

Calculating Contact Hours

Contact hours

The term 'contact hour' is defined as a unit of measurement that represents an hour of scheduled instruction given to students. Contact hour tends to be used broadly to refer to the time spent learning in contact with the instructor or teaching assistant. Generally, this is measured in accordance with the credit hours assigned. For any course, one credit hour must be accompanied by at minimum one hour of direct faculty instruction. For example, a 3 credit course meets at least for 3 hours once a week for 15 weeks, so it is a minimum of 45 contact hours. Pedagogically speaking, more contact hours benefit student learning.

All courses have homework, reading, studying, or work done outside of the class hours which is referred to as 'independent learning'. The general rule of thumb is that for each hour of contact hour time, students should have at least two hours of independent learning time (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2012). So that same 3 credit course with 45 contact hours would have 90 hours of homework over a 15 week semester. The numbers provided above for contact hours are a required minimum, not a target. Wesley Theological Seminary strives to provide consistent educational excellence, and there is a higher level of expectation for students and faculty.

The layout is as follows:

Credit Hours	Required Contact Hours	Required Independent Hours
1	15	30
2	30	60
3	45	90
4	60	120

How do the online, hybrid and intensive courses replicate the required contact hours, and homework hours?

Online, hybrid and intensive courses also have the requirement of both contact hours and independent study hours. Contact hours and Independent study hours must be differentiated so that the two can be clearly documented.

Online courses are calculated as time on task. The instructor must use tools in the learning management system that would count as direct contact. The learning management system (Blackboard) documents this activity and archives the information. Activities that count as direct contact have the direct oversight or supervision of the course instructor. Activities outside of the Blackboard are not as easy to document, so it is necessary for any activities being calculated as contact hours to go through the Blackboard learning management system. The table below shows some sample online activities for that would comprise contact hours as opposed to those activities that would be considered homework.

Direct Contact
Read or watch lecture
Presentations from instructor
Multimedia content – especially interactive
Assessments – quizzes, tests
Participate in discussion boards
Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blogs - Journals - Wikis - Peer review - Viewing another student's presentation
Engaging in experiential learning
Group work
Working with Writing Center
Research instruction from Library staff

Homework Hours
Reading course texts
Writing assignments
Studying
Preparing for class
Preparing one's own presentation
Reading/reviewing class notes
Group work

Faculty are encouraged to be creative when designing lesson plans, both in person and online. Experimentation and exploration is encouraged for the sake of helping students learn better. Most things that might be done in person can be done or simulated online with preparation and the right technology. The following table lists activities that may be planned for face-to-face activities with the online options or equivalents.

On Campus Activities	Online Version
Lecture	Video Lecture Instructor's PowerPoint (PDF) with links to outside media or text Instructor's commentary with summary/outside materials
Small Group work	Collaborative tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Groups - Blogs - Discussions - Wikis
Experiential learning	Online interactive maps Interviews Activities within the community Online field trips
Class Discussion	Asynchronous forum where instructor poses questions or expands up on lecture, answers questions, and/or facilitates student interaction

The Instructional Designer and Director of Educational Technology is available for pedagogical planning and Blackboard training. When designing an online course, it is ideal to meet with an Instructional Designer at least 3 times during the planning phase of the online course.

Her contact information is as follows:

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Works Cited

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2012, October 30). Credit Hour Policy.

US Department of Education Office of PostSecondary Education. (2011, March 11). GEN-11-06. Washington, DC.