

# Online Instructional Equivalency and Substantive Interaction Grid

According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s Credit Hour Policy and the PA Department of Education’s Title 22, “a semester credit hour represents a unit of curricular material that normally can be taught in a minimum of 14 hours of classroom instruction, plus appropriate outside preparation or the equivalent as determined by the faculty” (PA Code, Title 22, § 31.21.b). Hence a 3 credit course should have 42 hours of classroom instruction, or for online/hybrid courses, 42 hours of direct contact. The final exam is NOT included in the 42 hours of direct contact, but quizzes during the term can be included. Since many online courses are accelerated, the 42 hours of direct instruction will be greater than the 3 hours per week needed for a 14 week course. Common course lengths:

Lgth of Course in Wks	Direct Hrs Per Wk	Tot Hrs for 3 Credit Course
14	3	42
8	5.25	42
7	6	42

The *Online Instructional Equivalency and Substantive Interaction Grid* will assist you in translating instructional activities from a traditional classroom to equivalent online activities to meet the required number of direct contact hours. Most synchronous activities will have an equivalency rate of one to one, e.g., an hour of a live class using a telecommunication tool will equal an hour of direct contact. The equivalency rates will be different for asynchronous activities, e.g., the initial post to a discussion forum could count as 30 minutes of direct contact, but responses to other posts that requires reading all postings and replying to multiple posts could count as one hour of direct contact.

The grid also links direct contact hours to types of substantive interaction that a faculty member may use to engage with online students. New federal Title IV regulations, effective July 1, 2021, require instructors to engage in at least **two forms** of substantive interaction during each course. The substantive interactions with the student must occur on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course. The regulations define substantive interaction as engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following: (i) Providing direct instruction; (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework; (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency; (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course; or (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution’s or program’s accrediting agency.

The new regulations also require that an instructor monitor the students’ academic engagement and success. The instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student. Monitoring a student’s “academic engagement and success” may include: evaluating a student’s level of participation in synchronous class sessions; monitoring the student’s activity on course websites or materials; considering the quality of the student’s coursework or understanding; or other forms of monitoring the student’s engagement and success.

Method	Description	Activity	Rate of Equivalent Instructional Hours (Student)	Faculty - Substantive Interaction is met by:
Discussion Forum	Instructor-directed discussion board where students post messages directly related to course content. This activity typically supports application of concepts and/or reflection by analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and is evidenced by student postings and responses to the postings of others.	Initial relevant and substantive student posting	1 posting (requires reading prompt and replying) = ½ hr. instruction	Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency
		Reading instructor and/or other student postings to contribute multiple (1-3) substantive responses that reflects active engagement in the discussion	1 posting (requires reading all postings and reply to multiple posts) = 1 hr. instruction	
Case Studies and Problem-Based Learning	In-depth inquiry and examination of a subject or problem and its context that supports critical thinking skills and knowledge application by analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Analysis is shared with instructor and/or class.	Reviewing and working through case study. Research, define and resolve a problem	1 case study analysis & posting = 1-3 hrs. instruction	
		Reviewing instructor feedback and revising work	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
Individual Project	Set of interrelated tasks that involve research, planning, analysis, and synthesis which result in a completed individual project. Periodic guidance and feedback from instructor to support specific learning outcomes.	Individual project tasks	1 hr. - 3 hrs. per week for duration of project	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
		Reviewing instructor feedback and revising work	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	
Group Projects	Set of interrelated collaborative and individual tasks that involve research, planning, analysis, and synthesis which result in a completed small-group project. Periodic guidance and feedback from instructor to support specific learning outcomes.	Individual and collaborative project tasks	1 hr. - 3 hrs. per week for duration of project	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
		Reviewing instructor feedback and revising work	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	

Method	Description	Activity	Rate of Equivalent Instructional Hours (Student)	Faculty - Substantive Interaction is met by:
Peer Review and Critique	Peer evaluation of work produced by students to support specific learning outcomes, maintain standards of quality, and target higher order affective and cognitive skills. Peer review should be supported by examples and guidelines for review and responses.	Evaluation of a peer's work to determine if the project demonstrated achievement of learning objectives. Develop thoughtful critique of work.	1 hr. - 2 hrs.	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
Service-Learning and Experiential Learning Project	Instructor guided projects that integrate community service or firsthand, real-world experiences with course content to support specific learning objectives. Reflections should be shared with instructor and/or class for guidance and feedback.	Substantive exchanges between the instructor/student(s) via digital tools that define and focus work on the project	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	Providing direct instruction.
		Tasks completed in the field	1 hr. - 3 hrs. per week for duration of project	
		Reviewing instructor feedback and revising work	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
Journals, Blogs, and Reflections	Self-reflective reporting on experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to course work and used for sharing formative feedback with instructor and/or class. Postings reflect serious analysis, synthesis of course content, and contemplation of course material.	1 individual post	1 private posting = ½ hr. instruction 1 shared posting (required to read all classmates' postings) = 1 hr. instruction	Substantive Interaction is met by direct participation in Blogs, etc., and providing feedback on a student's coursework
		Reviewing and responding to peer's work	1 shared posting (required to read all classmates' postings) = 1 hr. instruction	

