STUDENT WORK LOADS

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ABSTRACT

The problem of student work loads has been the concern of staff and students in tertiary institutions for some time. Studies of success, failure and wastage in higher education have indicated a number of factors which may be relevant to the problem of student work loads, but until recently no comprehensive study of the problem has been attempted. A detailed plan for the investigation of student work loads has been prepared by the Higher Education Research Unit at Monash University. Two studies, of quite different type, based on this overall plan, were conducted in 1972 and further studies are proceeding in 1973. This paper includes a general description of the plan for investigating student work loads and gives details of the two studies conducted at Monash University in 1972.

Introduction

Studies of success, failure and wastage of students in higher education (reviewed by Miller, 1970) have indicated a number of factors relevant to the problem of student work loads. Other aspects of the problem have been raised by the Hale Report on University Teaching Methods in Great Britain (1964) and the Passmore Report on Teaching Methods in Australian Universities (1965).

The Hale Committee developed a number of useful categories for reporting student work loads and gave some norms for students in British Universities. This committee also raised the question of how the division of time between formal contact hours and private study might be controlled, a question which was discussed at some length by the Passmore Committee.

The Hale Report

The Hale Report presents figures on students' use of time in British universities. The information was obtained during a week between 24th
January and 8th March, 1962. It covers the amount of time the students spent on academic work during term and the manner in which their hours were divided between instruction and private study. Instruction time was further analyzed in terms of hours spent in lectures, written exercise classes, practical classes, field periods, tutorials and seminars.

The median number of hours worked by students responding to the survey was 36.7 hours per week, although the figures varied over type of faculty:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Science</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Science</td>
<td>39.3</td>
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and between Honours (37.1 hours) and Pass students (33.9 hours).

The question was raised whether too much of the students' time was occupied in receiving instruction and attending laboratories, leaving them insufficient time for reading and other activities. Accordingly each university was asked whether it or any of its colleges or faculties had considered as a matter of policy how many hours a week a student should spend receiving instruction and attending laboratories. It was found more usual for faculties or departments to decide this matter rather than the University staff. Students experiencing most difficulty in this regard were those taking courses covering more than one subject where each subject had an equal claim on time, and those taking subjects with laboratory classes were more heavily committed to formal class instruction.

The Passmore Report

The question of regulation of class time was considered in some detail by the Passmore Committee, as it is usual in many Australian university courses for a student to take a number of units or subjects in a number of different departments, each of which generally speaking proceeds independently of the others.

In this situation it is possible, if several departments decide independently to increase the pressure on their students, that the work load for particular students could be increased to an intolerable degree.

The Committee declared that the preparation of assignments and private study represented a most important part of the students' learning activity. At the same time the Committee was concerned that the demands made on a student's time due to attendance at formal classes, should leave sufficient time available for this activity without foregoing all participation in other university activities. Some measures for controlling