Credit for Laboratory Courses

Summary of Three Common Models for Awarding Credit Hours Earned by Undergraduate Laboratory Work

Prepared for the Florida Tech Undergraduate Curriculum Committee by committee members:
John Hadjilogiou, Electrical and Computer Engineering
J. Clayton Baum, Chemistry
G. Susanne Bahr, Psychology

Models:

The following institutions were researched regarding their practices and policies governing the assignment of credit for laboratory work: Auburn U., Clemson U., Duke U., Georgia Tech, MIT, Polytechnic Institute of New York, University of Florida, and University of Miami.

The research identified that basically three established policy models exist with subtle variations in practice.

The first model is a standalone lab course where 1 (one) unit or credit corresponds to 3 (three) contact hours in the lab.

The second model combines lecture with lab credits. For example, a 4-unit or credit course will have 3 hours of lecture and 3 hours of lab. This results in a better coordination between the lecture and lab experience. The times for lecture and lab are well defined and conducted in different locations.

The third model is to award credits based on departmental evaluation of anticipated workload. For example, one assumption is that a full time load is 15 credits that will require 60 hours of work per week. Thus, one credit allocation should correspond to approximately 4 hours of work. The times for lectures and labs are not well established and in some cases, lectures take place during the lab session.

There are other variations, but the committee felt they belong to these three models with minor modifications.

Conclusion:

Through consensus, the committee reached the following:

- Florida Tech, with a history of structured programs, will find the first two models more appropriate and currently implemented by most of our programs/departments.
- The third model may present challenges to evaluate credits for Florida Tech courses both internally and for purposes of awarding transfer credits.
- The simplest and most rigid option would be to codify the current practice at Florida Tech and state that a minimum of two lab hours per credit hour is required.
- The option at the opposite extreme would be to embrace academic freedom, intellectual openness and creativity and allow colleges/departments to decide which or to develop a model that is best for their respective curricula. Florida Tech courses that fit the third model require proper justification and documentation to be submitted to the UGCC.