

Time on Task: Student Workload Expectations

TEACH ONLINE: DO IT YOURSELF (DIY) RESOURCES

Overview:

Student workload expectations are defined by credit hour. Student “time-on-task” expectations are to be set at 3 hours per week per credit/contact hour. For example, for a 3-credit course in a 15-week term, students are expected to spend 9 hours per week for a total of 135 time-on-task hours.

This translates to all terms as a total of 135 time-on-task hours. For example, for a 3-credit class:

- 3-week term = 45 hours per week = 135 hours total
- 5-week term = 27 hours per week = 135 hours total
- 15-week term = 9 hours per week = 135 hours total

Who should consider this information?

All faculty, instructors, graduate assistants, course designers and subject matter experts.

What is it best used for?

It is important to expect time-on-task hours and assign a reasonable amount of work. Students have many commitments within and outside of school. Instructors and course designers should be cognizant of finding a balance of reasonably assigned work and the pedagogical level of the class. “If the workload we assign is reasonable and achievable, it increases the possibility that students can maintain motivation while balancing multiple goals.” (Carnegie Mellon University, 2019)

Advantages

- Planning appropriately for student productivity and student success.
- It helps ensure that the University meets accreditation standards.
- Without well-defined course expectations, students will not view online learning as seriously as they need to be successful.

Disadvantages

- Some instructors may find it challenging to plan appropriately for short intensive courses.

How to:

Provide the anticipated time for completion for each course module in the module overview page.

Resources

- You may wish to use the workload calculator from Rice University to help break down each task:
<https://cte.rice.edu/workload>

References

- Carnegie Mellon University, 2019. [Solve a teaching problem: Assign a reasonable amount of work](#). Retrieved April 24, 2019.
- McDaniel, E. A. (2011). Level of student effort should replace contact time in course design. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 10(10).
- New York State Education Department, Office of College and University Evaluation (2013). [Policies: Determining time on task in online education](#). Retrieved July 3, 2013.
- Rice Center for Teaching Excellence, 2019. [Course Workload Estimator](#). Retrieved April 24, 2019.
- Turner, T. (2005). Student workload in the online course: Balancing on a rule-of-thumb. *Educator's Voice*, 6(3).
- Vai, M. & Sosulski, K. (2011). *Essentials of online course design: A standards-based guide*. New York and London: Routledge.