Student Workload

TO COMPLETE A PROGRAMME of study successfully, students are required to engage in a number of teacher and/or self-directed learning activities. Student workload is the time taken by average students to complete the learning activities.

Learning activities can be divided into these main types:

Modes of instruction (teacher-directed)

Lectures, online, seminars, research seminars, practicals, laboratory work, guided personal study, tutorials, internships, placements, fieldwork, and project work.

Learning activities (student-directed)

Attending lectures, performing specific assignments, practising technical or laboratory skills, writing papers, independent and private study, reading books and papers, contributing to online discussion forums, and learning how to give constructive criticism of the work of others.

Assessments

Oral/written examinations, oral presentations, tests, papers/essays, portfolios, reports, continuous assessment, and (final) thesis/dissertation.

What is credit value?

All New Zealand qualifications have a credit value. Each credit equates to 10 hours of learning and includes all teacher contact time and independent student learning hours needed for an average student to complete the course. For example, a 15 credit course equates to 150 hours of student learning.

In most programmes, it is assumed that the student workload will add up to the hours of learning indicated by the credit value of the course.

The actual student workload is usually not calculated and could probably be lighter or heavier than the hours indicated by the credit value of the course.

Why is student workload important?

Research has shown that student workload is one of the most crucial factors affecting student engagement with a course, and overload is one of the main contributors to student drop-out.

Students have limited time to study. They also differ in their abilities and will spend different amounts of time on coursework, but they are expected to move at a pace that meets the teacher's expectations of the amount of work that should be completed at each stage of the course. Workload also affects the way students learn.

A heavier workload encourages surface learning rather than deeper learning.
- A surface learner memorises and reproduces the bare minimum needed for an assessment.
- A deep learner tries to understand the concept, relates new ideas and concepts to previous knowledge and everyday experience, adopts an enquiring and critical stance, examines the logic of an argument and seeks evidence to support conclusions.

In deeper learning, the student acquires the skills necessary for problem-solving. All tertiary study should encourage deeper learning.

Estimating student workload

The teacher needs to be aware of the specific learning objectives and competencies to be achieved in the course to help them decide on the teaching, learning and assessment activities that are most relevant to the learning objectives and use the time available to best advantage. Using clearly stated objectives or competencies and calculating workload hours in relation to them is good practice.

WelTec

Teachers should have an idea of the time required to complete each of the learning activities in the course. To calculate student workload, all learning activities in the course have to be analysed and an estimate of the time required to complete the activities outlined. The workload should match the number of learning hours indicated by the credit value of the course.

Example
Course A is worth 15 credits at level 5. There are four topics in this course and the learning hours are 15 x 10 = 150 hours. The table below shows the workload calculation for one topic in Course A.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN TOPIC 1 OF COURSE A	ESTIMATED STUDENT WORK TIME IN HOURS
Background questionnaire	1 hour
Lectures (6 x 1 hour)	6 hours
Group work on definitions (class discussion)	1 hour
Reading-assignment (four 4 chapters of the text book)	5 hours
Class seminar on the reading	4 hours
ASSESSMENT – ORAL PRESENTATION	
Information search	11 hours
Reading and making points	8 hours
Creating a PowerPoint presentation	2 hours
Practising	4 hours
Presentation and peer review	1 hour
TOTAL	**43 HOURS**

The workload for the other three topics can be calculated the same way. The sum total of the estimated work time for all four topics would indicate the total workload for the course.

All learning activities in the course have to be analysed and listed and the time required to complete the activities outlined. This total workload should match the learning hours indicated by the credit value of the course.

If the evaluation process reveals that the estimated student workload does not correspond to the actual workload indicated by the fixed credit value of the course, it may be necessary to adjust the course workload (amount of learning material and/or the types of teaching, learning and assessment activities).

Monitoring course workload

Although monitoring course workload is the responsibility of the teaching staff, students have a crucial role in the process of determining whether the estimated student workload is realistic.

Questionnaires are the most common method used to check if the estimated student workload is accurate. Students complete the questionnaires either during the learning process or after the completion of the course.

References

Lockwood, F. (1998). The design and production of self-instructional material. UK : Taylor & Francis, Inc