

Guidelines:

Documenting Credit Value and Full Load Equivalents.

Full load equivalent (FLE) relates to the student and instructional activity in a ministry-approved program, and can provide a measure of both student and institutional effort.

Advanced Education uses FLE as a measure of a program's load or what a student enrolled in all credits of a program would generate (program FLE). The ministry also uses FLE to count students enrolled in ministry-approved programs (enrolment FLE). In essence, FLE is a measure of both a student's effort and institutional efforts that allows for comparable calculations across different institutions, across different programs.

This guideline offers advice about calculating and documenting FLEs in program proposals based on academic credit (i.e., program FLE).

This guideline is intended to foster educational quality, while mitigating institutional risk, protecting students and promoting accountability.

Scope

This guideline pertains to proposals for new programs and specializations submitted by institutions to the ministry through the Provider and Program Registry System (PAPRS). These proposals can be for non-credential, certificate, diploma and degree programs. This guideline does not apply to apprenticeship and graduate programs, and to programs delivered by private career colleges.

Guiding Principles

- A system-wide standardized approach to FLE calculations across post-secondary institutions can facilitate consistent system-wide reporting.
- FLE and load calculations should align with individual institutional practices, as well as with comparator ministry-approved programs at other Alberta institutions.
- Student enrolment reporting distinguishes and measures the activities contributing directly to provincial government targets and priorities that allow for monitoring at the institutional and program levels.
- Typically, credit assignment is based on contact hours of instruction.

Course Credits and the "Carnegie Unit"

Course credits are widely used as a standardized measure in post-secondary programs for varied purposes, including determining instructional workloads, allocating resources, calculating tuition fees, and as one criterion for assessing transfer. Student Aid systems also frequently use credit value measures to help determine how many courses per semester constitutes full-time or part-time study for purposes of student aid eligibility.

Most North American post-secondary institutions base their academic credit allocation systems on the "Carnegie unit", designed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "Carnegie unit" assigns a standard value of three academic credits to each undergraduate course offered in a 12 to 16-week semester.

Using the "Carnegie unit", the structure of a standard undergraduate degree in Canada is typically 120 credit hours across four years of study, a diploma is 60 credits across two years of study and a certificate is 30 credits across one year of study.

The "Carnegie model" is the basis for full loads. (Programs shorter or longer than 30 credits would still reflect the standard full load of 30 credits – their actual loads would reflect less or greater than 30 credits.) As such, the only time the full load in an academic year would not be 30 credits would be if the institution counted credits differently, and then, how the institution counts credits would factor into what the full load is.

While the "Carnegie model" provides for some standardization across post-secondary programs, the Ministry of Education has dispensed with the "Carnegie unit" in favour of the achievement of 80 per cent of course outcomes regardless of instructional hours. This makes it difficult for Alberta post-secondary institutions to manage and report on secondary school courses which must be aligned with provincial high school curriculum, but reside within post-secondary foundational learning programs under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Definitions

Credit: The value assigned to a course that counts toward program or credential completion. Credit is determined by teaching mode, hours of instruction and length of semester or equivalent.

Instructional Load: Total number of credits generated by instructional studies as defined by an institution's credit valuation policy. Some institutions define instructional load as including laboratory and/or seminar hours (i.e., beyond lectures).

Practicum Load: Total number of credits generated by practicum placements as defined by an institution's credit valuation policy.

Actual Load: The sum of instructional and practicum credits in an academic year. (As tuition is typically based on credits, any changes in actual load are subject to the ministry's Tuition Fee Regulation).

Full Load: The credits generated by a standard program at a post-secondary institution over a typical academic year. The ministry encourages that this be standard across all programs offered by a post-secondary institution, across all years of study within a program, and across all Alberta institutions. The full load should not vary from year to year within a program or specialization.

Institutional Credit Valuation Policies

Many public post-secondary institutions in Alberta have credit valuation policies in place. The ministry does not direct what should be included in these policies and they vary across institutions, including differences in the number of hours constituting an instructional credit, the range of hours constituting a practicum credit, and what is counted as instructional versus practicum credit.

The counting of FLEs is further complicated when the reporting of some programs, like apprenticeship programs, are in hours rather than credits. It is also further complicated for programs that as a result of heavy clinical, accreditation or co-op requirements, follow non-standard credit loads – this is typical for health sciences and engineering programs.

As there remains a substantial variance in hours per credit across post-secondary institutions and this is a foundational unit of measure in load calculations, Alberta post-secondary institutions have expressed concern that FLE may not present as a reliable comparator for the province.

Credit valuation policies guide the determination of instructional and practicum credits (i.e., a program's actual load). In addition, they may include reference to a standard full load.

The ministry encourages a standard full load across all years of study within a program (i.e., 30 credits per academic year), across all programs and across all institutions. Despite this, there is variability in full load across the system as institutions may deviate from a standard full load to ensure alignment of program FLE across same/similar programs or types of programs, or to ensure each academic year of study in a program generates one FLE.

Post-secondary institutions have also expressed concern that if FLE is intended to “standardize” or benchmark programming, varying full loads across years of a program renders the benchmarking void.

Definitions Continued

Actual Weeks: the length of the program (in weeks).

Program FLE: the FLE that a student will generate over the life of the program if the student takes the entire curriculum.

Enrolment FLE: is determined by taking the actual credits completed by students enrolled in a specific program divided by the institution's standard full load for that program. Enrolment FLE relate to actual enrolments in the program each year, based on student loads.

Sessional: the annual reporting of programs of study with defined instructional and practicum loads (credits) by session (fall, winter, spring and/or summer).

