

Fitting Course Load to the Individual Student



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The hours of course work that a student carries must be fitted to the individual student. His load must fit his nature, his abilities and his time. We, as teachers almost always have some advising to do, and too often we do not advise the individual student — but instead, the average student. The average student may be in somewhat the same situation as the person who had one arm in ice water and the other in hot water and was “on the average” comfortable.

Some students are by nature perfectionists and want to carry too light of a load in an attempt to make straight A's. Others are good students but attempt too many hours and thus spread themselves too thin and do not earn grades which indicate their true ability. On the other hand, many students carry a light load with the intention of devoting more time to each course but find themselves with more time and thus put off studying saying, “It can wait, I have lots of time.” The poor management of time is a most common fault of many students.

Students with exceptional ability should not be allowed to lighten their load to the point of earning the bare minimum hours for graduation. We are presently at a time when four years of college is barely enough for today's jobs. The better student should carry a heavier load and either finish a semester early or work into his program courses which are not required for his degree but which make him more qualified for a particular job

or for graduate study. I very much prefer the addition of the course work over finishing early.

Students of below average ability should carry a somewhat lighter than average load and attempt to stay out of grade trouble. This is applicable especially to freshmen since many who do not graduate because of low grades acquired their first year have the ability to earn a baccalaureate degree. I hope that students of below average ability who carry a lighter load are not inclined to believe that they have a lot of time because of the lighter load. Many do not do appreciably better with reduced loads; in fact, they may begin to enjoy extracurricular activities so much that they actually earn lower grades.

At my institution we are on the quarter system but give semester hours credit. The average load is 10 semester hours per quarter. The majority of the courses in all fields carry 2.5 semester hours of credit and a student enrolls in four courses. Students are limited to 12.5 semester hours of course work per quarter. Freshmen who are in the lower half of their high school class are encouraged to take only three courses their first quarter. I insist that freshman agriculture majors take one course in their field because far too many cannot see the value of some required courses since they came to college to study “agriculture”. The student who takes required courses and a course in the major field has an opportunity to tie the courses together and make the quarter's work

more meaningful. A student who does this is less likely to become disinterested in college work and less likely to become a drop out. I also believe that a student will have a higher grade average for his first quarter and his first year since he should do better in his field of interest than in the required courses.

A student must have his course load adjusted for his time. Many students work part-time and some hold full-time jobs. I suggest that if a student works in excess of 20 hours per week he should carry one less course. Individual students have told me that they utilize their time much more effectively if they work part time without course load reductions and with no adverse effect upon their grades.

Some students have considerable difficulty in certain areas or with certain instructors. When this difficulty is apparent, some consideration should be given to course load reductions. In order to compensate for this, a somewhat heavier load should be carried when the student does not have courses in a difficult area. An alternative would be to enroll for a summer session or two, if the student wanted to graduate in four years.

Certain factors prevent men students from adjusting their course loads to any extent. The major one of these at the moment is the requirement by most draft boards that a student must carry 10 semester hours of course work per quarter or 30 semester hours per year to retain educational deferments.

Many activities and events compete for a student's time. Many of these activities are an integral and necessary part of the student's training. I believe that a student should become affiliated with certain clubs, organizations, teams, etc. However, there are other “things” which do not necessarily add to the student's academic and social progress.

I don't know whether the following data are pertinent to this topic, but I would like to quote a few statistics that have been compiled by Henry Boucher, Dean of Student Affairs at Northeast Missouri State Teachers College.

1. Freshmen (men and women) without cars were more likely to make a 2.0 (4.0 maximum) than those with cars. About 36% of the freshmen without cars were below 2.0 and about 60% of the freshmen with cars were below 2.0.

2. Average grades of men who pledged a fraternity dropped considerably the quarter that they were initiated into the fraternity. Average grade point attained after the pledge quarter was higher but average grade point at graduation did

not exceed the grade point received the quarter before pledging.

3. Freshman men living in dormitories made higher grade averages than freshman men living off-campus. Very few boys living in dormitories failed all courses; whereas a number living off-campus did. On a percentage basis, twice as many boys living off-campus were under 1.0 compared to those living on-campus. Space does not permit a lengthy discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of students

having cars, belonging to fraternities, or living on or off-campus.

One can speculate on these data for considerable time. I believe that these results are fairly typical of most colleges. I present them here as food for thought; how we as teachers of agriculture use them is up to each individual. I think that if we realize some of the existing trends and patterns it gives us something to work with to advise and counsel young men and women better and at the same time to raise academic standards.

The Professional Advising System



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Many colleges and universities have changed their methods of advising as a result of the great influx of students. The institution with which I am affiliated, Central Missouri State College, is among those that have made drastic changes. We now use the professional adviser system. For many years each of our faculty members had approximately thirty advisees at the time they entered college, and we counseled these students for two years and sometimes for four years.

In colleges and universities today, faculties are spending many hours of each day toward preparation, instruction, sponsoring of organizations, research, and committees. Because of the many obligations, faculties have lost contact with the students.

An institution such as ours, which has had a tremendous growth in recent years, has gone completely to the professional adviser system. However, the majoring student sometimes checks with an instructor in his field before going to the adviser to make out his program.

We are on the quarter system. Sometime during the quarter the student is assigned a twenty-minute period with which to consult his adviser to make out his schedule for the next quarter. That probably will be the only time he sees his adviser that quarter. This places a big burden on the adviser. Because of his heavy load, it is difficult for him to know all of the programs and keep abreast of the changes. At the same time it places some of the responsibility on the student. This responsibility seems to be accepted willingly by many of the students. College students should be responsible enough to shoulder the initiative to check the catalog, consider his goals, keep a record of his progress, and make preliminary decisions in the making of his program.

I shall endeavor to explain some of the workings of our system of advising and some of the reasons why we have changed.

The student is not allowed to take less than eight hours. The average hours carried last year was ten plus. Freshmen are usually advised to take nine hours their first quar-

ter. This means three courses of three hours each. If the high school record of the student has been outstanding, he may be permitted to enroll for more hours. The students on the honors program are not subject to these regulations.

The freshman is assigned an adviser during the summer. Then he and his parents are invited to the college on a specific day at which time they are shown the college and its facilities. The student also meets with his adviser, and they agree on his program for the first quarter. The data processing machine programs the schedule, and he is through with his enrollment.

The freshman is enrolled in one course in his major, and the other two courses are in general education.

After the first term, assuming he has passed his courses, he then enrolls for eleven hours. That is the maximum, with few exceptions, for his first two years. In addition to the hours mentioned, he is expected to carry one-half hour in physical education for six terms.

The upper classman may take twelve hours with twelve and one-half hours as the maximum. There is a requirement here that he have a "C" or two-point average. Every agreement that is made with the student is in writing and a copy is placed in his file. This eliminates misunderstandings in case the faculty member leaves or any other reason that may appear.

Some of the advantages and disadvantages of the professional adviser system may be stated in the following ways.

Advantages

1. Several steps in the enrollment procedure are eliminated. Only a