

Crossing the line: Building value with 1-credit experiential courses

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Abstract: The traditional 3-credit course model provides faculty the time to cover a breadth of topics or focus deeply on a specialized topic. This model focuses on drawing in students based on content, usually from a limited set of majors. Even when outside majors are interested, they might not think they have the prerequisite knowledge to succeed in the class. This hinders the student's ability to learn and other students' ability to gain diverse perspectives, which is a founding principle of American higher education. This research examines 1-credit experiential classes that helps recruit students for both the content and method of delivery. Such courses use a range of pedagogical approaches that provide a more engaging experience than the traditional classroom, thus breaking the model of the traditional 3-credit model in a manner beneficial to the overall learning experience. Lessons using high engagement practices help students understand and retain even the most complicated topics. The 1-credit model that focuses on method of delivery reduces the content burden and barrier to entry for outside majors. These courses can also help general retention trends as students earn credit for more engaging courses. Lastly, it is also less distributive to student and faculty schedules. Students are provided more opportunity to take courses outside the major without conflicting with core major requirements. Faculty are able to develop and teach courses without impacting their normal teaching load. This paper uses student surveys in a topically similar 3-credit and 1-credit course to better understand the positive impact of 1-credit courses. We argue this model provides relevance to a student's education, increases educational value with a low cost, provides an important socialization across the university, and encourages pedagogical innovation among faculty.

“Favorite class of the semester, had great discussions and always looked forward to going to the class.”

“I think the class was well done and everything was perfect. I wish we could watch more movies because they were so awesome and I loved doing the research.”

These student quotes are from HI199 Military History at the Movies, a 1-credit pilot course testing learning outcomes across courses of various credit. Student reviews indicate they enjoyed the content and modality of teaching in the 1-credit course, even if they did not have a high level of interest in military history prior to the class. This paper is a first cut at developing a range of learning outcomes – broad, intermediate, specific – and applying them to 1- and 3-credit courses of similar content to determine when learning denigrates between the courses. In the fall of 2022, faculty taught a 1-credit course on military history using movies and the primary tool to teach and a traditional 3-credit course on military history using more conventional approaches like lecture, discussion, archival work, and written assignments. We find there are important differences between student perception in each class and their ability to achieve more specific learning outcomes. The initial results, discussed below, indicate the utility of substantive, content based 1-credit courses and encourage the development of more pedagogically innovative 1-credit courses.

The idea of variable credit courses is not new. A review of any university course catalog will reveal courses ranging from 1-4-credits, or more depending on the field. Four-credit courses are more common with the additional hour used to supplement laboratory, language, or research skills (Thomas 2009; Walker 2014). Some institutions are even leveraging the 1-credit model to convey core concepts online, so students are prepared for the content in a 3-credit course

(Klemm 2017). Importantly, the additional credit is seen as a part, or extension of the original 3-credit course.

Faculty constantly revise their syllabi in these courses, reviewing content, and updating learning objectives to reach new student populations and keep up with the discipline. However, revisions and innovation can be limited because of rigid teaching schedules that require faculty to rotate through normal teaching loads that include service courses and upper-division courses for departmental majors. Any revisions to content necessarily fall into the traditional 3-credit hour course model to meet enrollment needs. The traditional 3-credit model provides faculty the time to cover a breadth of topics or focus deeply on a specialized topic. This model focuses on drawing in students based on content and using catchy course titles or topics to boost enrollments (Flaherty, McAdams, LeBlanc 2017). Even the best efforts might only appeal to a narrow group of majors that feel they have the prerequisite knowledge to take the course. When outside majors do not enroll, it limits learning potential because it reduces the disciplinary perspectives that can lead to rich course discussions. Identifying innovative ways to appeal to non-majors can increase success and integration across campus (Felege and Ralph 2018).

1-credit experiential courses present a pathway to recruit students for both the content and method of delivery. Standalone 1-credit courses are abundant but usually do not focus on the substantive content found in 3-credit courses. One-credit courses focus on orientating students and have been successful for Honors Programs (Montgomery & Nottingham 1995), first year introductory courses to build cohorts (Bielefeldt 2010), professionalization courses (Mills, Jenkins, and Waltz 2000), and personal wellness (Bland and Kittleson 1994). This model is

especially useful for first year students that do not know how to navigate higher education.

Discipline specific professionalization courses can help students learn about their major, career options, and increase retention rates (Kesler 1997; Goldberg 2021).

