

UOCC Preliminary Spring 2015 Curriculum Report. Request additional copies from kathyw@uoregon.edu. After May 15, 2015 report errors in writing to kathyw@uoregon.edu and jefferis@uoregon.edu

FACULTY-STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN UO ONLINE COURSES

Passed by Undergraduate Council – Jan. 21, 2015

Passed by Graduate Council - Feb. 18, 2015

Passed by UOCC - Feb 20, 2015

Amended by Undergraduate Council – May 14, 2015

**As per the May 2015 amendment,
this policy shall be applied only to proposed online courses.**

Rationale

Historically, the student credit hour (SCH), derived from the Carnegie Unit, has meant, in broad terms, 1 hour per week of engagement with the instructor in a classroom setting and 2 hours per week of student work outside the classroom for each academic credit. From that model emerged our understanding of the standard 4-credit UO class, with its 120 hours per term of “student engagement”: 40 “hours” of contact with instructor + 80 “hours” of student-driven activity for undergraduates and 160 “hours” for graduate students. That model has worked well for courses where the instructor and the students are in a classroom, involved in bilateral engagement, for 4 hours per week over a 10-week term. Bilateral engagement in this sense refers to the iterative, responsive nature of a classroom experience. Furthermore, some well-established deviations from this general guideline nonetheless follow the principles behind the model; for example, grad courses provide rich occasions for bilateral engagement through the exchange of student work and formative instructor feedback. We assume in this model that bilateral engagement between instructor and student in the classroom has educational value. This kind of engagement characterizes effective pedagogy, whether in a large lecture hall, small seminar, discussion section or an online environment.

As other teaching and learning methods have become more popular, this model no longer completely meets our needs for evaluating academic courses. In fact, strict adherence to this model carries with it two dangers: 1) inflexible adherence to SCH’s built on the instructor-led, students-in-seat principle; 2) abandonment of direct instruction in favor of an entirely self-paced, or self-generated focus on learning outcomes. The first danger ties us to potentially outmoded and “unscalable” pedagogies; the second danger obliterates the kind of residential, liberal arts education that is central to our academic mission.

Exceptions to the standard SCH model mostly apply to online/hybrid courses in which some or all of the bilateral engagement is not in the classroom but rather conducted online, but they also apply to other types of learning activities where bilateral engagement between instructor and student is less than it is under the traditional SCH model. In either case, these courses may need to be evaluated differently. This policy seeks to provide clearer guidance on how to evaluate such courses.

Policy

As a rule of thumb, roughly one-third of an undergraduate and one-quarter of a graduate student’s engagement in any given UO course - regardless of format - shall entail bilateral engagement with the instructor. For traditional, synchronous, classroom-based courses, bilateral engagement is typically achieved through face-to-face interaction between instructor and student. For courses which have less than the standard one-third bilateral engagement (i.e. less than 40 hours per term for most 4-credit courses), course proposals will need to describe how classroom-based bilateral engagement is being replaced by other activities.

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Bilateral engagement shall be defined at the UO in the explicit terms of instructor engagement with students. This engagement may take asynchronous forms, and may or may not entail individualized feedback or one-on-one rapport, but is in any event to be distinguished from the mere assessment of learning outcomes or passive and static assignment of work. The expectation with such mutual engagement is that it involves instructors actively shaping and reshaping the learning experience in response to student work and feedback as the course progresses.

A strict definition of bilateral engagement will not work here. Instead, course approvals that depart from the standard SCH model will rely on the collective judgment of faculty on the appropriate committees. That judgment should be based on the idea that replacing the traditional bilateral engagement attained in the classroom cannot be done by merely reducing the instructor role and increasing the work of the student.

Implementation

Proposed courses which fall below the standard bilateral engagement between instructor and student, as outlined above, will require a response to the prompt below:

“It is generally assumed that in most traditional classroom courses students engage with instructors 1 hour per week per credit in a classroom setting, and complete 2 hours per credit per week of work outside the classroom (3 hours for graduate students). If the proposed course calls for less student-instructor classroom engagement than 1 hour per credit per week, describe how bilateral instructor-student engagement will be achieved in this course to replace what would have happened in the classroom.”

This prompt will be located in the appropriate field in the Courseleaf system used for course proposals.