

Course Policies and Procedures

Based on Divisional Committee Policies and Guidelines (<https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta>)

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Background

Enabling legislation for the UW-System (Chapter 36) includes the specification of faculty responsibilities (36.09): *The faculty of each institution, subject to the responsibilities and powers of the board, the president and the Chancellor of such institution, shall be vested with responsibility for the immediate governance of such institution and shall actively participate in institutional policy development. As such, the faculty shall have the primary responsibility for academic and educational activities and faculty personnel matters. The faculty of each institution shall have the right to determine their own faculty organizational structure and to select representatives to participate in institutional governance.* These responsibilities are further explicated in “Faculty Policies and Procedures” (FP&P); see FP&P 1.20 for details.

Under this legislation, the faculty organized themselves into “Faculty Divisions” (FP&P, Chapter 4) with responsibility for, among other things, approval of courses, review of course offerings, and advice on tenure appointments. Thus, Divisional Committee policies and guidelines form the basis for course development and planning on campus. Find below specific topics addressed by the Divisional Committees.

- 1. Credit hours.** The campus must meet the federal definition of a credit hour: “one hour [50 minutes] 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 hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time.” A three-credit class requires approximately 45 contact hours, plus approximately 90 hours of outside classroom work.
In line with these contact hour standards, the campus has established Summer Session credit load maximums for students. Students may carry one credit per week of instruction. Session-specific limits follow this rule, with the exception that 9 credits are allowed in the Eight-Week General Session and 6 credits are allowed in the Five-Week Law Session. There are also maximum credit loads by school/college for the entire Summer Session (e.g., Special Students may take 12 credits over the summer). Students must obtain permission from their academic dean to carry a credit overload, either by session or for the entire summer.
- 2. Qualified instructor.** “Instructors (excluding teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) must possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members must possess the same level of degree.” This requires that Special Students with a previous degree must be taught by an individual with at least a master’s degree.
- 3. Course number and level.** Courses numbered under 300 (100-299) may be taken for credit by undergraduates only. Offerings at this level are generally considered elementary level, although some courses may be intermediate. Courses numbered 100-299 are generally directed to first and second year undergraduates. Courses in the 300-699 range may be taken for credit by both undergraduate and graduate students. Courses in the 300-499 range are generally considered intermediate level, while courses in the 500-699 range are generally considered advanced level. Graduate students taking courses numbered 300-699 are expected to do graduate-level work, though they are enrolled in an undergraduate-level course. The 300-699 range is not intended to include undergraduate-only, elementary level courses. Courses in the 700-999 range are open only to graduate students.
- 4. Course components.** Courses generally consist of one or more of the following components. (Note that what is referred to as an instructional “hour” below equals 50 minutes here on campus.)
 - a. Lecture:** An instructional method in which a qualified instructor presents data and little discussion occurs. One credit is awarded for approximately 15 hours (750 minutes) of lecture.

- b. Discussion: One credit is awarded for approximately 15 to 30 hours (750 to 1500 minutes) of discussion.
- c. Laboratory: Independent activity by a student within a group under supervision by a qualified instructor in a room with special equipment. This includes studio work, e.g., group art, dance, and music instruction. One credit is awarded for approximately 30 to 45 hours (1500 to 2250 minutes) of laboratory.
- d. Field Study: Instruction generally occurs in a non-classroom setting. Sections are determined by the span of supervision of a particular qualified instructor rather than the meeting time and place. Examples include student teaching, internship, clinical experience, field work (where that represents the total contact of the course). The number of credits awarded should be consistent with the federal credit hour definition.
- e. Seminar: A group of advanced students at the undergraduate or graduate level studying with a qualified instructor (or, in the case of colloquia, under the leadership of several qualified instructors) and exchanging the results of their research through discussion, reports, etc. The number of credits awarded should be consistent with the federal credit hour definition.
- f. Independent Study: Occurs where all course sections have an enrollment of one and where a section number is determined by the qualified instructor's conference section number. The number of credits awarded should be consistent with the federal credit hour definition.

Note that a research paper, on its own, will not normally be considered the equivalent of an hour of instructor-student interaction. Independent work by a student with no instructional contact fails to meet the federal credit hour definition. Online courses will be considered by the same standards as face-to-face courses; that is, instructor-student contact hours must be consistent with the number of credits assigned to the course.

5. **Syllabus.** A course syllabus should include the following:

- a. The course department, title, and number
- b. An indication of the time devoted to individual topics, together with the hours of instructor-student instruction and/or discussion
- c. Learning objectives
- d. Texts or references to be used
- e. A representative list of readings
- f. How students will be evaluated:
 - i. Assignments, papers, exams, etc. and the weight assigned to each of these requirements
 - ii. What constitutes an A, AB, B, BC, C, D, F. For example, A=93-100%, AB=88-92%, B=83-87%, BC=78-82%, C=70-77%, D=60-69%, F=0-59%. Or, if the course will be graded on a curve, describe the standards upon which the curve will be set.

6. **Topics courses.** A topics course is an umbrella designation used for courses that vary significantly from semester to semester within a particular area of study. The subject is usually offered one time only. The course may be used, for example, by a qualified visiting instructor to present a subject or by an academic unit to introduce a course on an experimental basis, before seeking permanent approval. For each semester the course is offered, the particular topic should be added to the title; this topic will appear on the student's transcript.

It is appropriate to use a topics number for a course taught so infrequently that it is impractical to have its own course number. (If a course is taught more than twice every five years, it should have its own number.) The School of Education APC is reviewing a policy that requires topics courses generally be reviewed for conversion to a permanent course after being offered three times in a five-year period.