1-credit courses use a range of pedagogical approaches that provide a more engaging experience than the traditional classroom, thus breaking the traditional 3-credit model in a manner beneficial to the overall learning experience. The 1-credit model that focuses on method of delivery reduces the content burden and barrier to entry for outside majors. One-credit courses are not meant to replace the traditional 3-credit course but are meant to offer students and faculty a wider range of learning options.

Bowman et al. (2010) directly compared 1-credit and 3-credit service-learning courses and found students in the 1-credit course were more understanding of poverty, open to diversity, had an increased responsibility toward society, and were more inclusive. This study demonstrates the utility of 1-credit courses to achieving challenging learning objectives. Despite the benefits of 1-credit courses, most focus on teaching skills over discipline specific content.

Leveraging innovative pedagogical approaches to teach discipline specific content in 1-credit courses can benefit a wide range of majors. The traditional lecture-based class is becoming a relic as students demand more engaging ways to learn material. Importantly, high impact learning techniques are shown to increase understanding and retention of even complicated topics (Archer and Miller 2011; Omelicheva and Avdeyeva 2008). Leveraging innovative techniques is especially important for non-majors because active and experiential learning is

shown to increase student enjoyment (Hendrickson 2019). This can facilitate cross-discipline enrollments as students realize content is supplemented by experiential methods because faculty have the ability to develop more dynamic forms of content delivery than the normal classroom format. Non-majors enrolling in these courses can develop a modest background in the material (Walker 2014) which can lead to further interest and subsequent courses in the discipline. It will also expose majors to new perspectives as additional majors fill the class.

In this research we seek to better understand 1-credit courses so they can be integrated into the curriculum. First, 1-credit courses are meant to convey material and achieve learning objectives. We compare student success in achieving learning objectives in similar content 1- and 3-credit courses to determine if learning goals can be achieved in both courses. If they can, we ask when learning denigrates and students in the 1-credit course can no longer achieve specific learning objectives achieved in the 3-credit course. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1a: Students will achieve broad learning outcomes in 1- and 3-credit courses.

H1b: Students will better achieve specific learning outcomes in 3-credit courses.

Second, we argue 1-credit courses have a lower barrier to entry and can serve as an important socialization and retention tool for universities. It allows students to interact with others outside their discipline and the engaging form of delivery helps build connections among students. This is especially important for first year students. Providing opportunities for first year students to make stronger connections with colleagues and faculty increases the likelihood of retaining those students. While literature supports community building's impacts on student retention (Davis et al. 2019), our ability to test retention is limited until the research is expanded to a longitudinal study. Until then, we can test the relationship building that happened among colleagues and with

faculty during the courses with the following hypotheses and we anticipate strong relationships will lead to greater retention.

H2a: Students will develop a stronger sense of connection with colleagues in 1-credit courses.

H2b: Students will develop a stronger sense of connection with faculty in 1-credit courses.

Lastly, these courses are beneficial to faculty because it encourages pedagogical innovation.

Faculty are eager to try new, engaging methods of content delivery. Testing something new during a 3-credit course can be challenging and might not be appropriate. There are misconceptions about what constitutes experiential learning, startup barriers, time commitments, and fears of failure, which detracts instructors from exploring high impact learning experiences. Focusing on developing an innovative pedagogical approach in a 1-credit course provides additional safety for faculty to try and refine new approaches. Once developed, new approaches require less developmental commitment, making it easier to implement during a normal 3-credit course. Similar to limitations on retention, it is difficult to determine if instructors are incorporating the methods developed in their 1-credit course into their 3-credit courses. As the university builds out the 1-credit model, we hope to develop a larger research program to more effectively test the arguments presented in this paper.

Methods

History 199: Military History at the Movies was created as a 1-credit course for the Fall 2022 semester and coincides with the long standing 3-credit offering History 236: Military History II. The 1-credit course focused on incoming first year students from across the university. Department chairs from various majors were contacted during the summer 2022, were provided

an overview of the 1-credit course including the socialization goals and were asked to identify one incoming student from their major to register for the class. Eight chairs, the director of undeclared majors, and the director of the university Honors Program were asked to submit a student name. The class ended up with five different majors from liberal arts and STEM fields and one undeclared major. Students in the 3-credit course self-selected into the course during spring 2022 registration. The course fulfills various degree requirements for different majors and ended up with ten majors from liberal arts and STEM fields.

At the end of the semester students were provided a 23-question survey (**see Appendix 1**). Questions attempted to measure socialization and content aspects. Importantly, the primary focus of this study is to determine if students achieve different levels of learning goals in the 1- and 3-credit courses. Three levels of learning goals are developed – broad, intermediate, specific (**see Table 1**). Broad learning goals include the ability to identify the more authoritative secondary source. Two options were provided to students, one sourced with footnotes and one without. Intermediate learning was measured by providing students a picture of a book and asking them to properly cite the source. Additionally, students were asked if they learned how to engage in critical discussion of historical issues. Lastly, specific learning goals included accurately identifying depictions of historical events in film and correctly identifying a key theory in military history.