Method	Description	Activity	Rate of Equivalent Instructional Hours (Student)	Faculty - Substantive Interaction is met by:
Online Quizzes and Tests	<p>Subject competencies are assessed using online examinations, tests and quizzes. Growth in content knowledge, abilities, and/or skills are measured. Instructor to provide formative feedback on progress towards specific learning outcomes. Use of LMS for delivery of online testing or submission of testing materials.</p> <p><b>NB: Final examinations may not be counted toward instructional hours, per Pa. Code 22.</b></p>	Answering questions and reviewing feedback	1 hr. test = 1 hr. of instruction	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
Consultations with Faculty on Research and Writing	Interactive analysis and review of student formal writing. Submission of at least one draft should be required for individualized, instructor feedback and guidance for improvement done either asynchronously or synchronously.	Reviewing articles and course content	Multiple substantive exchanges, synchronous or asynchronous, of active engagement in the discussion. 1 hr = 1 hr of instruction	Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency
		Reviewing instructor feedback and revising work	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	
Student Presentations	Student presentations, delivered synchronously in a web-conference or asynchronously through a video file, which provide opportunity for participation and feedback from instructor and/or class. Recordings should be posted for review when possible.	Creating and giving a 10 – 20 minute presentation	1 hr. - 2 hrs. of instruction	Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
		Answering questions and reviewing feedback	½ hr. to 1 hr. of instruction	

Method	Description	Activity	Rate of Equivalent Instructional Hours (Student)	Faculty - Substantive Interaction is met by:
Asynchronous Video/Audio Lecture/Content	Instructor created or curated multimedia presentations used to deliver instruction on course concepts. Students consume and interact with lecture content. Students may interact with quizzes embedded in videos.	Reviewing a ten minute recording	½ hr. of instruction	Recorded online instructor lecture can only be considered substantive interaction if the instructor provides direct feedback to questions or problems within the lecture.
Library, Online and Electronic Database Research	Class directed research activity in lieu of online class meeting. Student engages in class-related research where the quality and quantity of the deliverable content is clearly delineated relative to the amount of time provided for the research.	1 hour of research	1 hr. of instruction	Providing direct feedback on class-related research.
Lab Assignments	Student performs virtual or live-remote experiments.	Perform experiment, submit lab report	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Assessing or providing feedback on the student's lab report
Required Attendance at Live or Virtual Events	Student attendance in prescribed events/activities external to the class. Students provide documentation to the instructor that provides clear evidence as to their attendance at the event or the engagement in the prescribed activity	Attendance at event - 1 to 1	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Providing feedback on reflections of event
Office Hours/Synchronous Online Meetings	Synchronous online interaction, using a synchronous tool, e.g., web conference, chat, etc., which gives students opportunity for clarification and feedback before and after instruction. Recordings should be posted for review when possible.	1 hour of web conference	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency
		Reviewing 1 hour recording	1 hr. - 2 hrs. of instruction	

Method	Description	Activity	Rate of Equivalent Instructional Hours (Student)	Faculty - Substantive Interaction is met by:
Synchronous Lecture	Instructor-directed, live presentation via synchronous tool used to deliver instruction on course concepts and provide opportunity for class participation and feedback. Recordings should be posted for review when possible.	1 hour of web conference	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Providing direct instruction
		Reviewing 1 hour recording	1 hr. - 2 hrs. of instruction	
Instructor-led Synchronous Discussions	Students discuss topic(s) with the instructor and/or with one another. Classroom topical dialogue discussed online via videoconference, teleconference, and/or chat.	1 hour of substantive classroom lecture or case review and discussion = 1 instructional hour	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency
Breakout Room Group Discussions	Students discuss instructor assigned topic(s) with one another in assigned groups. Students interact on topical issues in videoconferencing breakout rooms monitored by the instructor	1 hour of substantive classroom synchronous discussion = 1 instructional hour	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency
Simulations/Field Study	Participation in and/or in-depth observation of a real-world environment. Participation may be live or virtual.	Participate, observe in simulation/Field Study.	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	
		Analyze and report on experience.		Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework
Collaborative Annotation	Students engage in collaborative annotation of course readings and videos to deepen understanding of course content. Available tools: Perusall, Canvas annotated forms.	Annotate readings and synchronously/asynchronously respond to each other's comments and questions in context.	1 hr of activity = 1 hr. of instruction	Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency.  Assessing or providing feedback on the student's lab report