
Student Workload Policy

Academic Policy

1 Purpose

In its statement of values, the Victoria University of Wellington ('the University') is committed to providing a supportive environment that will enable staff and students to develop to their full potential, and to pursuing equity in educational and employment opportunity.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that these values are applied to student workloads and to provide both staff and students with a guide to the time that a student of average ability would be expected to put into a course in order to obtain a pass. The University uses the allocation of points to define its degree requirements and also to provide guidance to students on what is a reasonable workload in each trimester and how to plan their study time.

The workloads of postgraduate programmes may be less well defined. However, this policy should be applied as far as is practicable to both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

2 Organisational Scope

This is a University-wide policy.

3 Definitions

For purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

Assessment:	The process of assigning marks or grades to pieces of work submitted by a candidate in a course, and to the candidate's overall performance in the course. This may include internal assessment on the basis of such items as essays, reports, exercises, tests, student presentations or tutorial participation during the course and/or an examination at the end of the course.
Break:	A teaching-free period in the middle of a trimester (mid-trimester break) or between the end of an examination period and the start of the following trimester (e.g. mid-year break).
Course:	An individual unit of study towards a qualification, identified by a course code and title and carrying a specified points value.
Course Outline:	A document supplied to each student at the beginning of each course that accurately describes the content and assessment of the course and explains general University requirements.
Summer School:	A defined six-week period of teaching that occurs in January and February.
Trimester:	One of three teaching periods that make up the academic year.

Workload: The amount of time spent by students on University study, including both scheduled contact time (lectures, tutorials, laboratories, workshops, etc) and individual (or group) study.

4 Policy Content and Guidelines

4.1 Determination of Workload

- (a) Workload expectations for a course should correspond to the points value of the course irrespective of the discipline or mode of delivery. Typically, a point requires ten hours of student work (refer to the *Assessment Handbook* for more specific guidelines). Students should be aware that the workload in a fully internally-assessed course, or one offered during a shorter teaching period such as Summer School, is likely to be more concentrated than in one taught over 12 weeks with a final examination in the official examination period. It is important for equity reasons that workloads across the University should be broadly consistent. In particular, care should be taken to maintain a consistent workload across multiple offerings of a course in any one year.
- (b) Calculation of workload should include class contact time (lectures, tutorials, workshops, laboratories, etc) as well as individual time spent on activities such as:
 - (i) Reading (consideration needs to be given to both the amount of reading and the degree of difficulty of the reading expected)
 - (ii) Note-taking
 - (iii) Field work
 - (iv) Interacting with resources outside class, e.g. Blackboard
 - (v) Discussing topics and issues
 - (vi) Participating in online discussions
 - (vii) Engaging in collaborative group work
 - (viii) Assessments (written, oral and online)
 - (ix) Project work
 - (x) Music practice
 - (xi) Practica
 - (xii) Preparing for and sitting tests or examinations.
- (c) Heads of School should ensure that all academic staff in the School gain experience in course design and the principles of assessment. Those who lack such experience should be strongly advised to attend a formal development programme.
- (d) Schools are strongly advised to examine the workload requirements of their courses at each level. Heads of School must ensure that the determination of the appropriate points for any course takes account of the type of course, the types of teaching and learning activities involved, the weight and composition of the assessment and that the expected student workload is:
 - (i) equitable: all students have comparable workloads and access to required resources and student support services to enable success in learning;
 - (ii) reasonable: allows students to manage the workload within the timeframe and deadlines set, and to maintain a balance between study and personal lives; and

- (iii) safe: all practicable steps are taken to minimise physical or mental harm to students.
- (e) Every course proposal should make it clear how the target workload is to be achieved by the combination of class contact hours and activities, including assigned work (whether assessed or not) and individual study. It should also be clear how that workload is distributed over the trimester. For instance, it is not acceptable to offer a course which requires, say, 40 hours per week in the final two weeks of the course but only three hours per week in the earlier weeks, even if the total workload is reasonable.
- (f) When courses are offered over a shorter period such as Summer School care must be taken to warn students in advance of the workload requirements and the timing of assessment in relation to the teaching period.
- (g) Faculties should establish workload norms as a context for the approval of proposals for new courses. For example, faculties where most assessment is by way of written assignments should have a common understanding of the total word limit appropriate to the number of course points and the level of the course. Faculties should also arrive at an agreement on the workload associated with online and collaborative tasks.
- (h) Once a course has been approved, a general statement of the relationship between its points and workload should be included in the course outline. It should also be made clear that students who have not studied in the subject for some time or lack the required skills for the successful completion of the course may require more than the standard workload

