

## Policy on Rigor and Guidelines on Course Levels

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

### Academic Policies/Academic Standards

Policy Owner: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

*Effective date:* April 21, 2025

*Approval date:* April 21, 2025

*Schedule for Review:* 2030

#### Policy Summary:

This policy defines a rigorous curriculum and establishes how an academic program will demonstrate these standards are being met.

#### Policy Statement:

1. Fort Lewis College sets high standards for student learning across the curriculum. Students will participate in a series of experiences that develop understanding, challenge them to integrate learning both within and across disciplines, and prepare them to succeed in an increasingly complex world.
2. The faculty of Fort Lewis College establish the following definition of rigor:
  - A. A rigorous liberal arts curriculum balances foundational coursework, inclusion of diverse perspectives, and in-depth analysis to provide students with appropriate knowledge as defined by college-wide and program learning outcomes. The rigor of a Fort Lewis College degree is ensured by the diversity of courses required by the liberal arts core and by the depth of study required by majors.
  - B. A rigorous curriculum:
    - i. Requires students to synthesize and apply course ideas.
    - ii. Reflects views and content that are relevant to current thought and practice.
    - iii. Provides a platform for students to demonstrate mastery of knowledge.
    - iv. Requires students to take active responsibility for learning.
3. Substantive evidence that a program meets these standards may include assessment reports, program reviews, and/or standards set by the discipline or external accrediting agencies. At the course level, evidence should include a combination of examples from the following: learning objectives, course assignments, exams, and/or descriptions of student activities. For both programs and courses, evidence to demonstrate rigor should be selected as appropriate to the discipline.
4. Departments shall ensure that programs and courses meet the Fort Lewis College standards for rigor. In the ordinary course of curricular review, departments may be called upon to demonstrate to the next level(s) of review (i.e., dean, curriculum committee, faculty senate, provost) that programs and courses meet these standards.

5. The faculty of Fort Lewis College establish the following general, minimum criteria for course level designations:

**100 Level:** Courses at the 100 level prepare students for academic success by developing foundational knowledge and skills.

**200 Level:** Courses at the 200 level require students to develop connections between concepts both within their field and between disciplines, expand on ideas central to the discipline, and enrich a student's perspective of the world.

**300 Level:** Courses at the 300 level expose students to specialized concepts and techniques central to the discipline. Students apply 100- and 200-level skills to unfamiliar topics and problems with the accumulation of knowledge given class standing. Students engage in the craft in a supervised or guided manner.

**400 Level:** Courses at the 400 level require students to synthesize advanced knowledge and master skills learned within the program of study at the 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses in the discipline and/or guide students to independent production and engagement in the craft given class standing.

**500 Level:** Courses at the 500 level require students to synthesize advanced scholarly knowledge and master skills in the discipline at the graduate level with independent production and engagement in the craft or discipline.

**600 Level:** Courses at the 600 level require students to study, master, and synthesize advanced scholarly knowledge and theoretical concepts.

**700 Level:** Courses at the 700 level require students to employ advanced or specialized knowledge and theoretical concepts in scholarly and/or professional settings.

Courses numbered below 100 do not count toward graduation. Courses numbered 100-299 are called lower division courses, while those 300-499 are known as upper division courses. These courses are applicable to Associate and Bachelor Degree, Undergraduate Certificate and Minor. Courses numbered 500-799 are graduate courses. These courses are applicable to Graduate Certificates and Degrees. Courses designated from 1100-1790 are considered physical education (PE) or activity courses that do not count toward program course of study.

## Definitions of Degrees

**Certificate:** A certificate is awarded after the completion of a shortened program (12-18 credits) in either the undergraduate (100-400 level courses) or graduate levels (500-700 level courses) that offers courses in a specific field. While these do not result in a degree from the college, credits result in a college recognized credential.

**Minor:** A minor is considered a secondary program of study outside of a student's major. Though not required, a minor may be awarded to students pursuing an initial bachelor's degree. A student pursuing a minor as part of their baccalaureate degree program must be complete the 18-21 credits by the finish of their bachelor's degree.

**Associate Degree:** Associate Degrees are offered to those that have completed a 1-2 year program (at least 60 credits) to prepare a student for the workforce or transfer to a separate fouryear degree. Courses of study will typically be completed at the 100- or 200-level.

**Bachelor Degree:** Bachelor's Degrees are offered to those that have completed a 4-year program (at least 120 credits) to prepare a student for a degree in a specific field. Courses of study will be completed at the 100- to 400-level with experiential learning in internship or practicum form.

**Master's Degree:** Master's Degrees are offered to those that have completed a 1-3 year program (at least 30 credits) to prepare a student for a degree in a specific field. Courses of study will be completed at the 500- to 700-level with advanced learning in the designated discipline.

## **Reason for Policy**

Higher Learning Commission Assumed Practice B.1.e., which states "Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education."

Responsibilities:

*For oversight of the policy:* Provost

*For following policy:* Faculty in each academic program

*For enforcement of the policy:* Provost

Review and Revision History: