



Policy Title:

Academic Workload and Duty Hours

Policy Identifier:

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Category: Undergraduate Medical Education	

LCME Standards

8.8 - Monitoring Student Time

Scope

University of South Carolina (USC) School of Medicine Columbia faculty and undergraduate medical students.

Policy Statement

Academic Workload in the Preclerkship Curriculum (M-I/M-II)

The University of South Carolina School of Medicine – Columbia recognizes that the time spent in acquiring knowledge is critical to achieving a solid and sound medical education. Student attendance is highly recommended for course activity and it can be mandatory by the course/block directors.

In order to ensure that the learning objectives and intended learning outcomes are appropriate for scheduled contact hours in the pre-clerkship educational experience, this policy places limitations on the weekly academic workload. Educational engagement hours for medical students in the preclerkship curriculum are not to exceed an average of 28 hours per week including all scheduled activities (e.g. lectures, self-directed learning modules, laboratories, small group sessions, problem-based learning).

The monitoring of all scheduled educational activities, and thus the student academic workload, resides with the Curriculum Committee. All student contact hours will be formally assessed as part of the annual course review by the M-I/ M-II subcommittee with assistance from the Office of Undergraduate Medical Education.

Duty Hours in M-III/M-IV

Duty hours in the M-III/M-IV years must be limited to 80 hours per week, inclusive of all in-



house call activities.

Reason for Policy

The LCME expects that the medical school faculty committee responsible for the medical curriculum and the program's administration and leadership ensure the development and implementation of effective policies and procedures regarding the amount of time medical students spend in required activities, including the total number of hours medical students are required to spend in clinical and educational activities throughout the curriculum.

Procedures

Academic Workload in M-I/M-II

Contact Hours. Course directors are encouraged to limit contact hours to allow students to individualize their academic preparation. Educational engagement hours for undergraduate medical students in the pre-clerkship curriculum is not to exceed 28 required educational activity per week when averaged over the total semester's weekly class schedules. The academic workload expectations for each course (i.e. the assigned period of contact hours allotted to a course each week) will correspond to the number of assigned credit hours. Each self-directed learning hour is given the same weight as a didactic hour when calculating a course's contact hours.

Fifty-minute Classes. Each contact hour provided in a lecture format includes a 50-minute lecture and a 10-minute break. Faculty members should begin lectures on time and conclude lectures at 10 minutes before each hour.

Duty Hours in M-III/M-IV

Providing medical students with a sound didactic and clinical education must be carefully planned and balanced with concerns for patient safety and medical student well-being. Each required clerkship and elective rotation must ensure that the learning objectives of the program and the school are not compromised. While didactic and clinical education should have priority when it comes to the medical students' time and energy, this should not be at the expense of their physical/mental health or their ability to learn.

Duty Hours

Duty hours are defined as all clinical and academic activities related to the education of the medical student; i.e., patient evaluation, time spent in-house during call activities, and scheduled activities such as conferences. Duty hours do not include reading time spent away from the clerkship or elective site.

Duty hours must be limited to 80 hours per week, averaged over the 4 weeks, inclusive of all in-house call activities.

Medical students must be provided with 1 day in 7 free from all educational and clinical responsibilities, averaged over the clerkship, inclusive of call. One day is defined as one



continuous 24-hour period free from all clinical and educational duties.

Adequate time for rest and personal activities must be provided. This should optimally be a 10-hour time period provided between all daily duty periods and after in-house call.

On-Call Activities

The objective of on-call activities is to provide medical students with a continuity of patient evaluation experiences throughout a 24-hour period. In-house call is defined as those duty hours beyond the normal workday, when medical students are required to be immediately available in the assigned institution. This does not include night float schedules where the workload of continuous night shifts is comparable to that of day shifts.

Continuous on-site duty hours, including in-house call, must not exceed 24 consecutive hours. Medical students may remain on duty for up to 4 additional hours to participate in didactic activities and maintain the continuity of medical and surgical care (hospital rounds).

At-home call (or pager call) is defined as a call taken from outside the assigned institution. The frequency of at-home call is not subject to every-third-night limitation. At-home call, however, must not be so frequent as to preclude rest and reasonable personal time for each medical student.

When medical students are called into the hospital from home, the hours the medical student spends in-house are counted toward the 80-hour limit.

The clerkship director and faculty must monitor the demands of at-home call in their clerkships and make scheduling adjustments as necessary.

Exceptions

Limited and carefully justified exceptions to this policy may be permissible. It is recognized that students do not work the consistently demanding and lengthy hours of resident physicians. In addition, their educational experiences in many areas are of limited duration. Maximizing their opportunity to experience some clinical or educational opportunities may from time to time justify exceeding the normal duty hours policy.

Examples of justifiable exceptions might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Prescheduled educational conferences or 'rounds' that must occur beyond the '24/4' limits.
- A student-initiated request to participate in or observe a medical activity or procedure (e.g. surgery, diagnostic study, specialty consult or treatment, etc.) that must occur beyond the "24/4" or 80-hour policies.
- A student-initiated request for an excused absence (e.g. attend a special conference, attend a wedding, birth, or funeral, etc.) per the attendance policy. It is anticipated that such exceptions will be infrequently invoked.

Monitoring



It is the responsibility of the clerkship director, faculty, and chair of each department to monitor and ensure that medical students do not exceed the limitations of their duty hours. Departments are required to publish their specific duty hour policy and are free to modify the above policy as long as the duty hour limits are not exceeded. The Curriculum Committee and/or the Academic Standards Committee may periodically request verification of monitoring by individual departments.

Students are required to report infractions of the duty hour policy to their clerkship director, on their clerkship evaluation, and/or to the Office of Undergraduate Medical Education. Infractions will be investigated by the Academic Standards Committee and appropriate action taken to ensure infractions do not continue.

Contacts

Office of Undergraduate Medical Education
Clerkship Director(s)
Course/Block Directors

History

Date of Change	Change
3-15-24	Moved policy to new policy template