4.2 Assessment

- (a) Assessment requirements for a course should be clearly specified in the course outline in accordance with the requirements and guidelines set out in the *Assessment Handbook* and any additional Faculty requirements. Generally, students should be able to expect that the time and effort required for each assessable task should reflect the contribution of that task to the final grade. However, in order to demonstrate or achieve proficiency in the material in some courses, students may be required to complete exercises which contribute little or nothing to the overall grade.
- (b) Academic staff should follow the requirements of the *Assessment Handbook* with regard to the timing of pieces of assessment. The pattern of assessment should provide maximum flexibility for dealing with students affected by adverse personal circumstances.
- (c) Except where provided for in the *Assessment Handbook*, no teaching may be scheduled in undergraduate courses in study or examination periods or in mid-trimester or mid-year breaks, and no assessment should be scheduled for submission during mid-trimester and mid-year breaks.
- (d) Where group work is a component of the course, the course outline must give an indication of the time commitment required beyond scheduled class time. The course coordinator should supervise and monitor group work assignments so as to ensure that not only are all students contributing equally to the assignment, but also that students are not under peer pressure to make time commitments in excess of that indicated in the course outline.
- (e) Proposals to introduce new courses (or to change the assessment of existing courses) must make clear the proposed distribution of assessment and its relationship to the total workload.

4.3 Extensions

- (a) The University recognises that the development of work discipline and time management skills is an important part of the educational process and that each student must take responsibility for allocating sufficient time for their studies. Nevertheless, academic staff should recognise the hardship that can arise for students faced with three or four major pieces of work due in a short period, as often happens in the weeks before or after a mid-trimester break or during the final two weeks of a trimester. Research literature on student retention recommends flexibility in dealing with requests from such students for a short extension of time to complete an assessment item. Extensions are also appropriate where students are put under pressure by medical or other unexpected circumstances. No penalty should be imposed on the student when an extension is given on the grounds of genuine hardship.
- (b) The granting of an extension is at the discretion of the relevant course coordinator. In addition to the situations outlined in s4.3(a), extensions may also be granted where a student has simply not allowed enough time to complete the work. In these cases, penalties similar to those set out in the course outline for late submission of work may be imposed.

4.4 Monitoring of Workloads

- (a) Heads of School must ensure that mechanisms for the monitoring of workloads are in place to determine whether the estimated student workload is realistic. This should include the checking of student evaluations in terms of workload expectations and the real time involved so that an adjustment of the workload can be made when it is demonstrated that the actual workload deviates significantly from the estimate.
- (b) Faculties must monitor the actions of Schools, either through their Academic Committees or a separate Workload and Assessment Committee. When Faculties review new courses after they have been taught for the first time they should ensure that Schools have collected student comment on the actual workload of the course.
- (c) Students who have concerns regarding the workload of a course or programme should raise them with the course coordinator in the first instance. If they are not satisfied with the outcome they should raise them with the Head of School. Matters not settled within the School should be referred to the relevant Associate Dean (or other designated person) in the Faculty. The Education Coordinators of VUWSA are available to help students with their concerns.

5 Compliance

Heads of School are responsible for compliance with this policy. It is recommended that Associate Deans (or some other designated person) also monitor Faculty-wide compliance.

6 Legislative Compliance

Though the University is required to manage its policy documentation within a legislative framework, there is no specific legislation directing this policy.

7 References

[Assessment Handbook](#)

Previous version: [Student Workload Policy](#)

8 Appendices

None

9 Approval Agency

Academic Board

10 Approval Dates

This policy was originally approved on:	13 July 2006
This version was approved on:	28 July 2011
This version takes effect from:	1 October 2014

11 Policy Sponsor

Provost

12 Contact Person

The following person may be approached in relation to this policy:

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