To: Curriculum Committee  
Fr: Pete Skoner  
Da: January 6, 2012  
Re: Proposed Policy: Definitions of Semester Length, Credit Hour, and Instructional Time Equivalencies

The following policy defining the semester length, credit hour, and instructional time equivalencies for Saint Francis University is proposed for inclusion in the Faculty Handbook. It is proposed to place the policy in the Faculty Handbook within Article XII. Rights and Responsibilities of the Faculty, as an additional new section, Section 26.

Section 26. Definitions of Semester Length, Credit Hour, and Instructional Time Equivalencies

To comply with our regional accreditation organization and government regulations, Saint Francis University establishes semester and credit hour definitions.

The regional accrediting organization, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, suggests that universities establish “expected learning outcomes that are consonant with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;” and provides “direct evidence of student learning; and assessment results that provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes.”

“These definitions are provided as a reminder to institutions. They are not Commission requirements, and an institution may demonstrate in alternative ways that academic offerings are of appropriate academic content, breadth, length, and rigor, provided that it also demonstrates compliance with all applicable government policies, regulations, and requirements.”


The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in The Pennsylvania Code, Title 22 Education in Chapter 31 General Provisions in Subchapter 31.21 Curricula, provides the following guidelines:

“(a) The curricula must provide the opportunity for the achievement of the stated objectives of the institution, as related to its statement of philosophy and mission, and must be structured in a group of coherent, integrated degree programs.

(b) Degree requirements stated in this section may be stated in terms of semester credit hours or quarter credit hours, as determined by the institution and conforming to generally accepted academic practices. General education, as defined in this section, refers to the curricular inclusion of humanities, arts, communications, social sciences, mathematics, technology and science courses in support of the mission of the institution. A semester credit hour represents a unit of curricular material that normally can be taught in a minimum of 14 hours of classroom instruction, plus appropriate outside preparation or the equivalent as determined by the faculty. ..
(d) To assure academic integrity, an institution shall provide students in a distance education program access to academic and student services, including textbooks, study guides, library and other learning resources, personal interaction with faculty, tutors or other educational personnel by computer, telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings. The institution shall assure integrity of student work and provide opportunity for student assessment.”

And, the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Part 600 – Institutional Eligibility Under the Higher Education Act of 1965, As Amended, provides a definition of credit hour. “Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), a 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 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.”

A. Traditional Semester Format
The traditional semester will consist of 14 full weeks of classes followed by a week of final examinations. The University considers a 50 minute class to be the equivalent of one hour of instruction. Courses on a Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule will meet 42 times for 50 minutes, and for a final examination, providing a total of 44 hours of classroom meeting time for a three-credit course. Courses on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule will meet 28 times for 75 minutes, and for a final examination, again providing 44 hours of classroom meeting time. Courses that are scheduled to meet once each week for 150 minutes of instruction (not including breaks) and a final examination also provide 44 hours. If other formats are used, the equivalent amount of classroom instructional time should be provided. The amount of classroom instructional time should be prorated for varying numbers of credits. When a specific class in a course is cancelled for any reason - for example, for the closing of the University due to inclement weather or the illness or for unavailability of the faculty member – then either the class time will be held at an alternative time, will meet using electronic modalities like videotaping of the instruction, or use additional structured instructional activities to meet the equivalency standard. Whenever possible, these contingencies should be explained in the syllabus, approved by the department chair, and documented accordingly.

II. Alternative Formats
There are a number of outcomes-based formats at the University in which classroom instructional time is less than the 14 hours per one semester credit, but meet the equivalency standard set forth in these regulations and guidelines. With alternative formats, the classroom instructional time and the additional structured instructional activities must provide the equivalent learning time. For example, a seven-week, three-credit course meeting for four hours once each week for 28 hours of classroom instruction would
have additional and integrated 16 hours of structured instructional activities to meet the standard; a one-week class that meets for 7 hours for 5 days would be 35 hours of classroom instruction and integrated 9 hours of structured instructional activities to meet the standard; or a three-week course meeting three times each week for a total of nine class meetings for 4 hours each class would meet for 36 hours of classroom instruction and have additional and integrated 8 hours of appropriate structured instructional activities; or completely online courses would require 44 hours of appropriate structured instructional activities to meet the minimum threshold; and hybrid or other variations of course format would mix classroom instructional time with appropriate instructional activities. The syllabus for all courses should clearly indicate the total amount of classroom instructional time and the other structured instructional activities utilized in the course.

