

Miscellaneous Subcommittee Report

September 15, 2010

By Gary Pielak

Gary Pielak (Chemistry), chair, Patricia Parker (Communication Studies), Steve Reznick (Psychology), Miles Fletcher (History), Deborah Eaker-Rich (Education), Alice Dawson (Academic Advising), Sherry Salyer (Exercise and Sport Science/Academic Advising), Roger Kaplan (Academic Advising), Dale Hoff (undergraduate student), Bethany Corbin (undergraduate student) Liaison: Bobbi Owen

Most communication was carried out by email. I have included, as supplementary material, the compilation of a series of messages describing the rationale behind our charges and other useful information. Additional data are available on our Blackboard site. The committee met face-to-face in two hour-long meetings on April 16 and April 30.

A summary of each charge is followed by our response.

=====

1. The Curriculum.

- a. Are there too many requirements?**
- b. Is there too much overlap between requirements?**
- c. Are the proportions appropriate?**
- d. Is the Curriculum too complex?**

Curricula are complicated because they must cover all students, from English majors to Physics and Astronomy majors. Ours have many requirements with a lot of overlap. The committee was unable to formulate a plan where small changes would do much to remedy the situation. Fortunately, our corps of Advisors understands the curriculum, and does a good job guiding students. A key problem is many members of our faculty do not understand the curriculum. We address this problem at the end of the report.

2. Should more or less overlap be allowed for double majors?

The amount of overlap seems reasonable, since at least half of the courses and credit hours in each major must be completed at UNC-CH.

3. Writing across the curriculum.

- a. Are the criteria appropriate?**
- b. Do syllabi match the criteria?**

The answer to both questions is "yes," for most Foundation courses. There are two provisos. First, 10 pages of writing in, for instance, Physics or Chemistry will often comprise more mathematics than rhetoric. Second, for Connections or Approaches

courses, the task of marking 10 pages of writing per student in a large class can be challenging.

The 10-page rule should be strictly enforced for most courses, especially those with fewer than 55 students. The Administrative Boards should consider waivers for other large classes with limited teaching assistant support. The Boards should consider waiving the 10-page limit for courses with student-to-teaching assistant ratios of greater than 55-to-1 or student-to-grading assistant ratios of greater than 80-to-1.

The Boards may want to rephrase the criteria for the Communication Intensive designation. BIOL 101 lab reports are inappropriate because there is no speaking component. BIOL 101 also lacks the criterion that Communication Intensive courses 'integrate foundational skills' because BIOL 101 is a foundation course, and therefore, unlikely to be integrative. The Communication Intensive criteria also emphasize that students learn to "write and speak effectively in their disciplinary areas." Again, BIOL 101 does not satisfy the criteria because it is introductory.

First-year seminars are also inappropriate for the Communication Intensive designation, because they do not teach students how to "write and speak effectively in their disciplinary areas." The document describing first-year seminars states that students in these seminars "are unlikely to have the writing and research skills that we expect from our more advanced students," providing further rationale for their exclusion.

4. Should By-Examination (BE) credits for meeting General Education requirements be restricted?

The amount of BE credit earned by incoming first-year students is getting out of hand. For a student to earn a Bachelor's degree from UNC-CH, most of his or her courses should be from UNC-CH or, in the case of transfer students, taken in the College or at UNC-CH. The average number of Advanced Placement (AP) plus International Baccalaureate (IB) hours credited to first-year students has increased from 13 hours in 2000 to 17 hours in 2009, and the percentage of first-year students entering with at least some BE credit has increased from 67% to 83%. In theory, a student can fulfill nearly all General Education requirements through BE credit (I have included as supplementary material a message from an academic advisor, Mr. Roger Kaplan proving this point.).

We recommend that incoming first-year students be limited to one semester's worth (15 hours) of credit toward graduation. Credit is defined as that earned by examination (BE) through AP, SAT, Subject SAT, and IB tests. Hours beyond 15 could be used to fulfill General Education requirements, but no additional hours will be awarded. "Surplus" BE credit might also be applied toward a major with the idea that students could then access additional advanced courses, but such decisions would be left to each unit overseeing the major.

5. Two majors and a minor or two minors and a major. Are three areas of study appropriate?

Yes.

6. Multiple counting. Can one course count for more than two General Education designations (and a major and/or minor course, too)?

There are 2935 courses that fulfill one or two General Education designations. There are 488 three-cherry courses, 59 four-cherry courses, and 2 five-cherry courses.

One five-cherry course, ANTH 453 Field School in South American Archeology, is HS (Historical Analysis), FI (foreign-language intensive), EE (Experiential Education), WB (World Before 1750), BN (Beyond the North Atlantic World). This course only nominally fulfills five designations because the FI designation has not been implemented. The other designations seem reasonable.

