



BOSTON COLLEGE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Donald Hafner, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs
FROM: Norah Wylie, Chair, Education Policy Committee, BC Law
RE: Calculation of Credit Hours under 34 CFR § 600.2
DATE: February 1, 2011

The federal Department of Education, under authority granted to it by the 2010 reauthorization of Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 has promulgated regulations to improve the integrity of programs funded under HEA. One of the regulations, 34 CFR §600.2, seeks to insure that there is a uniform definition for the granting of credit hours.

34 CFR § 600.2 defines “credit hour” as:

“an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement...that reasonably approximates not less than—

- (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work for each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester....
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, ...internships, practica...and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.”

Because the definition of “credit hour” in 34 CFR § 600.2 is comparable to the requirements applicable to the Law School by our accrediting agency, the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar (the Council) of the American Bar Association (ABA), the Law School’s classes are in compliance with the new federal regulations.¹

¹ Since 1952, the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar (the Council) of the American Bar Association (ABA) has been approved by the Department of Education as the recognized national agency for the accreditation of programs leading to the first professional degree in law. In many jurisdictions, graduation from a school accredited by the ABA is a requirement for admission to the bar.

The Council publishes Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools (Standards). The Council also regularly reviews and updates the Standards and issues interpretations to assist law schools in conforming to the standards. Law schools are visited every seven years by a team including representatives of the ABA and also the American Association of Law Schools (AALS) to insure the schools are still in sufficient compliance with the Standards to merit reaccreditation.² The Standards are quite explicit about the requirements of the course of study a law school must offer. Standard 304, entitled Course of Study and Academic Calendar, outlines the number of days required in each academic calendar, the number of minutes of instructional time that each student must receive before a degree is granted, and the maximum time for completion of the degree. Standard 304(b) states that “A law school, shall require, as a condition for graduation, successful completion of a course of study in residence of not fewer than 58,000 minutes of instruction time....” At least 45,000 of these minutes shall be by attendance in regularly scheduled class sessions at the law school.”

Interpretation 304-4 offers further guidance on how a law school can insure that it meets the instructional time required for a degree. That Interpretation states “Law schools on a conventional semester system typically require 700 minutes of instruction time per ‘credit,’ exclusive of time for an examination.³ If a law school on a semester system offers classes in units of 50 minutes per credit, it provides 700 minutes of instruction in 14 classes....”

The majority of the credits granted at Boston College Law School are granted through traditional in class instruction with a final examination at the end of the semester. Our classes are held in various formats:

- 1) 50 minute classes that meet 3 times a week;
- 2) 75 minute classes that meet 2 times a week;
- 3) 2 ½-3 hour classes that meet once a week.

Because our semesters are either 13 or 14 weeks long, excluding the examination period, when the time for examinations is factored in all of these class formats fall within the requirements of 34 CFR §600.2

In some classes, and especially our seminar classes, a substantial research and writing project is required and used, in whole or in part, as the method of evaluation. In such classes, a slight deviation for the length of in class meeting time may be allowed. For example, a 3 credit class with a writing component that is schedule to meet once a week for 2 ½-3 may meet for 2 hours to allow for work on a paper. This deviation from the normal requirement is permitted by the ABA Standards as explained in Interpretation 304-3 (d): “In a seminar or other upper level course

² Boston College Law School’s next reaccreditation visit will be in the spring of 2012.

³ In this regard, the ABA standards are stricter than the Department of Education standards, which permit time spent in examinations to be counted as “instructional time.” The Law School excludes review and study days and exam days from its calculation of minutes of instructional time.

other than an independent research course, the minutes allocated for preparation of a substantial paper or project [may count as minutes of ‘regularly scheduled class sessions’] if the time and effort required and anticipated educational benefit are commensurate with the credit awarded.”

In addition to our in-class instruction format, credit is granted at the law school for the following activities:

- 1) Participation on a law review, journal or digest;
- 2) Participation by a third year law student on a national moot court team;
- 3) Participation by a second or third year student on a national mock trial team;
- 4) Participation in a clinical program that also includes a regularly scheduled class component;
- 5) Preparation of an independent study research paper or project by arrangement with and under the supervision of a faculty member;
- 6) Participation in the Environmental Law Teaching Seminar.

The EPC is in the process of reviewing the number of credits awarded for all these activities. The committee has already received some initial information from the Administrator of the Law Reviews as to the amount of time spent per week by students participating in those reviews, as well as a response from one of our clinical programs. Requests for information is being sent to all our clinical programs and to the Director of Advocacy Programs and to the professor who supervises the Environmental Teaching Seminar to ask for explanations of how many hours of work are required each week for those programs. The EPC will meet in late February or early to review these documents. By the end of the semester, the EPC will develop reporting procedures for all of the credit bearing activities listed above and work with the Assistant Dean of Academic Services to insure that student hours spent on each activity each semester is reported to Academic Services.