

Catlin Gabel School Workload Policy

6/2008. Revised 5/2009 , 8/2013, 10/2014 and fall 2015

Preface

In the spring of 2009 the Upper School head appointed a committee to examine student workload. While the school has long relied on informal guidelines to regulate the amount of time that students are expected to devote to class work and extracurricular activities, the growth of the school and the opportunities it offers, as well as questions regarding the efficacy and equity of those traditional guidelines, suggested the wisdom of taking a wide-ranging look at these issues.

From its inception, the workload committee set out to be both inclusive and comprehensive in its work. It was co-chaired by the Math and English department chairs and made up of faculty members from each of the school's academic departments, two support faculty members, six students drawn from all four grade levels, and a parent representative. Two of the faculty representatives serve as athletic coaches and all have experience in advising extracurricular activities. The committee began its work by gathering as much data as possible on the question of workload in the Upper School. We surveyed and interviewed each "constituency" affected by these matters: every individual academic department, support faculty (counselors, college counselors, librarians, etc.), coaches and directors of extracurricular activities, students, parents, and alumni. We also reviewed the latest information that brain research has to offer on questions of homework, and compared Catlin Gabel's homework load to that at other first-rate college preparatory schools.

In weighing this data, the committee resolved to approach the workload question in a holistic manner. To this end we delineated all the time commitments that confront Catlin Gabel students, factored in the necessity of "down time" and sufficient sleep in helping students maintain their mental and physical health, and then attempted to determine how much time the school can realistically demand from its pupils. At the same time, we paid careful attention to the amount of time that teachers, coaches, and extracurricular leaders informed us was necessary to maintain the rigor of their programs. Our ultimate goal was to insure that students lead full and balanced, healthy lives, while preserving the strengths of Catlin Gabel's academic, athletic, and extracurricular offerings. (A more detailed explanation of the committee's findings and assumptions can be found in the appendix included at the end of this document.)

The committee sought to produce a set of recommendations to which the majority of community members could assent. Although the group was quite diverse in its initial positions on the workload question, we were able to reach a consensus on workload guidelines through examination and discussion of the data we gathered. The committee presented a draft of these findings to the faculty in late spring and solicited feedback on its proposals in the weeks following. As a result, significant changes were made to the proposal before it was approved by the Upper School faculty at its end of the year meetings. Consistent with Catlin Gabel's status as a laboratory school, this proposal should be treated as experimental and subject to revision. We expect elements of the proposal to be altered as their viability is tested by the actual educational process, and as factors such as the school's schedule and educational and extracurricular program offerings are modified in the future.

The Workload Committee recommended that the following policies be adopted by the Upper School Faculty for the 2008-9 academic year. The policies were endorsed by the faculty at the end of school year meetings in June 2008. These were reviewed in the Spring of 2009 and again in the Fall of 2014.

When the Upper School moved from a weekly to a seven day schedule in the 2012-13 school year, Head Dan Griffiths appointed a faculty committee chaired by Kate Grant (College Counseling) and Tony Stocks (English) to adjust the workload policy to that new schedule.

I. Guidelines for Homework Load

1) Cyclic Workload Guidelines

Teachers should observe the following guidelines in assigning work to be completed outside of class. The “average student” (defined as occupying the middle 50% of a class), should not be expected to devote more total time per course than the guidelines listed below. The guidelines assume that upper-level students can carry a heavier workload than first and second year students, and that reading and writing intensive courses generally require more preparation time.

<u>Course Type</u>	<u>Homework Load per Seven Day Cycle</u>
Standard full-credit course (art, math, language)	150 minutes
Lab Intensive Course (science)	200 minutes
Reading/Writing Intensive Course (English, history)	225 minutes
Upper Level and Accelerated Courses	300 minutes
Upper Level English Course	300 minutes

Reading and Writing Intensive Courses are those classes in which reading and writing constitute the predominant mode of study (i.e. English and History).

Upper-level courses designate the grade level at which the course is aimed, not the grade level of all individuals in the course (a freshman admitted to French 4 would be expected to cope with the upper-level workload).

Instructors will generally be expected to distribute the cyclic homework load equally over their total number of class meetings per cycle (eg.30 minutes per class meeting for a standard class that meets five times per cycle; 45 minutes per class meeting for a reading and writing intensive course). However, in order to accommodate longer assignments, instructors may occasionally assign a greater number of minutes than the average for a particular class meeting, and then reduce the amount of homework given for other classes of the seven day cycle. Instructors may also assign homework to be completed on a day that a class does not meet in order to give a class daily practice. Instructors should, however, carefully monitor such exceptional assignments, to insure that they do not interfere with students fulfilling their other obligations.

Instructors who elect to meet their classes fewer than five times in a given cycle may assign the same amount of homework as full credit classes that meet more frequently; half credit courses on the other hand, are expected to assign half the workload minutes outlined above.

Departments will identify which courses fall within each category above in consultation with the Upper School Head.

2) Regulating Workload Peaks

a) Calendar Assignments: Each academic department may designate a number of types of assignments (unit tests, class presentations, etc.) that can be expected to result in more stress on a student than regularly scheduled class work. Teachers must coordinate these assignments via an online calendar, such that an individual student does not have more than two of these assignments on any one day or more than three such assignments over a contiguous two day period. Students who face more than two calendar assignments in a day, or more than three over the course of two contiguous days, may choose to ask a teacher to move one of those due dates to a time mutually agreeable.

b) Major Assignments: Each academic department may designate a small number of exceptional assignments (term tests and term papers, for example) that can be expected to require more homework time than the limits designated above. Such assignments must be listed on the online workload calendar, and teachers are expected to devote substantial class time to these assignments, to mitigate against large amounts of extra homework. Students who face more than one major assignment due on the same day may choose to ask a teacher to move one of those due dates to a time mutually agreeable. (Exception: these rules do not apply to the final exam period of the year, when students must expect to face more than one major examination per day.)

Individual classes shall not designate more than two calendar or major assignments per week.

c) Planning: Due dates for both types of assignments should be announced at least two weeks in advance in order to allow students sufficient time to plan their schedules.

d) Field Trips and Workload: Should a class field trip or other activity take students out of other classes, that class should grant "release" time to make up missed work. For each ½ day a class takes a student from other classes, the responsible class releases the student from either a class meeting or a daily assignment.

3) Monitoring Homework Loads

a) Teachers and departments will convey to students clear and specific expectations regarding workload (how long they should expect to spend writing a paper, studying for a test, etc.). These expectations should be revisited multiple times throughout the year in each class.

b) Teachers should check in weekly with their students to monitor the time that assignments are taking, and to adjust their workloads to stay within the prescribed limits. Students should also inform teachers if they find that assignments are taking more than the allotted amount of time expected.

c) Teachers should work individually with students who are consistently taking longer than expected to complete their work, emphasizing strategies to reduce the time they spend on assignments and/or to avoid overwork by perfectionists.

II. Extracurricular Activities and Athletics

1) Advisor's Role in Monitoring Student Schedules

a) Advisors will counsel students as they sign up for academic courses, JV/Varsity sports and major extracurricular activities (as defined by the Dean of Students), also taking into account major activities not associated with Catlin Gabel. Advisors should discourage students from signing up for more obligations than they can handle. They should also consult parents frequently in order to monitor their advisee's homework and extracurricular load and sleep patterns.

b) Advisors should be consulted prior to any student being accepted on an extended trip which preempts classes for three days or more.

