



**THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
/ ALBANY, NY 12234**

Professional Education Program Review
89 Washington Avenue, 2nd Floor, West Wing
Albany, NY 12234
Tel. (518) 474-3817 ext. 360
Fax. (518) 473-8577
Email. OPPROGS@nysed.gov

Determining Time on Task in Distance Learning Classes

Time on task is the total learning time spent by a student in a college course, including instructional time as well as time spent studying and completing course assignments (e.g., reading, research, writing, individual and group projects.) Regardless of the delivery method or the particular learning activities employed, the amount of learning time in any college course should meet the requirements of Commissioner's Regulation Section 50.1 (o), a total of 45 hours for one semester credit (in conventional classroom education this breaks down into 15 hours of instruction plus 30 hours of student work/study out of class.)

"Instruction" is provided differently in online courses than in classroom-based courses. Despite the difference in methodology and activities, however, the total "learning time" online can usually be counted. Rather than try to distinguish between "in-class" and "outside-class" time for students, the faculty member developing and/or teaching the online course should calculate how much time a student doing satisfactory work would take to complete the work of the course, including:

- reading course presentations/ "lectures"
- reading other materials
- participation in online discussions
- doing research
- writing papers or other assignments
- completing all other assignments (e.g. projects)

The total time spent on these tasks should be roughly equal to that spent on comparable tasks in a classroom-based course. Time spent downloading or uploading documents, troubleshooting technical problems, or in chat rooms (unless on course assignments such as group projects) should not be counted.

In determining the time on task for an online course, useful information include

- the course objectives and expected learning outcomes
- the list of topics in the course outline or syllabus; the textbooks, additional readings, and related education materials (such as software) required
- statements in course materials informing students of the time and/or effort they are expected to devote to the course or individual parts of it
- a listing of the pedagogical tools to be used in the online course, how each will be used, and the expectations for participation (e.g., in an online discussion, how many substantive postings will be required of a student for each week or unit?)

Theoretically, one should be able to measure any course, regardless of delivery method, by the description of content covered. However, this is difficult for anyone other than the course developer or instructor to determine accurately, since the same statement of content (in a course outline or syllabus) can represent many different levels of breadth and depth in the treatment of that content and require widely varying amounts of time.