Table 1

Learning goals	Questions
Broad	Identify the more authoritative secondary source.
Intermediate	Using the information provided, provide a citation for this source. I learned to engage in critical discussion of historical events.
Specific	Which film provide the most accurate representation of historical events? Which term is key to understanding the soldier's will to combat?

Analysis

The total number of respondents across both classes was 26 students. Eight students responded in the 1-credit course and 18 responded in the 3-credit course. The small n limits the ability for significant comparisons. However, the initial findings suggest building out more substantive 1-credit courses and assessing learning against the traditional 3-credit course.

Learning goals

Both classes were able to properly assess the more authoritative secondary source, a key, broad learning goal. Students in the 1-credit course were given primary and secondary sources to read prior to each film. Discussion on good source material was relatively limited, but students engaged with quality sources throughout the semester and used them for discussion and reflection papers. Still, 7 students (87.5%) were able to properly identify the better source. Comparatively, the 3-section course explicitly discussed the quality of sources in the curriculum. However, only 13 (72%) correctly identified the more legitimate source.

This difference is important because students in the 1-credit course were able to achieve this broad learning goal through engagement and without explicit discussion. Although there were dedicated discussions about sources in the 3-credit course, attention can wane in the typical 50- or 75-minute course filled with other content. Initial comparisons between the course suggest **H1a** can be supported and further research with a larger sample is warranted.

We anticipated students in the 1-credit course would be less likely to achieve intermediate goals than the 3-credit students. In general, both groups did poorly in properly citing the source. Only two students in the 1-credit course and four students in the 3-credit course properly cited the book. However, all students in the 1-credit course felt they could better engage in critical discussion of historical issues compared to 14 (77.7%) in the 3-credit course. The use of film as a platform to deliver content is more engaging to students. Faculty led discussion following the film can get students critiquing components of the film and making connections to the assigned readings. There is substantial room in the 3-credit course to develop critical thinking skills, but a student's perception of that might get lost in the broader content being covered. It also requires students be prepared for class, which is easier in a 1-credit course with limited readings versus the regular reading assignments in the 3-credit course.

Lastly, students in both courses achieved specific learning goals that were tied to their course. All eight respondents in the 1-credit course were able to correctly identify the film that had the most accurate portrayal of historical events, and none were able to identify the key to understanding the soldier's will to combat. Most students (83%) in the 3-credit course were able to achieve the specific learning outcome by identifying the key to understanding the soldier's

will to combat. However, 4 (22%) students in the 3-credit course were also able to correctly identify the film that had the most accurate portrayal of historical events. There is mixed success for **H1b** because not all of the 3-credit students achieved the specific learning goals, but they were able to correctly identify the appropriate film for the 1-credit class's specific learning goal.

Importantly, these initial results indicate students are learning substantive content in 1-credit courses. They do not have to be limited to orientation or professionalization courses. Students can achieve valuable learning goals using the 1-credit course model. Developing more 1-credit courses with more dedicated forethought has the potential to convey a wide range of learning objectives, even specific goals if the entire 1-credit course is built around a single objective. These courses have the added benefit of allowing faculty to test new approaches in the classroom and incorporate those methods into the traditional 3-credit course when appropriate.

Socialization

For both classes, students had some interest in military history regardless of major. This is not surprising given Norwich University's ROTC program and commitment to the military. However, 8 respondents (100%) in 1-credit course strongly agreed that the content covered was enjoyable compared to only 6 (33%) in the 3-credit course. The remaining 12 students (66%) did agree that they enjoyed the content.

It is difficult to measure connection with students and faculty outside of the student perception. Still, we develop questions to gauge the student's perception of the classroom environment and their connection with others in the class. Generally, students in the 1-credit course perceived

greater engagement and connection, suggesting **H2a** and **H2b** should be further investigated with a larger sample.

All students in the 1-credit class agreed that during discussion, the rest of the class wanted to hear their contributions. This is an impressive number compared to only 10 (55.5%) students in the 3-credit class that felt the rest of the class wanted to hear their contributions. The less formal atmosphere of the 1-credit course helped create an environment that facilitated student engagement. If students feel their opinion is valued and they can make substantive contributions to the discussion, there is an increased likelihood a university will be able to retain that student. Nearly all the students in the 1-credit course felt like they made substantive contributions to discussion (87.5%) compared to only 11 (61.1%) in the 3-credit course. This can be a product of the method of instruction. The more engaging medium of movies creates an atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing and connecting with one another.

