

Toward a Dialogue about Reasonable Academic Expectations

The ideas laid out here are meant to be part of a dialogue about the expectations this Christ-centered community of scholars has for its quality college learning environments. Often students and faculty have different perspectives on what a normal or reasonable workload is in a college class. This often comes up when students and faculty talk about General Education classes. There is a certain mentality on the part of many students and some faculty that a general education course should be less challenging and less work than courses in the major. Some general education faculty members contend that GE courses should be the most challenging and are the courses in which students should do “real college” work. In order to temper these varying understandings and to provide a functional standard by which students and faculty alike can assess whether or not the workload or requirements of a particular course falls in a normal range, assessing against the following standards might prove useful.

What is a reasonable workload in a GE course?

It would be common in a properly calibrated SNU General Education course:

- For faculty to expect students to utilize/demonstrate critical thinking and effective communication skills in order to meet the minimum acceptable standard.
- To expect students to utilize 1-2 sources per page in an essay or research paper.
- To expect students to be working together *in class*, on topic, over the course of the term for the number of hours equal to the number of credit hours assigned to the course multiplied by 15. (For a 3 credit class, students work together on the course for 45 hours in a semester). This interaction may occur in a physical classroom or in an online classroom...the important notion here is significant interaction among members of the scholarly community formed by the class.
- To expect students to do about 2 hours of work outside of class for every hour students are in class together.
- Taking those together, in a three (3) credit semester course, faculty can expect a student should expect to spend 9 hours a week engaged in doing the work necessary to achieve the learning outcomes of the course.
- For a course with a lab, students will spend 2-3 additional hours engaged in solving the weekly lab problems.
- When students are in engaged in courses where the delivery is not organized by the standard semester, it would be normal to expect the work load for the course to require that students engage in learning activities for **40-50 hours** over the

instructional term **for each credit hour** assigned to the course (class + preparation and demonstration time). (For a 3 credit class, it would be normal for students to spend 120-150 hours engaged in class related work over the term). This means that in a 5 week class, students should be prepared to put in about 25-30 hours per week, including time in class, engaged in the work of the course.

- It would be normal for students to spend 50-75% of the time together in class engaged in active learning exercises that require them to collect from one another information (normally individually acquired outside of class) and analyze it, either individually or collectively, in order to create knowledge for themselves.

How long does it/should it take to...

While there are a wide range of learning activities and a range of tempos by which students complete those activities,

Activity done to assignment standard	Product/hour
Read discerningly	10-15 pages/hr
Write reflectively	300-600 words/hr
Research and compose research paper	100 words/hour

What is a reasonable grade distribution?¹

In an SNU General Education course, **properly calibrated for a group of students' level of ability**, it would be normal for students to meet the course's standards for learning achievement in the following proportions:

5-10% earn an A in the course

20% earn a B in the course

55% earn a C in the course

15-20% earn a D or F in the course (or withdraw late in the semester b/c they would earn a D or F in the course if they didn't). Why, because some students choose not to try very hard, life gets in the way of their academic work, they are working a full-time job and they can't engage the course at reasonably expected levels, etc.

¹ This is neither a statistical fact nor a claim that student performance should be conformed to a "bell curve"; it is a suggestion that if all students are earning A's or no student is earning an A, it might be worth one's time to look think about things like workload, expectations for success, etc. This might a good conversation starter with students, and with colleagues, regarding expectations for college level courses.

