects)

The total time spent on these tasks should be roughly equal to that spent on comparable tasks in a classroom-based course. Time spent downloading or uploading documents, troubleshooting technical problems, or in chat rooms (unless on course assignments such as group projects) should not be counted.

In determining the time on task for an online course, useful information includes:

- The course objectives and expected learning outcomes
- The list of topics in the course outline or syllabus, the textbooks, additional readings, and related education materials (such as software) required
- Statements in course materials informing students of the time and/or effort they are expected to devote to the course or individual parts of it
- A listing of the pedagogical tools to be used in the online course, how each will be used, and the expectations for participation (e.g., in an online discussion, how many substantive postings will be required of a student for each week or unit)

Theoretically, one should be able to measure any course, regardless of delivery method, by the description of content covered. However, this is difficult for anyone other than the course developer or instructor to determine accurately, since the same statement of content (in a course outline or syllabus) can represent many different levels of breadth and depth in the treatment of that content, and require widely varying amounts of time.

The TOT for courses that meet face-to-face with an instructor is defined by the number of hours spent in classroom plus outside learning activities. TOT in **synchronous** online environments may be quantified in the same manner as for traditional classes. TOT in **asynchronous** learning environments is based on the following guidelines:

1. The course syllabus should clearly document that the course covers the same amount of material or course content that would normally be expected if the class were a traditional campus-based course. Clear documentation includes the course objectives, the course topics, and the stated expectations for readings, projects, and other assignments as well as the stated learning outcomes. It is the responsibility of faculty teaching in an asynchronous environment to determine if the course content is of sufficient scope and rigor to ensure the amount of material delivered is comparable to a classroom-based course.

2. During the planning and development of an asynchronous learning environment, faculty should quantify the time a successful student will take interacting with the course content. This should be equivalent to the TOT normally expected in a classroom-based course. The following rubric

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has been developed and should be used as a guideline for instructional design for asynchronous courses.

3. Faculty are encouraged to determine class attendance by the evaluation of student participation in scheduled online discussions, required interaction with the faculty as well as other classmates, and the timely submission of class assignments rather than simply by the number of logins provided in the statistics measured by the course management system. Quality and quantity of work will demonstrate the rigor and time on task assignments necessary to equal those of the traditional course delivery.

Rubric for Asynchronous Online Semester Hour Determination

In asynchronous learning environments, the TOT must be quantified for each course. When faculty plan and develop asynchronous courses, whether fully online or blended, they must account for the equivalent of 45 hours of TOT for each semester hour. In the absence of actual data, the following rubric can be used to estimate asynchronous TOT.

Interactions with Course Content	Time on Task Estimates	Examples
Reading (descriptive and technical text) *	3 minutes per page	Textbooks and reference materials, both online and traditional.
Reading (online screens w/no interactivity) *	2 minutes per screen	PowerPoint Slide Shows. Syllabus. Announcements. Case Studies. Journals.
Reading (online screens with interactivity) *	4 minutes per screen	Multimedia. Tutorial.
Video	Actual time required to watch the video	Instructor Brief. YouTube. Demonstrations.
Lecture Capture	Actual time per lecture	Staged or Classroom Capture.
Audio	Actual time per audio presentation	Music, Medical, History, Speeches, Radio, Nature.
Practice Problems	10 minutes per problem	Math, Computer Science, Case Studies. Surveys.
Outside Online Short Training modules	Average time per outside course	Courses taken, usually from Government sources (e.g., CITI Online Training courses) as one requirement in an online course.
Writing Assignments / Papers**	2 hours per page (including prep)	
Developing AV presentations	1 hours per slide (including prep)	

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Discussion Forum	15 minutes per post (includes preparation and actual posting	Discussion. Remote Conferencing. Chats. Group Collaboration. Wikis. Blogs. Social Learning. Online Office Hours.
Competency Checks / Exams	3 minutes per objective question; 15 minutes per essay question.	

* Reduce TOT by 50% for required review of information previously studied.

** Other types of assignments must be evaluated for TOT based on expected output.

In sum, regardless of the didactic course type (campus-based, online, blended, or independent study) or the particular learning activities employed, the student total amount of time on task must be consistent with the Credit Hour Policy, and in general, require 45 hours of learning activities including instructional time (i.e., TOT) per semester credit hour.

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