

Best Practices when Proposing and Teaching 600-level Courses

A common stumbling block encountered by FHSU faculty members when they propose new 600-level courses is a lack of clarity and specificity when it comes to the differences between requirements and expectations for undergraduates and those for graduate students. This document outlines best practices that, if followed, will ensure not only that 600-level courses receive approval from the Graduate Council in a timelier manner, but also that these courses do indeed offer challenges and rigor that are appropriate for graduate-level education.

When drawing up course proposals and sample syllabi for 600-level courses, faculty members are strongly advised to include the following items:

- I. **A separate grading scale for graduate students.** Since expectations for graduate students in 600-level courses are, as required by the Kansas Board of Regents, markedly different from those that apply to undergraduates, it makes sense to weigh various assignments differently on two separate scales. When major projects—term papers, literature reviews, public presentations, etc.—are required of graduate students, the grading scale should reflect the importance of these activities. **Giving graduate students credit for attendance or class participation is, in the vast majority of cases, not a good practice. In addition, as a general rule, the FHSU Graduate School discourages the use of pass/fail assignments.**

- II. **A variety of substantial additional assignments for graduate students.** Syllabi for 600-level courses should always identify **two or more** additional requirements for graduate students. Simply stating that higher quality work will be expected is not enough, nor is the common practice of establishing a different length requirement for a term paper (say, ten pages for undergraduates, fifteen for graduate students). Graduate students should, most certainly, hand in longer papers that consult a higher number of sources and reflect a higher level of synthesis and comprehension. However, this requirement should be combined with other assignments not given to undergraduates. For example, graduate students should be asked
 - to provide literature reviews or annotated bibliographies,
 - to deliver professional-quality presentations either in class or at off-campus venues (such as conferences),
 - to teach the class for one or more sessions,
 - to produce more complex pieces of art or performances,
 - to conduct interviews with appropriate experts on or off campus,
 - or to complete a service-learning project.This list is not, of course, complete, nor is it applicable to every discipline. Other rigorous, time-intensive assignments may be required of graduate students. Any such assignments should be clearly described in course proposals and syllabi.

- III. Additional reading requirements for graduate students.** Graduate students should always read more than the undergraduates in a 600-level course. A good practice, then, is to list *additional required readings* for graduate students and to do so, when possible, for each week on the syllabus.
- IV. Methods of evaluation appropriate to graduate-level education.** Quizzes and written examinations—or, worse, examinations made up entirely of multiple-choice questions—should never be the sole means of evaluating the performance of graduate students in 600-level courses. For graduate students, instructors should supplement quizzes and written examinations with oral examinations, writing assignments, presentations, contributions to discussion boards, and so forth.
- V. The course description included in the course proposal form should also appear on the syllabus.** However, since the needs of students are different from those of Graduate Council members, instructors may, if they wish, *add* material to the “Course Description” section of their syllabi.