



VCU

Academic Workload in the Pre-Clinical Curriculum

Policy Statement and Purpose

The Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) has established standards regarding the amount of time medical students spend in required activities throughout the curriculum. The LCME also requires medical education programs to ensure adequate time for self-directed learning experiences throughout the curriculum in order to promote individual development of lifelong learning skills among students. The VCU SOM strives to create an optimal learning environment that facilitates student learning in a variety of formats while promoting student health and well-being. The purpose of this policy is to establish balance in the medical student's pre-clinical academic workload, which includes scheduled preclinical responsibilities, classroom learning in multiple formats, independent learning, and time for attention to personal health and well-being.

Stakeholders

The faculty, staff, and students of the VCU School of Medicine are responsible for knowing this standard operating procedure, its contents, and provisions.

Definitions

Scheduled Learning Activities: Scheduled learning sessions that may be delivered in various formats including live, synchronous instruction, as well as recorded and/or time-limited asynchronous sessions.

Assigned Activities: Assigned formal learning activities—such as required readings, audio/video recordings, online modules—to provide guided preparation or reflection for a specific learning session. Assigned Activities count towards hours of instruction but they occur outside of class and are completed on a student's own schedule. Assigned Activities *do not include* study time of session material.

Self-directed Learning Activities: A type of Assigned Activity that allow students to take ownership of their own learning with guidance from a facilitator or faculty member. For an activity to be defined as self-directed it must include the following:

- Self-assessment of the students learning needs
- Independent identification, analysis, and synthesis of relevant information
- Independent and facilitator appraisal of the credibility of information sources
- Assessed on and receive feedback on their information-seeking skills

Unscheduled Time: Any time that does not include Scheduled Learning Activities or Assigned Activities that students may use for independent study or personal reasons.

Half Day: A continuous four-hour block of time extending either through the morning (8:00 AM to 12:00 PM) or afternoon (1:00 PM to 5:00 PM).



VCU School of Medicine

CC: Curriculum Council.

OME: Office of Medical Education.

Responsibilities

CC: Provides central oversight of the student academic workload to ensure the learning environment is supportive and provides sufficient protected time for independent study, wellness, and personal activities.

OME: Collects information regarding scheduled learning activities, assigned activities, self-directed learning activities for each course.

Assistant/Associate Dean for Preclinical Medical Education: Reviews the collated course information to ensure that the academic workload complies with the requirements outlined in this policy, and works with faculty to modify the schedule when needed. The Assistant/Associate Dean for Preclinical Medical Education is also responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy, highlighting any discrepancies for review during the curriculum planning process and prior to approval of the preclinical curriculum schedule, and reporting compliance with this policy to the CC. This individual has the authority to modify the schedule due to circumstances created by adverse weather or natural disasters.

Preclinical Curriculum Course Directors: Responsible for providing timely course activities information as requested by the CC or OME, ensuring their courses comply with this policy, and providing timely notice to the Assistant/Associate Dean of Preclinical Medical Education and CC of emerging issues or barriers that may impede full compliance (e.g., faculty non-compliance, course organization).

Procedures

Guidelines for Academic Workload

- The maximum amount of Scheduled Learning Sessions is 26 hours per week, averaged over the semester
- The maximum amount of Assigned Activities is 14 hours per week, averaged over the semester
- Students will have a minimum of two half-days a week free from scheduled activities, averaged over the semester
- The cumulative academic workload (Scheduled activities + Assigned Activities) will not exceed 40 hours per week, averaged over the semester
- Students may participate in enrichment activities or electives, which do not count towards required activities or workload limits
- Independent study of material does not contribute to academic workload as defined in this policy

Scheduling Process

- The VCU SOM Academic Calendar is produced by the Assistant/Associate Dean for Preclinical Medical Education
 - The Academic Calendar establishes the first and last day of classes, number of weeks of instruction, breaks, and holidays.
 - No classes or other required activities will be scheduled on official VCU holidays
- The Assistant/Associate Dean of Preclinical Medical Education provides the timeline and template of available time to the course directors to use for course scheduling
- Preclinical Course Directors are required to submit their course’s detailed schedule including the number of scheduled learning sessions, assigned activities, and self-directed learning activities to the Assistant/Associate Dean of Preclinical Medical Education by the designated date prior to the beginning of the term
 - Failure to submit the schedule by the required date will result in the Assistant/Associate Dean for Preclinical Medical Education finalizing the course schedule
- The Assistant/Associate Dean of Preclinical Medical Education will review the hours and assist the course directors in balancing the academic workload to ensure compliance with the established preclinical academic workload policy
- The Assistant/Associate Dean of Preclinical Medical Education will provide a compliance report and the proposed schedule to the CC for review for final approval prior to the start of the term
 - Changes to the approved version of the calendar must be reviewed and approved by the CC prior to implementation

Related Policies

Review Cycle and Revision History

The policy is reviewed and may be revised by the Curriculum Council as necessary, but at least every three years.

Initial Policy Approved: 12.08.2022

Current Revision Approved: 12.08.2022

Applicable Laws, Regulations & Standards

LCME Standards for Accreditation of Medical Education Programs Leading to the MD Degree:

- LCME Standard 6, Element 3
- LCME Standard 8, Element 8



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