2) Guidelines for Athletics and Major Extracurricular Activities

a) No JV/Varsity sport or major extracurricular activity shall require a commitment of more than two hours per day (with exceptions for game, performance, and/or competition days). JV sports shall meet for no more than four days a week at 2 hr. practices or five days a week at 1-1/2 hr. practices unless granted a special exception by the Head of the Upper School.

b) Athletic teams and extracurricular activities may schedule practices on weekends but individuals must be excused for conflicting academic, extracurricular, or family engagements on those weekends, provided the student gives the coach or extracurricular director adequate notice of the potential conflict.

c) Any extracurricular or sporting event which requires students to miss more than one class period or takes more than 6 hours of a student's time (including transportation time) on a single day, shall not hold practice the following day. Exceptions can be made for varsity teams when practice to be missed immediately precedes a game-day and for playoffs.

d) The Athletic Director shall make recommendations to the Head of the Upper School by August 1st outlining ways in which the overall time commitment to team sports by students will be reduced to the above levels, as well as ways in which the athletic schedule (including travel time) can be modified to reduce conflicts with class time.

e) Students are responsible for communicating obligations which will cause them to miss practice to coaches and extracurricular leaders in a clear and timely manner. Coaches may request from parents or teachers documentation justifying such absences.

f) Labor intensive extracurricular activities should consider establishing tiered levels of responsibility.

III. Weekends, Breaks, and Special Evenings

- 1) Homework-free Weekends: Prior to the beginning of the school year, the faculty shall designate at least one Homework-free weekend for each trimester. During Homework-free weekends, no homework shall be due the first class meeting after the weekend. Only a nightly amount of homework may be due the following class meeting.
- 2) Teacher In-Services Days: (including Parent Conference Days)- Teachers may assign a total of 3 hrs. of homework to cover the 4 days of work missed during parent-teacher conferences.
- 3) Long Weekends: Over long weekends (other than those due to an In-Service day), teachers shall assign no more than the nightly amount of homework.
- 4) Special Evenings: When a large proportion of students are required to attend an evening event, each class should cut its nightly work proportional to the demands of the evening event, and there shall be no calendar/major assignments for those students due the next day. These days shall be announced to faculty and students at least a month in advance and the school will record as many as possible on the year-long calendar.
- 5) Special Days: Teachers should assign no more than the nightly amount of homework over other days when classes do not meet (Campus Day, Diversity Conference, etc.).
- 6) Breaks and Winterim: Teachers may assign one night's worth of homework to be completed before the first class meeting after the break or vacation. No major assignments can be due upon the return from breaks or vacations.
- 7) Inclement Weather days: Students will be expected to keep up with their assigned homework on days when school is not in session. (They should refer to their syllabi for specifics.)

IV. Coordination, Cooperation, and Follow-through

- 1) Applicability and Exceptions: All Catlin Gabel teachers, coaches, and directors of extracurricular activities are expected to abide by the guidelines outlined in this document. Any exceptions to these guidelines must be approved by the Head of the Upper School.
- 2) Integrity of Class Time: All classes at Catlin Gabel are equally important, and students are expected to attend all classes unless they have an excused absence or are excused for an officially sanctioned field trip. Students should never miss class time in one class to meet obligations in another class.
- 3) Follow-through: Each department shall report to the Head of the Upper School on the efficacy and impact of these policies. The Head shall report to the faculty on the substance of these reports. The school shall continue to reexamine these issues and discuss them as a faculty at least every 2 years.
- 4) New Teachers: Department heads and the Head of the Upper School should work with new teachers to ensure they are aware of these concerns, policies and recommended guidelines.

V. Recommendations for Further Study

Several factors that affect workload fell outside the charge of the committee. Some of these are still under consideration. The committee recommended that the following topics be addressed by the faculty in a comprehensive and timely manner:

1) **Crunch Week Schedules:** The school should weigh instituting a special schedule with fewer class meetings during the weeks prior to winter and spring breaks, as these weeks often pose the dilemma of large numbers of calendar and/or major assignments with less flexible deadlines. We recommend the formation of a committee to investigate the design of such a schedule.

2) **Assisting students:**

a) The school should look into providing for a more deliberate method to assist students with learning skills such as time management and making sensible choices regarding academic and non-academic obligations. This process should include working with parents.

b) The school should investigate mandating structured “open periods” for students who demonstrate an inability to manage their time wisely. By October the faculty should identify such students. Students will be released from such obligations when they show sufficient improvement in their time management skills.

