

Senate Committee Annual Report

Senate Committee: Curriculum Committee

2014-2015

1. What are the primary duties of this committee?

This committee reviews and recommends all manner of curricular change including new programs such as degrees, minors, certificates and more, new and modified courses, catalog copy and changes, and curriculum related policy.

2. What did you plan to accomplish this year?

Our work is the result of curricular change proposed by departments and programs, so it is driven by the needs of the University rather than the interests of the committee. This year we anticipated a high number of changes due to retrenchment, prioritization, and reorganization. We also anticipated major changes to the structure of the majors in sociology/anthropology, art and communications, and the new creative writing major.

3. What did the committee accomplish during this academic year?

We recommended for approval to the senate 25 changes to majors, 26 changes to minors, 15 changes to certificates, option areas, or concentrations, 64 new courses, and 342 modified courses. In addition, we approved two new programs – the BFA in creative writing, and the creation of Sociology and Anthropology as a combined major.

The committee's work ranges from the detailed wordsmithing for clarity, to evaluating academic level and rigor in terms of the appropriate 100, 200, 300, and 400 level, modifications to ease data entry and record keeping in banner, advising issues related to major, minor, and course modifications, potential cross listings with multiple departments, avoiding curricular overlap between departments offering similar courses, and interfacing between administration, staff, chairs, individual faculty, and departments in all matters related to curriculum.

4. What issues and/or additional responsibilities arose this year that influenced the work of the committee?

While the purview of the curriculum committee is focused on evaluating the academic characteristics of courses and programs, decisions on curriculum necessarily affect every part of the university. Many of the changes brought to the committee this year included those necessitated by the loss of faculty due to retrenchment and the response of departments to the recent prioritization. Many of these changes included restructuring and the loss of courses. In addition, a large number of courses and in some cases option areas were deleted as well due to a large number of upcoming retirements and the loss of individuals with specialized expertise that will be permanently lost from their departments. Overall, in addition to the elimination of specific programs due to retrenchment there was a trend of additional contraction and reduction within many departments and programs in the changes reviewed by the committee.

An additional issue dealt with by the committee this year is that of credit increases for specific courses. Several departments submitted requests to increase the number of credits received for multiple existing courses, for a variety of reasons which included changes in the expected student workload for a course, trying to recognize a higher existing workload as the course is currently taught, and bringing the credit load for courses currently loaded less than one ELU per lecture hour. Some programs

compensated for course credit hour increases by reducing major requirements, some programs will increase in total credits required.

While technically a curricular issue, the potential effects on students of multiple credit increases within or across programs go far beyond the purview of the curriculum committee to affect registration, financial aid, scheduling, and especially advising. Arguments against credit increases are that they represent a tuition hike in disguise, that they may reduce the number of classes that students register for and slow their progress towards graduation and make it more difficult for students to keep on track with their major and take necessary prerequisites in time, that it recognizes a higher student workload without recognizing a corresponding higher faculty workload. Arguments for credit increases are that they give students a better expectation of their workload, that for many courses they are consistent with the standards defined by the Carnegie Credit Hour, and for some courses they accurately reflect faculty effort in terms of loading.

If the committee continues to receive requests by programs for multiple credit hour increases for existing courses, we recommend having a broader discussion of the issue including representatives from additional affected departments such as registration, financial aid, and advising, in order to discuss what policies the committee should take regarding credit increases.

5. Given what you have learned this year, what goals do you recommend this senate committee focus upon in the upcoming year?

The committee should have as a goal for next year the establishment and dissemination of a consistent policy for assigning credit hours to a class, including issues related to student workload, faculty workload, lecture hours vs. studio or lab hours. Such a policy should reflect the myriad effects of credit hours and credit hour increases on students both generally and within specific programs, and make specific recommendations that departments could work with.

In addition, we have had one further year of experience with the House program and the curriculum that was hurriedly established at the end of last year, and in some ways does not reflect the full scope and curricular goals of the House program as currently taught. Because it was changed from a new program to essentially a new general education prefix at the last minute, it would be worth hearing from those teaching in the houses and those working to establish new houses how well the current course descriptions and curriculum is working, and whether changes to the house curriculum could benefit the program.
