

REDUCTION IN CREDIT HOURS FOR GRADUATION

Synopsis: Recommendation to reduce the minimum number of credit hours required for graduation from 191 to 181 hours, with no more than 5 credit hours being removed from a college's general education curriculum, is proposed.

WHEREAS in October 2005, the University-wide Committee for the Review of Undergraduate Education recommended a reduction in the minimum number of credit hours required for graduation from 191 to 180 hours, to align the University with many of its peers nationally; and

WHEREAS subsequently, the University community, from the department/school, to college, to institutional levels, has engaged in a detailed discussion of this and related proposals; and

WHEREAS at its meeting on February 28, 2007, the Faculty Senate of the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences, in response to recommendations from its Committee on Curriculum and Instruction, approved a proposal to reduce the minimum number of credit hours for the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science degrees from 191 to 181 hours; and

WHEREAS that change was achieved through a 5-hour reduction in the "breadth" categories (natural sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities) of the general education curriculum, combined with a 5-hour reduction in electives of the major programs; and

WHEREAS the Council on Academic Affairs requested that all other colleges with undergraduate tagged degrees review their curricula and if possible propose a commensurate 10-hour reduction in credit hours to graduate, with no more than 5 hours from the general education curriculum; and

WHEREAS at its meetings, the Council on Academic Affairs reviewed the proposals from the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences and the other colleges with undergraduate tagged degrees; and

WHEREAS the proposal to reduce the minimum number of credit hours required for graduation from 191 to 181 hours, with no more than 5 credit hours being removed from a college's general education curriculum was endorsed by the Faculty Council, the University Senate Steering Committee, the Council on Academic Affairs and the University Senate at its May 10, 2007 meeting;

NOW THEREFORE

BE IT RESOLVED, That the proposal as stated above be approved effective immediately.



Memorandum

To: University Senate

From: Brian L. Winer, Chair
Council on Academic Affairs

Subject: Report on Minimum Credits to Degree and Related General Education Curriculum (GEC) Reform

Date: May 7, 2007

Introduction:

The Council on Academic Affairs (CAA) has concluded its review of the proposed reduction of the minimum number of credit hours for graduation from 191 to 181, and related proposals to change the general education requirements (GEC) for each college that grants undergraduate degrees.

In October 2005, the *University-wide Committee for the Review of Undergraduate Education*, chaired by Professor Brian McHale, recommended a number of reforms to general education requirements and a reduction of the minimum number of credit hours for graduation from 191 to 180. The university community, including individuals, departments, schools, and colleges, were asked to respond to the recommendations. The responses were assembled by the Office of Academic Affairs and distributed to the members of CAA in Spring 2006.

In June 2006, the Arts and Sciences (ASC) Senate voted on a series of resolutions that both embraced some recommendations of the report and rejected others. The ASC Senate also approved a template for general education curriculum (GEC) reform for the untagged Bachelor of Arts degree within the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences. This template included a reduction of the required number of credit hours from 191 to 181. Soon afterward, a committee was established to develop a similar GEC template for the untagged Bachelor of Science degree in the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences. Since the other colleges with undergraduate degree programs contain primarily Bachelor of Science degrees, CAA requested that these colleges wait for the outcome of the ASC BS template and then attempt to align their new templates as closely as possible. The BS template was approved by the ASC Senate on February 28, 2007. A letter from Edward H. Adelson, Associate Executive Dean (attached), further explains the process in the ASC Senate and ASC Committee on Curriculum and Instruction (CCI).

Through the course of this academic year CAA monitored the process in the ASC CCI and Senate. In addition, CAA acted on several important proposals that emerged from the process. First was the establishment of a university-wide advisory committee for the GEC. The second proposal created a pilot program for Freshman Clusters. Both are described in more detail below. On March 7, 2007 CAA initiated its discussion of the final Arts and Sciences' BA and BS templates. Simultaneously, the other colleges were developing GEC templates that aligned with the ASC templates. These templates were submitted to CAA throughout March-April, 2007. CAA met on March 28, April 4, April 18, April 25, and May 2 to complete its deliberations of the proposed changes for all colleges. At its May 2, 2007 meeting CAA passed a series of resolutions that covered concerns that were raised during the discussions. The resolutions are summarized below. Faculty Council also discussed the proposed changes at its March 29, April 5, April 26, and May 3, 2007 meetings. At the May 3 meeting, Faculty Council endorsed sending the proposed changes to the University Senate.

On May 4, 2007, the Council on Academic Affairs unanimously approved the GEC reforms including the reduction of the minimum credit hours to degree to 181, with no more than 5 credit hours being removed from a college's general education curriculum.

