Faculty Representative Report
March 26, 2013

It was a pleasure speaking with you at the April 2nd teleconference. The intent of this report is to clarify some of the issues generated by the mix of 3- and 4-credit courses that make up Fort Lewis College curricula. It is not my aim to convey an editorial opinion, or to advocate for a specific credit model.

Several faculty have asked, “We [FLC] have had a 3-4 credit mix for almost 20 years and passed accreditation before. Why is this suddenly a problem?” There are four answers to that question:
- Increased federal and state scrutiny of degree/program requirements with emphasis on timely graduation rates
- Tighter rules regarding seamless transferability of classes
- Changing accreditation standards with vastly more stringent institutional requirements. There is the potential of jeopardizing accreditation, or (more likely) the threat of probationary status and associated reputational damage
- It always has been a problem. In fact, the associated issues have become so divisive that last October the Faculty Senate created a Course Credit Taskforce charged with exploring resolutions to the topic. The taskforce charge (adopted 6 Feb. 2013) can be found at the end of this report.

Here are some definitions and background information to provide structure for the conversation:
- Federal definition of 1 credit hour, based on a 15 week term = no less than one hour per week of seat time, and two hours per week out-of-class time (research, homework, etc.)
- Labs (art studio, music, science, etc.) are calculated at a different rate of two or three hours class time per week for 1 credit.
- With a few exceptions, baccalaureate degree programs are limited to 120 credits. Even programs that have statutory exceptions to the 120-credit limit must guarantee that students can complete degree requirements in 8 consecutive terms (not including summer classes). The only two exceptions to the 8 consecutive terms rule are Chemistry for Secondary Teachers Option and Biology for Secondary Teachers Option.
- The federal government defines normal course load as 15 credits per term. Beginning in 2013-14, institutional merit scholarship policy requires students to complete a minimum of 30 credits each academic year to qualify for renewal.
- Federal aid and state institutional support are expected to increasingly be tied to 4-year graduation.

Challenges Associated with the 3- and 4-Credit Mix

Timely degree completion
Because courses are a mix of credits, it is difficult for students to take an average of 15 credits per term. Degree maps reveal that in many (if not most) majors, course sequencing forces students to underload some terms and overload others. This jeopardizes academic success and makes it difficult for students with outside jobs to manage work schedules. Underloading also potentially threatens federal financial aid eligibility. While enrollment in 12 credits remains the minimum number of credits for federal financial aid purposes, Federal Student Aid policy is leveraging low-income students to enroll in more credits each semester by limiting Pell grants to 12 semesters in a lifetime.
“Seamless” transferability of classes
Colleges and universities in Colorado -except Fort Lewis College- are on the 3-credit model. Students who transfer out of Fort Lewis end up with superfluous credits. Conversely, students who transfer in to Fort Lewis may have to take electives they do not need to make up for a credit deficit. As recently noted in The Chronicle of Higher Education, “Nearly 60 percent of students in the United States attend two or more colleges, so the nontransfer of credits has huge implications.” [Laitinen, Amy. The Curious Birth and Harmful Legacy of the Credit Hour. 21 Jan. 2013.]

Course scheduling
Fitting 3- and 4-credit classes into the uniform schedule code is problematic. Class conflicts make student course scheduling an exercise in frustration. Facilities scheduling is also needlessly complicated. The opening sentences on the registrar’s uniform schedule page sum up the problem:

Over the last few years it has become clear that classes have been scheduled at a large variety of times and days and it has been done with little coordination among classes. The problem has been exacerbated by the addition of a large number of 4-hour courses. It has led to an unnecessary number of time conflicts in student schedules (sometimes classes overlap by 10 or 15 minutes one or two days a week) and poor utilization of classroom space. The Office of Academic Affairs has determined that uniform class meeting times need to be set. It has become clear that no solution will satisfy everyone.

Even with the uniform schedule code, Fort Lewis runs the risk of being out of compliance should individual course syllabi be examined for accurate credit representation. CCHE requires 750 minutes of seat time per 1 credit hour in a standard lecture course. Both the frequently used 3- and 4-credit course format models below are not structurally compliant unless faculty adds extra time at various points in the semester, and indicates those additions in the course schedule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Class Format</th>
<th>Total Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>80 minutes, 2 times a week</td>
<td>2240 (additional 10 minutes must be added at some point in the term to meet CCHE required seat time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>70 minutes, 3 times a week</td>
<td>2940 (additional 60 minutes must be added at some point in the term to meet CCHE required seat time)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increased class size
Fort Lewis College prides itself on close student/teacher interaction and small class sizes. When departments switch from 3- to 4-credit classes, faculty resources are stretched and fewer course sections can be offered. Class size necessarily increases to serve the same number of students.

Impacts on the need for adjunct instruction
Generally speaking, faculty loathes trimming curriculum. In 2011, then AHSS Dean Linda Schott worked with IR to evaluate the staffing impacts of credit change. Below are excerpts from an email on this topic (sent 9 Nov. 2011):

I've been analyzing what happened when programs changed from 3-credit to 4-credit courses. I looked at the number of courses programs had before the change and now as well as the number of credit hours in those courses. You'll see that the number of courses often increased and the increase in credit hours was often huge. I also looked at the staffing before the change and now and calculated the number of courses and number of credits per faculty member --not that they were actually teaching but for which they
would be "responsible" in order to offer their entire curriculum. One thing that occurred to me is that perhaps this helps explain the feeling faculty have that they are overworked. They have created more courses for themselves and have fewer folks to offer them!