Non-sessional: the annual reporting of programs of study with continuous admission or multiple intakes, or that are delivered through alternative/blended means or not by defined loads per session. Typically, the credits for a non-sessional program, regardless of whether instructional or otherwise, are reported in their entirety as instructional credits in the fall session.

A program of study does not need to be either sessional or non-sessional consistently across all years of study.

Semester: an academic term of normally 15 weeks.

Pre-Planning Considerations

Prior to calculating and establishing FLEs for a new program or specialization, institutions should consider the following:

- Does your institution have documented credit valuation policies or practices?
- Does your institution use a standard full load number consistently across programs and faculties/ departments?
- Does your institution have a designated representative who needs to be consulted about proposed FLEs?
- What is the range of load and FLE numbers for similar programs within your institution? How are you justifying any significant variances from these?
- What is the range of load and FLE numbers in comparator programs in other Alberta post-secondary institutions?
- Does the proposed number of program credits fall within the typical credit range associated with the credential type?

Calculating FLE

For a given year of study in a program, the FLE value is calculated by taking the program's instructional plus practicum credits (i.e., actual load) for that year and dividing this by the institution's typical total credits across the academic year (i.e., full load) for that program for that year. (Heavier loaded years should generate higher FLE, thereby demonstrating increased effort.) The sum of the FLE values across all years of a program equals the total program load or total program FLE.

For a given year of study, instructional and practicum credits or loads can be reported by session (fall, winter, spring, and/or summer) or as non-sessional – this does not matter for the purposes of calculating FLE. While the ministry supports a consistent full load across all years of study in a program, the reporting of instructional and practicum loads as sessional or non-sessional can vary by year of program study. Non-sessional reporting is often used by post-secondary institutions for programs with continuous intake throughout the year or with multiple intakes at different points within the year, thereby allowing post-secondary institutions some flexibility to report only total credits by year.

A copy of the loads table in Provider and Program Registry System (PAPRS) program records is shown below.

Year	Semester	Instructional Load	Practicum Load	Actual Weeks	Actual Load	Full Load	Full Load Equivalent
Year 1	Fall, Winter, Spring	33	3	38	36	30	1.20
Year 2		21	13	45	34	27	1.26
Year 3		3	6	15	9	30	0.30
	Total	57	22	98	79	87	2.78
	Approved total	58	21	98	79	87	2.78
	% Change	-2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Proposing and Determining the FLE

Institutions should use the Program of Study as the foundational document upon which to base FLE and load calculations.

- It should be attached to all program proposals submitted in PAPRS.
- It should include a listing of courses by semester, with credit values.

Institutions should also review Programs of Study and their associated FLE values for:

- similar programs within the institution, and
- comparator programs at other Alberta institutions.

Institutions should be aware that although FLEs and loads are derived by formula, some modifications or adjustments may be required to ensure that FLE values align with:

- FLE conventions associated with the type of credential (e.g., degree, diploma, certificate), and
- similar programs in the province.

Institutions should be aware that the ministry acknowledges similar and comparator programs may have distinct features that result in some FLE variability.

Institutions should complete Specialization Load Detail Tables in PAPRS proposals for each specialization or major, as part of a proposal submission.

Institutions can access technical related information and assistance on the PAPRS site through Help documents.

Institutions should complete the Tables for each year of study and semester, with particular attention to the following:

- instructional load is derived by numbers of credits,
- practicum load is derived by number of practicum credits,
- actual weeks is derived by semester length or equivalent,
- actual load is derived from an institution's credit valuation policy, and
- the actual load divided by full load yields the program FLE.

FLE enrolments include full- and part-time enrolments that are converted to represent values related to a student's credit load in relation to the entire curriculum in a standard program.

A full-time student taking a full load in a standard program should generate 1.00 FLE over a typical academic year. One FLE represents the educational activity of one student enrolled in all the requirements of a standard program in a period that extends over both the fall and winter terms in a single year of study.

The educational activity of a student may include both instructional and practicum hours of study converted into instructional and practicum credits or load. The actual load for the student is the combination of the instructional and practicum loads they were enrolled in. This actual load is then divided by the full load to calculate the FLE that student generated during the session.

$$\text{FLE} = \frac{\text{Instructional Credits} + \text{Practicum Credits (Actual Load)}}{\text{Full Load}}$$

Expectations for Proposed Load and Full Load Equivalents

The ministry's practice with diploma programs that have a degree transfer option will show a zero load and zero FLEs in years one and two of the degree program record because the first two years were completed in a diploma program.

- This assumes that all students that want to enroll in the bachelor degree would have to enroll in the diploma program and then transfer into year three of the degree. Alternatively, there could be empty values for the loads in the diploma program, with this record being used to simply report parchments handed out to those that do not continue into year three.

Certificate programs that constitute the first year of a diploma program will show a zero load and zero FLEs in year one of the diploma program record because the first year was completed in a certificate program.

- This assumes that all students that want to enroll in the diploma program would have to enroll in the certificate program and then transfer into year two of the diploma.

The ministry recognizes that the post-secondary system includes programs that do not use credits and do not have the same one fall and one winter semester for a year of study, but instead use training hours and periods. An example of this is apprenticeship programs.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

Director, Program Design and System Innovation

Alberta Advanced Education

780-643-9472

Related Guidelines:

- Enrolment Planning
- Program Proposal Timelines
- Brokering Programs

Other related documents:

- PAPRS Records and Help Documents

To obtain a copy of other guideline documents, or to ensure that you have the most recent copy of this guideline, please send a request via email to ae.psp-paprs@gov.ab.ca.