3) **Advisor Time and Loads:** The school should examine the time provided to advisors to work with advisees, to ensure there is sufficient time to effectively counsel advisees on schedule matters. The school should make an effort to distribute advisees among advisors equitably.

Appendix

Below is an account of a few of the key pieces of data the workload committee discovered, and some explanation of the way they shaped the committee proposal:

1) The Twenty Four Hour Day

We began by looking at one of the non-negotiable elements in our work: the fact that there are 24 hours in a day. We projected the following time commitments for the typical Catlin Gabel Student:

Sleep	9.5 hours (the amount recommended by medical authorities)
Eating	1.5 hours (includes procuring/preparing food)
Hygiene	0.5 hours (dressing, showering, etc.)
Transportation	1.0 hours (can vary widely)
In Class	5.5 hours (assumes 6 classes, 1 long period)
<u>Sports/EC Activity</u>	<u>2.5 hours (both JV and Varsity; includes changing time)</u>
Total	20.5 hours

Under these circumstances, 3.5 hours are left in a student's day for homework, spending time with family, socializing with friends, and simply depressurizing.

If we cut the amount of sleep we want our students to get down to 8 hours, which seems more realistic, this brings our students' "free time" up to 5 hours.

These findings lay behind our proposal that maximum homework loads at the school be kept at three hours for Underclassmen (these students frequently have fewer free periods at school in which to do homework), and 4.5 hours for Upperclassmen. It also informs our proposal to limit the number of days students are required to devote to Sports and Extracurricular activities.

These time constraints affect all students at Catlin Gabel, no matter how hard-working or lazy. The data refutes the argument that if students only worked more efficiently, played fewer computer games, et al, workload would not be a problem.

2) Sleep

Sleep is certainly a crucial factor affecting student health, mental well-being, and academic success. Data from surveys of both parents and students suggest that the time students need to fulfill their busy schedules is being carved out of their sleep schedules. Currently, the average Catlin Gabel student gets 6.6 hours of sleep per weeknight. Fewer than 25% of our students get over 7 hours of sleep per weeknight. When surveyed as to how they would use the time freed up by 60 fewer minutes of homework, 50% of the students surveyed said they would use most of that time to sleep. Getting a handle on the workload would likely result in more alert, healthier students who could learn more effectively and miss less class due to illness.

3) Assigned vs. Completed Homework

Currently, students report being able to complete between 60-70% of the homework they're assigned. They also report being forced to prioritize some assignments over others, and to rush through and cut corners in their work. Our goal was a policy that would allow students to complete a greater percentage of the homework assigned, that would minimize the necessity of prioritizing one department's homework over another's, and that would allow more opportunity to complete assignments completely and thoughtfully.

4) Equity Among Disciplines

The committee started from the principle that all fields of study should be considered equally important. This is not the case under our current system, wherein some departments report students failing to complete homework or even refusing to attend class in order to complete assignments in other departments. The committee aimed to redress this problem by recommending a limit to the time commitment that could be demanded by any one discipline.

On the other hand, the committee agreed that homework functions differently in different subject areas. Faculty representatives from Science and Math, for instance, reported that homework in these classes was principally used to practice skills learned during class sessions. Teachers from History and English reported using homework to assign reading to be discussed during class time, and for student writing that must be done outside of class. Since both faculty testimony and student survey data demonstrated that reading and writing are generally more time-consuming and since the speed at which students read and write varies more widely, the committee agreed that reading and writing intensive classes required more homework minutes per night.

Student writing was a particular concern of the committee, since it is undoubtedly the most time-consuming activity our students are asked to engage in. The two most writing-intensive departments in the school take different approaches to the essay writing process. The English department spreads the writing process over a 3-6 week period, while History papers are written in a shorter, more concentrated time. To accommodate this difference, the committee agreed that History papers should be designated "Major Assignments," which might require a bit of extra homework time a few times a year. The English department, on the other hand, has agreed to fold its writing process into its regular homework load; therefore upper-level English courses have been given a bit more homework time each week to accommodate writing.

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