As curriculum and credit counts grow, the number of faculty remains fairly constant. Requests for adjunct instructors have increased yearly. This year alone requests were triple the allotted budget.

Student workload
Some faculty have expressed concern that, should Fort Lewis return to a 3-credit model, students would be overworked by taking 5 courses per term. Yet by taking four 4-credit classes per term, expectations for student work increase. A 15-credit load in standard lecture courses obligates students to 45 hours of work per week (15 hours in class, 30 hours research/homework). A 16-credit load obligates students to 48 hours of work per week.

Faculty workload
Workload inequities are without a doubt the most divisive issue in the 3- vs. 4-credit debate. The number of credits taught per term does not always reflect real faculty workload. Variables such as numbers of students, contact hours, and differing pedagogical structures affect the overall responsibilities of faculty. To illustrate the disparities in workload, I selected representative samples of faculty schedules as published on WebOpus. To keep the comparison as fair as possible, I chose faculty from schools and disciplines across campus. All are the same rank and all teach a standard 12-credit load this term:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Courses</th>
<th>Number of Course Preps</th>
<th>Actual Contact Hours (60-minute hours, not credit hours)</th>
<th>Total number of students served W13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12 contact hours per week</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22 contact hours per week</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 contact hours per week</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5 contact hours per week</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11 contact hours per week</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences between the disciplines require multiple pedagogical strategies. Contact hours and numbers of students served will vary from discipline to discipline, and that is to be expected. However, differences in workload have become so exaggerated that they are now inequities. This affects research time/productivity, ability to contribute to service obligations, and faculty morale.

Discipline-Specific Accreditation
The 3- and 4-credit mix has negatively impacted several departments, most notably Engineering, Athletic Training, and Teacher Education. These programs have discipline-specific accreditations that commit them to certain course offerings. Of course all of these disciplines require courses outside of their specific area. When auxiliary required courses move from 3 to 4 credits, accredited degree programs are forced to cut from the inside out. It has been a juggling act to maintain accreditation standards while keeping programs at or under the maximum number of credits.

Curricular Autonomy
From the preamble of the faculty constitution, found in the Fort Lewis College faculty handbook:

In accordance with the principle of academic freedom, the Faculty has responsibility for academic matters, including guiding the curriculum and related scholarly activity. The Faculty has a solemn professional commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence in knowledge and learning and to govern itself in this pursuit.
It would not be fair to note the challenges presented by a mixed-credit system without also reminding the Board the faculty has responsibility for “guiding the curriculum” and “governing itself in this pursuit.” Several trustees and faculty have (quite reasonably) expressed doubt that faculty will be able to reach consensus on this issue. I remain optimistic that faculty will govern itself and not abdicate its responsibilities.

I have collected the comments, emails and statements forwarded by the faculty. They are found in an appendix to this report. * Perhaps it is not surprising the degree of agreement on both sides of the argument: faculty workload, curricular autonomy, the value of diverse educational experiences, and an overriding concern for student success. This is the source of my optimism, that shared goals and values will guide our decision-making and lead faculty to some resolution. I look forward to updating you on our progress at the next Board meeting.

Respectfully,
Amy K. Wendland
Professor of Art
Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees

*Note: In the online post of this report, the appendix has not been attached. Many of the faculty who wrote to the Board requested anonymity.

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**Charge to the Faculty Senate Course Credit Taskforce**

Adopted February 6, 2013

The Faculty Senate of Fort Lewis College charges the Credit Taskforce to gather comprehensive information and make recommendations concerning the current practice of offering both 3- and 4-credit courses. This charge outlines the goals of the taskforce, the representation of the taskforce, and the timeline for the taskforce.

**Tasks**

1. Collect and systematize information about the practice of offering both 3 and 4-credit courses. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
   - Cataloging faculty thoughts and concerns about 3-credit vs. 4-credit courses (perhaps via informal speaking sessions)
   - Analyzing faculty workload/compensation in 3-credit vs. 4-credit courses, specifically:
     - Impacts on course sizes
     - Impacts on contact hours
     - Impacts on the need for adjunct instruction
     - Impacts on faculty scholarship and service obligations
     - Impacts on individual disciplines
   - Describing the pedagogy of 3-credit vs. 4-credit courses
   - Analyzing the effect of 3-credit vs. 4-credit courses on the overall liberal arts package provided at Fort Lewis
   - Determining the relationship between the number of course credits and student success, including timely graduation and study load
   - Highlighting the connection between federal/state requirements and financial aid requirements given 3 and 4-credit courses
   - Analyze issues related to transferability of credits
• Explore teaching, scholarship and service models at peer institutions
• Determining budgetary and practical feasibility of shifting from current 3 and 4-credit courses to a different model

2. Make recommendations:
   a. concerning the optimal course-credit model from both a student and a faculty perspective. Recommendations might include keeping the practice as is, switching to all 3-credit courses, switching to all 4-credit courses, adjusting faculty workload in non-credit related ways, etc.
   b. concerning strategies for shifting to a new model in the event that the full faculty votes to change or in the event that state mandates compel a change.

Representation
The taskforce shall consist of 11 members: 3 from AHSS, 4 from NBS, 1 from SOBA, 1 from Teacher Ed./Library, 1 student and 1 member from the Office of Institutional Research These members must be confirmed in a vote by the full Faculty Senate.