

Time on task

Time on task (the amount of time students spend on their academic work for their degree programmes) has been much discussed in recent years. And students were asked to indicate how much time they spend on their respective degree programmes in the Ministry's student survey¹. Time on task was included in the 2018 survey using the same methodology.

Note also that the results provide the data for indicator 7, Time on task in AU's quality assurance system as well as in AU's strategic framework contract's targets for student time on task.

In 2020, the results of the survey with regard to time on task may be affected by coronavirus restrictions and the periodic physical shutdown of AU. The survey was conducted from 20 October to 15 December 2020. During this period, the university was subject to a number of coronavirus restrictions that impacted teaching, but was not physically shut down.

In the wake of the shutdown in the spring, in early summer 2020, the university conducted a survey evaluating the transition to online teaching and exams. The aim of the survey was to learn from these experiences in order to enhance AU's approach to digital teaching and exams in future. The report and main conclusions are available here: <https://newsroom.au.dk/nyheder/vis/artikel/hvad-laerte-vi-af-foraarets-corona-undervisning>.

Main findings: Time on task

- The average time on task reported AU students is 37.3 hrs. pr. wk. in 2020, which is, which is 1.4 hrs. less than in 2018, when students reported that they spent 38.7 hours on task in a typical week.
- There are differences across the five faculties with respect to reported time on task. Students at Tech reported that they spend 42.7 hrs. pr. wk., at Nat 41.4 hrs. pr. wk., at HE 39,1 hrs. pr. wk., at BSS 36.2 hrs. pr. wk. and at AR 33.9 hrs. pr. wk.
- Students with paid work (53%) reported spending an average of 10.9 hrs. pr. wk. working.
- Students involved in volunteering (24%) reported spending an average of 4.7 hrs. pr. wk. on these activities.

Academic time on task

As in 2018, in 2020 the students were asked to indicate the number of full hours they spend on task during an average of a typical week with classes – divided into a number of different subcategories (classes, preparation and internships)².

¹ The student survey is carried out by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science every two years. The study consists of a number of sub-elements, including the Learning Barometer (which measures the students' experiences of the learning environment on their degree programme and their own approaches to learning), Degree Programme Zoom (digital admissions tool that allows students to compare degree programmes), Teaching Environment (under the auspices of Dansk Center for Undervisningsmiljø (the Danish centre for the teaching environment)). For more information about the student survey, please see the LINK to the memo on background and method on the website.

² The questionnaire and details about the individual activities can be seen at <https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/statistik-og-analyser/sporgeskeundersogelse>

Students were explicitly asked not to include holiday breaks (for example, the summer holiday), and were asked not to consider their anticipated time on task for the remainder of the semester.

Table 1 below shows the average weekly time on task for AU as a whole as well as at the individual faculties. The average reported time on task for AU students was 37.3 hrs., which is 1.4 hours less than in 2018. In 2018, students reported that they spent 38.7 hours on task in a typical week during the semester with classes and independent study (exam period not included).

There is some variation in reported time on task by faculty. Generally, students at all faculties reported a decline in time on task in 2020 relative to 2018. Students at Tech reported the highest number of weekly hours on task: 42.7 hours. At Nat, the figure is 41.4 hrs. pr. wk., at HE 39.1, at BSS 36.2, and at AR 33.9, the lowest figure. The largest decline in the number of weekly hours on task was seen at HE, where students reported spending 3.7 fewer hours on task per week in 2020 relative to 2018.

Table 1. Time on task spent on classes, independent study and internships (By faculty, AU 2018, 2020)

YEAR	How many hours do you spend in taught courses and on personal study time in a typical week during the current semester/half -year period?	AU	AR	BSS	HE	Nat	Tech
2018		38.7	34.4	37.9	42.8	42.4	42.9
2020		37.3	33.9	36.2	39.1	41.4	42.7

n= 12.251 (2018), n=10.870 (2020)

Table 2 on the next pages provides an overview of reported time on task by type of programme.

As in the surveys of recent years, full-degree students who are also doing an internship reported the highest weekly time on task (42.9 hrs. pr. wk.). However, this figure is three hours lower than in the 2018 survey. Students working on their final project, such as a Master's thesis or Bachelor's project, reported the next-highest time on task, at 39 hrs. pr. wk. Full-degree students reported 37 hrs. pr. wk., while students in full-time internships reported 36 hrs. pr. wk. Students studying elsewhere than at AU reported 33.8 hrs. pr. wk. The reported weekly time on task was lower for all types of programmes. However, this does not apply to students whose degree programmes are primarily offered as e-learning courses. They reported 36.8 hours of weekly time on task in 2020 and 36 hours in 2018.

Table 2 The students' programme type in the current semester (AU 2020)

The students' programme type in the current semester	2018		2020	
	Number of responses	Average time on task	Number of responses	Average time on task
I am on an ordinary study programme	10,033	38.1	8,891	37
I am on an ordinary study programme while also in an internship	867	45.9	430	42.9
I am doing an internship full time without regular classes	409	36.4	359	36
At the time being I study at another location than AU	281	38	71	33.8
I am working on my finals of this study programme (e.g. final assignment, bachelor assignment or thesis)	1,068	40.2	922	39
I am following the greater part of my studies as online courses	32	36	169	36.8

Time spent on paid and voluntary work

Many students spend some of their free time working, and the students were asked to answer whether they have paid or unpaid work. Students who responded in the affirmative were asked to indicate how many hours they spend on the activity during a typical week of the semester.

53% of the respondents replied that they have paid work in addition to their studies, and they reported that they spend 10.6 hours a week on their paid job.

Somewhat fewer (24%) students reported being involved in volunteer work, and these students reported that they spend 4.6 hours in a typical week on volunteering.

There are no significant differences between responses in 2018 and 2020.

Table 3. Time spent on paid and voluntary work (AU 2018, 2020)

YEAR	How many hours do you spend in a typical week this semester on	Paid work	Voluntary work
2018		10.6	4.6
2020		10.9	4.7

n = 7.117, 3,617 (paid work, volunteer work 2018), n = 5.876, 2,617 (paid work, volunteer work 2020)

FACTS about the 2020 survey:

AU's study environment survey is based on data collected by Epinion for the Danish Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Aarhus University. The results of the survey form the basis for the university's teaching environment evaluation, which is conducted every three years.

The survey is carried out every other year and was most recently conducted in the autumn of 2020.

The questionnaire was sent to 33,381 full-time students at Aarhus University and 11,133 students took the survey, which results in an overall response rate of 33.40%.