These initial findings are especially important in the 1-credit course that was comprised largely of first year students from various majors. Because more students felt they could and did make substantive contributions in the 1-credit course, they also perceived learning more about alternative disciplinary perspectives at a higher rate. In the 1-credit course, 6 (75%) students agreed to greater exposure to other perspectives while only 9 (50%) agreed in the 3-credit course. Exposing students to alternative perspectives is fundamental to the college experience. Instilling the importance of multidisciplinary engagement during the first year can encourage students to take classes outside their major which will facilitate the breaking of disciplinary barriers.

Lastly, in both classes, students felt comfortable communicating with the instructor. Although the number that strongly agreed was higher in the 1-credit course at 7 (87.5%) compared to the 3-credit course at 9 (50%), all but one student in the 3-credit felt they could communicate with the instructor. Seeing these results in both classes is good for any instructor but being able to build a connection with first year students is especially important for universities working to retain students.

The substantive 1-credit course offered in the fall to first year students had important socialization impacts. It was offered in a less formal, more relaxed atmosphere. It helped first year students feel comfortable to engage in discussion which facilitated a broader multidisciplinary understanding. Additionally, first year students can be intimidated by faculty and anxious to visit office hours to ask for help. The 1-credit courses showcase the faculty through a less formal lens. It can help first year students see faculty are approachable and willing to help, increasing the likelihood they contact faculty when they are challenged in a traditional 3-credit course. Helping students feel more comfortable communicating with faculty can help retain students because they can build connections and identify mentors sooner.

Conclusion

There is significant value to the 1-credit course model. It promotes faculty innovation, can help breakdown disciplinary silos, and retain students. This study was an initial attempt to develop a more formal model of testing 1- and 3-credit courses. There are numerous limitations that require refinement as we develop more 1-credit courses.

First, we were limited by the course offerings and hope to develop more 1-credit courses to further test their ability to achieve various levels of learning goals. The Military History at the Movies course was a test course to determine if a 1-credit course could reach enrollment standards. The course was successful, and students were interested in taking the course once word spread. It led to a Presidency in the Movies class during spring 2023 which quickly met the enrollment cap, including students from the Military History at the Movies course.

The idea to test various levels of learning outcomes came at the start of the fall 2022 semester, after syllabi were finalized and classes started. While the 3-credit Military History II course is established and only sees minor revisions each year, the movies class was a new syllabus. In retrospect, the movies class could have better been framed around the learning goals of 3-credit course. In fact, key learning goals in the 3-credit presidency course framed the design of the presidential movies class. With a clearer understanding of research goals, a more systematic approach can be applied as the project develops.

We also recognize the survey we administered needs significant refinement. Some aspects will be easy to refine especially when learning goals in 3-credit courses are driving the creation of a 1-credit course. Developing questions to assess the achievement of various learning outcomes should become easier. Questions that need more significant work include ones that tap into socialization and classroom environment. Most of our questions are perception based, which is important, but more objective questions need to be developed and included if we hope to develop generalizable results.

Developing a broader research agenda on 1-credit courses will help better understand the longitudinal impacts of these courses. Importantly, we can understand retention rates, student satisfaction, how majors are engaging with one another, and determine if this is a viable tool to support faculty innovation.

Appendix I

Informed Consent: Respondent's answers to the attached survey are for an original research project conducted by Norwich University researchers. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and refusal to participate involves no penalty. Participation will take approximately 15 minutes and requires no additional commitment beyond the survey completion. Participants may discontinue participation at any point. All survey responses are anonymous, and the respondent's identity will remain confidential. By taking this survey, respondents agree that they are 18-years-of-age or older. The use and analysis of this data is to determine engagement levels and learning outcomes in a variety of academic courses. Potential for undo stress and/or anxiety is no more than would normally be incurred during a classroom assessment. If you have any questions regarding your participation in this survey, please contact Dr. Michael Thunberg, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Norwich University by email at mthunber@norwich.edu or by phone at (802) 485-2374, Dr. Steven Sodergren, Professor of History at Norwich University by email at ssodergr@norwich.edu or by phone at (802) 485-2938, Norwich University IRB chair Dr. Mark Stefani at mstefani@norwich.edu, or Norwich University IRB at irb@norwich.edu.

