Guidelines for Assigning Work

I. Workload Expectations

How much work should faculty assign?

HKS courses vary widely in both the type of assignment (problem sets, memos, papers) and the type of course (quantitative/nonquantitative, lecture/case based, etc.). Bear in mind the overall workload for students – all students at HKS are taking at least four courses per semester, and many are taking five. All courses will have either a final exam, a final paper, or a take-home exam. In addition many of the quantitative courses also have midterm exams. Nonquantitative courses frequently have short papers or memos during the term.

Courses where the workload is quantitative

With quantitative courses, there is typically notably less reading; instead students are expected to work on problems. Such courses generally assign anywhere from five to ten problem sets per semester. A few courses assign shorter problem sets, but more of them, with a set due more often. Thus the time it takes to complete a problem set can vary. Those courses with 5 to 10 sets a semester might require 6 to 8 hours per problem set for the average student. The courses that assign problem sets every week would naturally require less time for each. Moreover, the time an individual student requires will vary depending on previous exposure to the material.

Courses where the workload is primarily preparing cases

Translating case preparation into hours required is difficult because how long it takes to prepare a case again depends heavily on a student's previous training. In case-based courses students may be required to read and prepare the case as well as to read other materials in support of the case. Usually, however, in courses taught by the case method, the actual reading load is less but the preparation for active participation in class discussion and the thinking-hard-about-the-issues load much heavier.

Courses where the workload consists primarily of reading

The amount of reading assigned depends in large part on the subject matter. In general, 100 to a maximum of 150 pages a week is normal, but keep in mind that 100 pages of (say) political philosophy may be more dense and difficult than 100 pages of more narrative material. If each course assigned 150 pages of reading a week, students would be faced with up to 750 pages per week. We know from students that this is more than they can reasonably accomplish. Students appreciate an emphasis on the most important readings rather than the quantity of readings. Some faculty recommend about 35-40 pages of reading preparation for each class meeting, with 40 pages being the maximum.

In all varieties of courses, students appreciate a distinction between "required" and "optional" readings. Textbooks should also be identified as "required" or "optional." Ordinarily any reading on the "required" list should be discussed in class. Students are unhappy if they have been asked to purchase and read materials that are never touched upon.

One faculty member's rule of thumb: don't assign more than 12 hours of work outside of class. Competing for students' attention by assigning more and more work is usually counterproductive.

II. Individual Work vs. Group Work

Students at the Kennedy School are often encouraged to work in groups. It is essential that the standards and parameters of the collaborative work be made clear before the work commences, and that students understand the criteria by which their individual work in the project will be assessed.

To prevent disciplinary cases arising from confusion about what is and is not acceptable, instructors should direct students to the Kennedy School's Academic Code and should include in every group assignment a clear indication of acceptable levels of collaboration (e.g., Level I: Work alone and write up alone, Level III: Work in a group, write up in a group, no consultation outside the group, etc.).

Quick Reference: *HKS Assignment Classifications*

I. Work alone and write up alone

II. Work with others, write up alone

III. Work in a group, write up in a group, no consultation outside the group

IV. Work in a group, write up in a group, outside consultation permitted