

Undergraduate and Graduate Course Level Guidelines

The following guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive. Nonetheless, they might provide food for thought as you ponder curriculum changes.

Undergraduate Levels

Though there are four levels of undergraduate course numbering at Virginia Wesleyan (100, 200, 300, and 400) which usually corresponds to the appropriateness of the course for first-year students, sophomores, juniors and seniors, the most essential categories of course numbering are encompassed by the terms “lower level” and “upper level.” The term “lower level” is used to describe 100 and 200-level courses while “upper level” is used to describe 300 and 400 level courses. Fundamental differences distinguish lower-level courses from upper-level courses. Often, the declaration of a major marks the boundary between lower and upper level courses. Therefore, while we attempt below to describe each level discretely, we recognize that there may be some overlap between 100 and 200 level courses as well as between 300 and 400 level courses.

000-level course designation

Remedial courses; placement determined by college-wide testing of entering students.

100-level course designation

Courses with no prerequisites (aside from possible remedial work), or survey courses, or courses defining basic concepts or presenting the terminology of a discipline. Faculty guidance structures student work. Appropriate for any student regardless of major.

Assumptions and Expectations:

- That students possess writing ability sufficient to compose definitions, paragraphs, or essays where appropriate;
- That they possess reading skills sufficient to comprehend college-level material in text-book and monograph form. Where useful, completion of remedial coursework should be a prerequisite.

200-level course designation

Courses of intermediate college-level difficulty; courses with 100-level course(s) as prerequisite(s). Balance of faculty guidance and student independence.

Assumptions and Expectations:

- That students will have completed expository writing (ENG 105) or the equivalent;
- That they possess general skills such as recognition, reading, appropriate quantitative skills, and varying degrees of fluency in writing and articulateness in expression.

300-level course designation

Courses of advanced college-level difficulty taken by majors and upper division students. Students work independently with some faculty guidance.

Assumptions and Expectations:

- That students have the ability to do research, or to obtain relevant information in the field through the proper use of libraries;
- That they are able to combine the results of the research, or the reading, into cohesive (and possibly original) statements;
- That they are able to produce some substantial work, such as a paper of "term-paper" length, or a creative or experimental project.

400-level course designation

Advanced upper-division courses; and/or seminars, tutorials and honor courses for majors and upper-division students. Students work independently with little faculty guidance.

Assumptions and Expectations:

- That students have completed a substantial amount of work at the 300 level,
- That students have the capacity to work independently under little guidance or supervision of an instructor.
- That students complete a research project or paper.

Graduate Levels

Though there are two levels of graduate course numbering at Virginia Wesleyan (500 and 600), the most essential distinction of these courses is that they are graduate-level, rather than undergraduate-level courses, requiring students to demonstrate knowledge and skills beyond those expected of undergraduate students and holders of bachelor's degrees in the relevant disciplines. Fundamental differences distinguish undergraduate-level courses from graduate-level courses. Therefore, while we attempt below to describe each level discretely, we recognize that there may be some overlap between 500- and 600-level courses.

500-level course designation

Graduate-level courses that cultivate students' knowledge of the literature of their discipline. Students engage in research projects and/or professional practice and training. Students work independently with little faculty guidance.

Assumptions and expectations:

- That students have completed bachelor's degrees and fulfilled admissions requirements to the graduate program;
- That students are capable of independent research that demonstrates knowledge of the literature of their discipline; and/or that students demonstrate the competencies and attitudes necessary for professional practice and training.

600-level course designation

Graduate-level courses that build on and expand students' knowledge of the literature of their discipline. Students engage in research projects and/or professional practice and training, with an emphasis on the application of knowledge to scholarly and professional issues within the discipline. Students work independently with little faculty guidance.

Assumptions and expectations:

- That students have completed bachelor's degrees and fulfilled admissions requirements to the graduate program;
- That students are capable of independent research that synthesizes knowledge of the literature of their discipline to address scholarly and professional issues within the discipline;
- That students demonstrate the competencies and attitudes necessary for participation as members of the discipline's scholarly and/or professional community.

Note: Best practices at Skidmore College, Hunter College, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Holy Cross, as well as SACS guidelines, were consulted in the development of this document.

Last updated by EPC on October 29, 2021