III. Supervised Group Activities
Some courses or parts of courses are scheduled and include group activities that include active learning but not direct faculty instruction. These include, for example, laboratory courses or sections, travel and service-learning, and supervised clinical experiences, among others. In these cases, a semester credit hour is awarded for the equivalent of fourteen hours of such activity, which is typically either two or three hours of the supervised group activity for the equivalent of one hour of classroom instructional time. That would mean a three credit supervised group activity would meet for or involve 84 to 126 hours. Some examples include a science laboratory that meets two or three hours each week of the semester for the equivalent of one credit, 12 hours of supervised clinical experience in a hospital each week as the equivalent of 4 credit hours, or a foreign travel course that may meet for three regular class meetings prior to and after for 6 hours and then have supervised group travel activities for 12 hours each day for 9 days or 108 more hours (the same as 36 regular classroom hours) for the equivalent of 3 credits. In these types of experiences, credits are not awarded based on the number of hours only, but also on fulfilling the objectives and/or obtaining the required competencies as set by the academic department.

IV. Full-time Experiential Learning (student teaching, practicum)
Some major programs require that a student's academic activity for a semester be essentially full-time in a hospital, school, or business setting. Examples include clinical rotations, student teaching, internships, and other such experiential learning experiences. On-site supervision is typically provided by employees of the host organization in communication with a Saint Francis University faculty supervisor. Students in these settings spend the fifteen weeks of the semester full-time in the setting, as defined by the host institution. That might mean 35-45 hours each week, depending on the host organization, for the equivalent of 15-18 credits earned. Activities for fewer credits require a pro-rated number of experiential hours, or about 3 hours for each of 14 weeks in the experiential setting for the equivalent of 1 credit hour. In these types of experiences, credits are not awarded based on the number of hours only, but also on fulfilling the objectives and/or obtains the required competencies as set by the academic department.

V. Supervised individual activity (independent study, individual studio, tutorial)
At points in their collegiate career, students may have the opportunity to earn credit for supervised individual activities. Examples include independent study (defined as study given initial guidance,
criticism, review and final evaluation of student performance by a faculty member); tutorial study (defined as study which is given initial faculty guidance followed by repeated, regularly scheduled individual student conferences with a faculty member, and periodic as well as final evaluation of student performance); and music lessons or art studio. Credit is awarded based on the amount of student academic activity. For example, for an independent study students may spend three hours, a tutorial three hours (including for example one hour with the faculty member) of learning activity, and music or art activity three hours total and 30 minutes with the faculty member for the equivalent of one hour of regular instructional learning. In these types of experiences, credits are not awarded based on the number of hours only, but also on fulfilling the objectives and/or obtains the required competencies as set by the academic department.

VI. Instructional Related Learning Activities

There are many instructional related or student learning activities that can be utilized to achieve learning goals and provide the equivalent of the 14 hours per credit of regular classroom-based instruction. Choosing the particular combination of learning activities and methods is the responsibility of the faculty and academic department 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 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:

- 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 instructor feedback;
- Case studies and problem solving scenarios relative to course goals and objectives and utilizing higher order analytical skills with peer and instructor feedback;
- Blogs, journals, or logs in which students share the most relevant aspects with instructor and classmates review and feedback;
- Internet search activities or library research in which instructor directs students to locate certain information or resources, relate them to course objectives, and share with classmates. This includes instructor review and feedback;
- Library or research skill instruction provided by a resource or content librarian relevant to the particular class;
- Lecture materials, including instructional materials like CDs or videos, written notes, videotaped lessons, or audio recordings that students view or read, and then develop questions, comments, or observations that are shared with classmates, and reviewed by the instructor through discussion board postings, journals, or participation in chat rooms;
- Help sessions where the faculty member reviews materials for students who choose to attend.
- “Snow Day” activities that are prepared, hidden on Blackboard, and then available for
students should a class be cancelled with little notice. Again, it should include student interaction, and/or instructor review.

- 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, theatrical performance, etc.) and prepare a paper or presentation that is shared with classmates and reviewed and given feedback by the instructor;
- Group projects based on learning objectives where students collaborate live or electronically by e-mail, chat rooms, and/or discussion boards, to research, analyze, synthesize, and prepare projects with instructor receiving periodic updates and providing guidance and feedback to the group;
- Group simulation, role-playing, problem-based, and other learning activities that may continue throughout part or all of the semester that involves student interaction, and instructor review and feedback.
- Attendance at and participation in prescribed campus events that are relevant to the course objectives, including student reflection and instructor review.

Instructors should establish and control 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, whether inside or outside the traditional classroom.

In order to ensure consistency for students and faculty in meeting regulatory requirements and learning objectives, Saint Francis University has developed a rubric of suggested equivalencies to hours of classroom instruction for various online and “out of classroom” instructor mediated activities in the various formats. That rubric is available from the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

VII. General Criteria for Credit Hour Equivalencies
For any activities or methodologies that are designed to be equivalent to regular classroom based instruction, the equivalent content should:

- Be related directly to the objectives of the course/program
- Be measurable for grading purposes
- Have direct oversight or supervision of the faculty member teaching the course
- Have opportunities for students to interact under the guidance of the faculty member
- Be equivalent of an activity conducted in the classroom

Routine assignments may not be used as equivalent content because they are part of student responsibilities outside of regular instructional activity.

