

UNH Faculty Senate
Motion # IX-M21
Student Study Hours per Credit Hour

1. Sponsoring committee: Student Affairs Committee
2. Motion presenter: Liza Finkel
3. Date of Faculty Senate discussion: May 2, 2005
4. Rationale:

The Student Affairs Committee was asked to examine the number of hours that students spend studying per credit hour. It is our understanding that the original intention behind this request was to see if there were indeed additional study requirements in place for those classes which meet for 3 hours per week but provide 4 hours of credit. When these classes were originally introduced, it was understood that additional readings, reflection, projects or other outside assignments would be required in these courses to make the workload commensurate with the additional credit.

The UNH Center for Teaching Excellence is currently creating a database providing information from the past eight years of teaching evaluations, broken down by course number (4xx, 5xx, etc.) and is in the process of breaking the data down by college. We also gathered information from other colleges, particularly from our regional peers (University of Maine, University of Massachusetts, University of Connecticut, etc.) regarding their expectations about student study habits.

Although the UNH Center for Teaching Excellence was able to give us some important information about student self-reports of study time, the center currently does not have that information organized based upon the number of credit hours earned. However, we did find some interesting information regarding UNH student study habits compared to expectations. UNH currently states that the expectation is that students will study (on average) 2-3 hours per week outside of class for every hour spent inside class. This expectation is communicated to new students at both the June and the September orientations and is provided to those students in a letter in June. This standard of expectation is widespread among other universities, including Boston University, University of Massachusetts, University of Connecticut, University of Maine, and many others.

However, according to the information collected by the UNH Center for Teaching Excellence, students currently claim to spend 4.7 hours per week outside of the classroom per class. This number can only be used as a general accounting, as it assumes (a) that during the final week of class students give an accurate accounting of the amount of time they have spent throughout the semester and (b) that there is an even distribution between three-credit and four-credit classes in the database. However, even as a very general accounting, this still suggests that UNH students are not spending the expected "2-3 hours per week for every hour inside class", since this would mean anywhere from 6-12 hours per week for a given class.

5. Motion:

In order to assess further the different expectations between 3 and 4 credit-hour courses, the UNH Center for Teaching Excellence should gather data specifically to examine these differences. The Center for Teaching Excellence should also conduct and publicize a series of seminars, pamphlets, etc., focusing on ways to help faculty create additional meaningful assignments that will force students to spend more time thinking critically about class materials, integration between disciplines, and application of learning.

In order to bring student study behavior better in line with standard, university-level expectations, the provost should alert deans and department heads to the university-wide discrepancy between student self-reports and university expectations.

In addition, the orientation process for new faculty should have, as a key session, an orientation to teaching at UNH, including the expectations and what our students are like. The current new faculty orientation spends very little time focused on preparing faculty members to teach at UNH.


Also, department chairs should set up new faculty members with mentors within the department who can observe the new faculty member and offer guidance and support in terms of teaching style, assignments, etc. to ensure that coursework is appropriately demanding of students' time and effort.

The Provost's Office and the Office of the Vice President for Student and Academic Services should improve the university's efforts to make sure that both faculty members and students are aware of the wide array of resources that can provide help. For example, many students are not aware of the Writing Center or the Center for Academic Resources; and many faculty are not aware of these centers and how they can help students or how other university resources can help faculty members in the planning and creation of their classes.

Finally, the primary responsibility for ensuring that students are aware of our academic expectations is for faculty to communicate these expectations to the students. While it is helpful that expectations are communicated to the students during orientation, it should be remembered that for most students the orientation session was a long time ago. Therefore faculty should take time within their early class sessions in the semester, to discuss their expectations for students to succeed, i.e. presence, participation and note taking in class, completing readings, using external resources (library, writing center) for assistance, etc. Additionally, faculty members should be prepared to create assignments and examinations that require more student work, preparation, and a greater depth and understanding of the topic at hand.

6. Senate action: passed, on May 2, 2005

Vote: a voice vote with three nays and three abstentions

Senate chair's signature: 

Forwarded to: President Ann Hart, on June 8, 2005

Forwarded to: Bruce Mallory, on June 8, 2005

Forwarded to: Mark Rubinstein, on June 8, 2005

Forwarded to: Lee Seidel, on June 8, 2005