



## Bulletin 4: Summer 2016

*Greetings from the Office of the Registrar & Student Services at St. Michael's College.*

This is the fourth of eight bulletins. The focus of the bulletin this week is a continuation of last week's topic: course selection. The angle we're approaching things from, however, is slightly different. Last week we emphasized the importance of selecting your first-year courses with particular programs of interest in mind. Our emphasis this week is on the *number* of courses that is appropriate for you to enrol in and, additionally, how to determine what that number is.

### **1. Choosing an Appropriate Number of Courses**

You already know that you should select your first-year courses on the basis of programs you're interested in pursuing. But, you also need to ask: how *many* courses should I enrol in this year?

Recall that five courses per term is the conventional full-course load. (This usually translates to 5.0 credits per year, allowing a student to accumulate 20.0 credits—the required amount for graduation—after four years.) So, you might feel the pull to take five courses per term. However, in some cases, there are good reasons for taking fewer than five courses in a given term.

There are four main considerations that should guide your decision: knowledge of English, functional preparation, other obligations, and health.

#### **a) Knowledge of English**

If you are not yet at home in an English language environment, you should consider taking a reduced course load. If you are not fully at ease reading text books in English,

listening to lectures in English, making notes in English, writing reports and exams and essays in English, or understanding the informal language of everyday speech, then you should consider taking fewer than five courses.

Of course, this is personal decision. You should reflect on your familiarity and comfort with English to determine whether a reduced course load might be appropriate.

For those of you who would benefit from some more preparation, it is worth exploring [English Language Learning \(ELL\)](#).

### **b) Functional Preparation**

You have to make sure that you are functionally prepared to take certain first-year courses. That is, you need the proper academic background. There are some 100-level courses that have specific high school prerequisites (or, at the very least, strongly recommended courses). For instance, consider [BIO120H1](#), [BIO130H1](#), [CHM135H1](#), [CHM136H1](#), [MAT135H1](#), [PHY131H1](#), [AST121H1](#), and [ECO100Y1](#).

You should also make sure that your preparation for these courses is *strong* (i.e., you did well (e.g., 80%) in the relevant high school courses) and *current* (i.e., you completed the relevant high school courses recently). This is not a strict rule but, rather, advice based on observations over the years. These first-year courses are demanding, so students who do not have a strong foundation are unlikely to excel.

### **c) Other Obligations**

Being a successful full-time university student is like having a full-time job: you work 35-40 hours a week, and there is the possibility of overtime. (By 'full-time university student', we mean a conventional 5.0-credit course load.) Lectures and labs normally account for 15-20 hours a week. The other 20 hours should be devoted to studying, making and reviewing notes, reading, researching, and writing.

However, many students have other commitments: salaried work, volunteer work, family responsibilities, or extracurricular activities. Everyone has to make a decision about how to allocate their time. The important point is to be realistic about what you can accomplish well and to strike a reasonable balance amongst all your obligations.

#### **d) Health**

If you have a medical problem—of any sort—or a learning disability, then this fact has to be taken into account when you deliberate about the appropriate number of courses to enrol in. Medical problems can be temporary or chronic. Whatever the case, there is the possibility of reasonable accommodation at the university as long as you identify yourself in a timely manner. We don't recommend that students with medical problems or learning disabilities 'tough things out' on their own—even if they were able to do so in high school.

The university has an office that can help: [Accessibility Services](#). The staff at Accessibility Services is dedicated to assisting students navigate their disability and related barriers. On the St. George campus, there are over 1500 students registered with the service. It has an excellent reputation, but it is extremely busy. So, it is important for students to register early in order to receive the full benefit of the service.

Remember: even with accommodation available, it may still be prudent to enrol in a reduced course load. Disability counsellors can offer guidance here.

#### **2. Degree Completion: No Time Limit**

Remember that you are not required to graduate in four years. So, you need not complete 5.0 credit per year. If you recognize that you're not in a position to successfully complete a full-time course load, then it is worth considering a reduced course load.

Additionally, it is always possible to drop a course along the way. But a course dropped at the halfway point represents time and energy which could have been devoted to other courses. If you are going to take a reduced course load, then you are better off to come to that conclusion sooner rather than later. (With this said, it might be worth 'shopping around' during the first week of classes: attending the lectures for five courses and, then, deciding which course—if any—you should drop.)

It is not a race to get out of the university. (Really!) An extra term or year—when considered in the context of the next 30-35 years of work—is not all that much. Of course, we understand the financial cost associated with enrolling in additional

academic sessions. University is expensive, so you might not want to be here longer than you need to be. Nonetheless, it is important to reflect on whether taking a reduced course load—and perhaps staying for an extra term or year—is the best all-things-considered option.

### **3. FAQs**

We will close by looking at a few frequently asked questions about various course enrolment-related matters.

*Question 1.* I've been told that there are staggered start times for the beginning of the general enrolment period on August 5<sup>th</sup>. Are these times posted anywhere?

- Yes, in addition to being posted in the [Important Dates: 2016 Fall](#), this information will be posted on your ACORN homepage on the days leading up to August 5<sup>th</sup>.

*Question 2.* If I take fewer than 5.0 credits during the Fall/Winter Session, is it still possible to graduate in four years?

- Yes, the Faculty of Arts & Science also offers courses during the Summer Session. It is possible for students to take up to 2.0 credits during the Summer Session, so this could make up for courses not taken during the Fall/Winter Session.

*Question 3.* Do I have to be enrolled in the same number of courses each term?

- No, you do not need to be. For instance, you might be enrolled in five courses during the Fall Session and four courses during the Winter session.

In Bulletin 5, we will turn our attention to things you should be doing over the coming month to prepare for school in the autumn.

Regards,

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Academic Advisors

St. Michael's College