The other five-cherry course, AMST 394 The University in American Life: The University of North Carolina, is designated SS, CI, EE, US, and NA. We were unable to obtain a syllabus, which is disquieting for such a “powerful” course, but we were able to find a description online at <http://amerstud.unc.edu/courses/fall2009>. According to the description, EE seems inappropriate because fieldwork is not required of all students. The US Diversity designation requires substantial study of a least two US groups or subcultures, which is not mentioned. The description also does not support the CI designation. Thus, AMST 394 seems to be a two-cherry course (SS, NA).

We recommend that new courses be limited to two designations except in rare circumstances, such as ANTH 453, with the final decision left up to the Administrative Boards. Our recommendation is endorsed by the Curriculum Committee and appears to be the norm after four years of course submission reviews. Because the “Criteria for General Education Requirements” stipulate that most courses fulfilling General Education requirements devote one-half to two-thirds of their content and assignments to a particular approach or topic, two designations seem a reasonable maximum for most courses. In other words, two designations will become the new standard, and cases of approving more than two designations will be exceptional.

We also recommend that the Boards examine the other 59 four-cherry courses. On the other end of the spectrum, given the broad mission of our curriculum and the need to make available sufficient courses to fulfill General Education requirements, all courses numbered below 300 should probably have at least one General Education designation. We recommend that academic departments and curricula be urged to submit such courses with no General Education designations for review if they appear to meet the criteria for an appropriate designation.

7. Majors versus degree programs. Currently, a student CAN major in Physics and minor in Astronomy or major in Spanish and minor in French, but CAN'T major in Spanish and major in French, or major in Interpersonal Communication and major in Speech and Hearing Sciences. Do these rules make sense?

Many of these situations do not make academic sense and arose, for administrative reasons, from combining departments with small numbers of majors. However, to permit, in essence, two majors within the same major would mean allowing students to exceed substantially the limit of 15 courses that they can take in any one discipline. The subcommittee judges that this limit, which was significantly increased when the 2006 Making Connections curriculum was introduced, is beneficial and should remain in effect.

8. Cross-listing Courses. Are the rules appropriate?

Cross listing is out of control. A total of 1458 UNC-CH courses are cross-listed with at least one other course, and there are a total of 650 such groupings. A “course offering” in ConnectCarolina speak comprises a unique subject code and catalog number, so CLAR 110/JWST 110/RELI 110 is one course with three offerings. Cross-listed courses can cause confusion for students enrolling in courses and for home, or sponsoring, departments in keeping track of enrollments. Many courses are cross-listed, not because they are interdisciplinary, but because an interdisciplinary major wants to publicize that those courses from various departments and curricula can count in that major. The Boards should consider the ideas outlined below.

Sever all cross-links. One practical drawback to this idea is that cross-links are sometimes used to control enrollment. For example, cross-listing allows spaces to be reserved so that all BIOL majors can be accommodated in the survey biochemistry class (BIOL 430/CHEM 430). Removing cross-listing might mean that BIOL majors would have difficulty enrolling in the course, because no seats would be reserved for them.

Although ConnectCarolina could create limits for each academic unit’s majors, it would require goodwill on the part of the sponsoring department or curriculum. Severing a cross-link might improve interdepartmental communication because the directors of undergraduate studies would need to cooperate in such matters.

We understand that cross-links can reflect a genuine collaboration between instructors from two different academic units. In this regard, another response is to ask each department or curriculum to defend cross-links in terms of the interdisciplinary character of the cross-listed course.

In general, our subcommittee believes that a broader campus discussion about the advantages, disadvantages, and goals of cross-listing is needed in order to define problems and suggest solutions. We recommend that a special task force be appointed to carry out this task.

9. How and when should the requirements of the General Education curriculum be communicated to students, faculty, and advisors?

Students: One idea is to take an hour or so in a First Year Seminar to go over the Curriculum. Unfortunately, enforcement is impossible, and this task would distract both the instructor and the students from the main pedagogical goals of the first-year seminars.

Faculty: The problem is that the authors of syllabi (i.e., faculty members) often are not very familiar with the requirements of the General Education curriculum. To ensure appropriate departmental or curricular review when new courses are proposed for fulfilling General Education requirements, the faculty member proposing the course should explain how it meets the criteria for a particular General Education designation, and the director of undergraduate studies or an appropriate committee in each department or curriculum should be required to approve the syllabus before it is submitted to the Curriculum Committee for review.

Advisors: There is good news here; this group knows what's going on.

Parents: In essence, they help buy the curriculum for their children. We should help parents appreciate what they are purchasing. Most parents monitor and try to advise their sons and daughters regarding course schedules. Knowing how the curriculum works would increase the effectiveness of their advice.

10. Is the document “Criteria for General Education Requirements” useful?

The document is useful, if it is read. Please see the response to question 9.

Gary Pielak (for the committee)