I have an interest in military history.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I found the content covered in this class enjoyable.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

The class wanted to hear my contributions.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I made substantive contributions to class discussions.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

All members of the class made substantive contributions to class discussions.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I learned about alternative disciplinary perspectives in this class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

How many classmates did you know prior to taking this class? _____

For the classmates you did not know, do you plan on maintaining communication with them after this class is over?

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I developed new friendships in this class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I developed new friendships in this class with students outside my major.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I felt comfortable communicating with the instructor.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I developed a greater ability to offer critical assessments of major issues in military history.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Identify the more authoritative secondary source.

1) **Napoleonic Warfare:** Napoleonic warfare was a major element in the pursuit of decisiveness as evidenced by the use of the Napoleonic column, the creation of the Corps, and the use of psychology. In 1791, the French Revolution created the highly motivational 1791 drill manual. This manual created the Battalion attack Column which utilized a flexible tactical system that allowed rapid movement, redeployment, and assault.¹ In addition to the creation of the Column, Napoleon utilized the Corps in 1805 as an extension of the combat divisions of 1792 and 1793. The use of this organizational structure allowed more effective command and control as well as logistics.² These elements allowed decisive battle to be sought and achieved with the more maneuverable and flexible military. However, the creation of a decisive military requires a properly motivated military force. John Lynn's article, "Toward an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army, 1789-1815" discussed the development of multiple styles of motivation, which he described as the "essentially incompatible natures of Virtue and Honor under the rule of Napoleon."³ The creation of an effective force requires the military to be focused purely on military affairs; to that end, Napoleon and his successors used personal relationships with their men as well as recognition for service rendered in the form of promotions and awards.⁴

2) **Reviewing Patton:** The film Patton stands as a hallmark in American war cinema, but its portrayal of the main subject is as problematic as it is famous. For example, at the beginning of the movie the American war effort in North Africa is presented in a state of near complete disaster, but General George S. Patton shows up and sets them straight. That depiction, and Patton's claims in the film that American soldiers at that point are "lazy" and "unmotivated," does a disservice to the veterans who fought and died prior to his taking command of the II Corps. The film follows a similar path from there, making it seem at times that American forces would have floundered without the firm hand of Patton involved in some way or another. On a different level, however, *Patton* documents the expectations which Americans have for their commanders (victory, aggressiveness), but also the limits that they set for them (respecting the American citizen soldier). The film gets lost in the flash of General Patton's particular personality traits along with an overblown emphasis on his contributions to the war effort, but it does raise important issues about the nature of American military leadership.

¹ Parker, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare*, 194.

² Parker, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare*, 198.

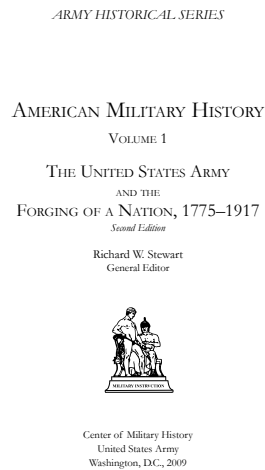
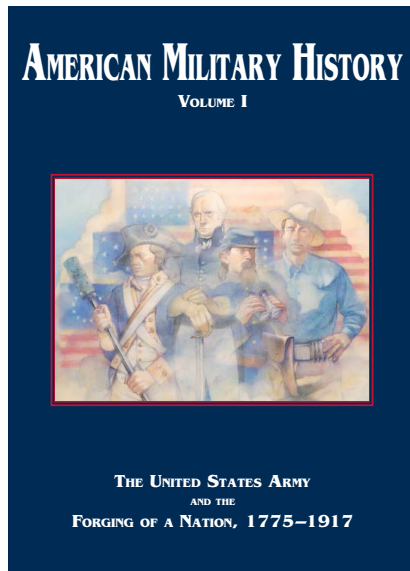
³ Lynn, "Toward an Army of Honor," 152.

⁴ Lynn, "Toward an Army of Honor," 170.

I developed an appreciation for how historical information is presented in various forms to the public.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Using the information provided, provide a citation for this source.



I learned to engage in critical discussion of historical issues.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I gained a greater ability to assess primary source materials and their relevance to historical research.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Which film provides the most accurate representation of historical events?

Saving Private Ryan *Patton* *Fury*

All provide an equally accurate representation

None provide an accurate representation

Which term is key to understanding the soldier's will to combat?

Bullet Theory Élan Initial Motivation Honor Drive

Please specify your gender

Woman Man Non-binary Prefer not to say Other _____

Please identify your major(s). _____

Please identify any minor(s). _____

Please specify your lifestyle

Corps of Cadets Civilian residential Civilian commuter International student

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