VIII. Faculty Support
The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning provides 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.

IX. Review and Approval of Courses
When new courses are proposed to the Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate, each will be reviewed to be in conformity with these policy statements.

X. Student Expectations
Also mentioned in various guidelines and regulations are expectations for students outside of classroom activities, or beyond those activities designed to be equivalent to regular classroom learning. Most of the suggestions are that students should spend at least two hours studying, reading, and working with course materials outside of the in-class or equivalent learning experiences. That would mean approximately 30 hours studying each week for a student with semester load of 15 credits, or six hours each week out of class each week involved in course material for a three credit course.
Appendix: References

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education suggests that universities establish “expected learning outcomes that are consonant with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;” and provides “direct evidence of student learning; and assessment results that provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes.”

“The Commission considers assessment evidence to be the most compelling evidence that an institution’s academic offerings are of appropriate academic content, breadth, length, and rigor. It nonetheless recognizes that, because student learning requires students and faculty to spend time engaged in the teaching-learning process, it is appropriate for relevant government agencies to set reasonable and suitable expectations for time spent earning degrees and credits.”

“These definitions are provided as a reminder to institutions. They are not Commission requirements, and an institution may demonstrate in alternative ways that academic offerings are of appropriate academic content, breadth, length, and rigor, provided that it also demonstrates compliance with all applicable government policies, regulations, and requirements.”


---------------------------------------------------------------
-------

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in The Pennsylvania Code, Title 22 Education in Chapter 31 General Provisions in Subchapter 31.21 Curricula, provides the following guidelines:

“(a) The curricula must provide the opportunity for the achievement of the stated objectives of the institution, as related to its statement of philosophy and mission, and must be structured in a group of coherent, integrated degree programs.

(b) Degree requirements stated in this section may be stated in terms of semester credit hours or quarter credit hours, as determined by the institution and conforming to generally accepted academic practices. General education, as defined in this section, refers to the curricular inclusion of humanities, arts, communications, social sciences, mathematics, technology and science courses in support of the mission of the institution. A semester credit hour represents a unit of curricular material that normally can be taught in a minimum of 14 hours of classroom instruction, plus appropriate outside preparation or the equivalent as determined by the faculty. ..

(1) An associate degree exclusive of a specialized associate degree must require the satisfactory completion of a minimum of 60 semester credit hours, which includes a minimum of 20 semester credit hours of general education, or a minimum of 90 quarter credit hours, which must include a minimum of 30 quarter credit hours of general education.

(2) A specialized associate degree must require the satisfactory completion of at least 60 semester
credit hours with a minimum of 1,500 clock hours or a minimum of 90 quarter credit hours. At least 70%, but no more than 80%, of the program must consist of specialized instruction that bears directly upon the employment objectives of the program; and at least 20% of the program must consist of general education.

(3) A baccalaureate degree must require the satisfactory completion of a minimum of 120 semester credit hours or a minimum of 180 quarter credits. Of the total baccalaureate degree program course requirements, at least 40 semester credit hours or 60 quarter credit hours must be in general education and represent a broad spectrum of disciplines in general education.

(4) A first professional degree, except those for the preparation of professional educators, must require the satisfactory completion of a minimum of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours for admission to the degree program and the satisfactory completion of a total minimum of 150 semester credit hours or 225 quarter credit hours for the program. Professional educator preparation programs must comply with Chapter 354 (relating to preparation of professional educators).

(5) A master’s degree must require the satisfactory completion of a minimum of 30 semester credit hours or 45 quarter credit hours beyond the baccalaureate level.

(6) The number of semester or quarter credit hours for a degree beyond a first professional or master’s degree shall be determined by the faculty and reflect the recommendations of professional associations or National learned societies...

(d) To assure academic integrity, an institution shall provide students in a distance education program access to academic and student services, including textbooks, study guides, library and other learning resources, personal interaction with faculty, tutors or other educational personnel by computer, telephone, mail or face-to-face meetings. The institution shall assure integrity of student work and provide opportunity for student assessment. These programs must comply with the regulations that apply to resident-based programs as prescribed in this chapter and Chapters 35, 36, 40 and 42 and conform to generally accepted academic practices for delivery of instruction through distance education.”


-----------------------------------------------
---------

And, the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Part 600 – Institutional Eligibility Under the Higher Education Act of 1965, As Amended, provides a definition of credit hour.

“Credit hour: Except as provided in 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l), a 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 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.”

Federal Register; Vol. 75, No. 209; October 29, 2010; Rules and Regulations, Page 66946; Section §600.2; http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getpage.cgi?dbname=2010_register&page=66946&position=all