Minimum Credit Hours to Degree (181):

The proposed reduction of the minimum credit hours for graduation from 191 to 181 has received widespread support. Several important reasons motivate this reduction. First, there is strong support, both internal and external to the university, that a student should be able to attain a basic degree from the Ohio State University in four years by taking a full load (15 credits/quarter) for three quarters each year. Second, most of our peer institutions attain this goal. Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Penn State, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Arizona, Texas-Austin, UCLA, and Washington all have a minimum of 180 credit hours (adjusted to quarter-hours for schools on semesters) for their basic untagged BA degrees. Indiana University requires the equivalent of 183 hours and Purdue University requires the equivalent of 189 hours.

General Education Curriculum Requirements:

Modification to the GEC requirements took place in several stages. First, the Arts and Sciences Colleges modified the requirements for the untagged Bachelors of Arts degree (see attachments for the BA template and other templates). These modifications considered both the general idea of modifications to GEC requirements and the specific task of reducing the required number of credit hours so that the reduction from 191 to 181 was achievable. In the case of the latter, the overall number of credit hours in the GEC was reduced by 5 hours. This was performed with the understanding that the remaining 5 credit hour reduction would come from elective requirements.

The general modifications to the ASC BA template consisted of the following:

- a) Specification of categories: **"Skills"** (Foreign Language, Writing and Relating Skills, Quantitative and Logical Analysis), **"Breadth"** (Natural Science, Social Science, Arts

& Humanities), “Historical Study”, “Issues of the Contemporary World” and “Diversity”.

- b) Requirements in the “Skills” area were left unchanged.
- c) Requirements in “Historical Study” remained at 10 credit hours. However, there is no longer a requirement that it be a two-course sequence.
- d) The reduction of 5 credit hours comes from the Breadth category. It is accomplished by reducing Natural Science, Social Science, and Arts and Humanities all by 5 credit hours (15 hour total reduction), then requiring the students to select 10 credit hours from any of the three Breadth areas.

The second stage of the process involved a modification to the ASC BS templates. These templates were organized in a similar structure to the ASC BA template with several important differences.

- a) Five ASC BS degrees had the “Drop-A-GEC” option removed, which effectively added 5 credit hours to the GEC requirements for students pursuing those degrees.
- b) Additional flexibility and choice was added to the student-selected courses.

The final stage was the development of the GEC requirements for the other colleges offering tagged undergraduate BS degrees. CAA requested that these colleges develop requirements that (i) aligned as closely as possible with the ASC BS requirements; (ii) reduced the GEC requirements by no more than 5 credit hours; and (iii) made serious attempts to identify an additional 5 credit hour reduction from either major requirements or electives. All these colleges reported back to CAA within a very short timeframe. The following general trends appeared.

- a) All structured their templates so that the categories mirrored the ASC categories.
- b) Most colleges built in flexibility for the student.
- c) All were held by CAA to the requirement that no more than 5 credit hours be reduced in the GEC.
- d) The 5 credit hour reduction occurred in the Breadth areas, most often in the Arts and Humanities and/or the Social Sciences. This is at least in part due to licensure and accreditation issues for many of these majors.

University-Level Advisory Committee on General Education Curriculum:

One of the recommendations in the report of the University-wide committee was the establishment of a committee to review general education on a continuous basis and with broad representation from colleges across campus. This recommendation had broad support from the university community. In January 2007, the Council on Academic Affairs established a *University-Level Advisory Committee on the General Education Curriculum*. The charge for the committee has been included as an attachment in the material forwarded to the Senate. The committee will have eleven voting members consisting of the chair, four arts and sciences faculty, four faculty from colleges outside the arts and sciences, and two student representatives. In addition, one arts and sciences advisor and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs will serve as ex-officio members of

the committee. The first Chair will be Professor Alexis Collier (Department of Psychology), the Chair of the ASC CCI subcommittee on GEC assessment. Her recent contributions to the re-accreditation of the university, specifically in the area of outcomes assessment of student learning and effective teaching, will provide a solid foundation for this new committee. The committee will provide an important forum for the continued discussion and monitoring of general education at the university. The committee is expected to start operating Spring Quarter 2007 and is required to report to CAA at least once a year. The Council on Academic Affairs considers the establishment and success of this committee to be an important cornerstone for the continued dialogue and reform of the GEC.

Freshman Cluster Pilot Program

The University-wide Committee suggested the use of “Freshman Clusters” as a method for delivering General Education in an interdisciplinary fashion. For example, a three-quarter cluster sequence could have a course in the areas of social science, natural science, and arts and humanities. The three courses would have a common thematic focus and the content of the courses would be coordinated by the faculty members teaching the courses. This model has been successfully implemented at other universities. While the University-wide Committee Report recommended an additional 10 credit hour release from writing requirements for students who took the clusters, the Arts and Sciences Senate supported the idea of clusters but only on a credit-by-credit basis. On January 17, 2007, the Council on Academic Affairs reviewed and approved a pilot program for Freshman Clusters from the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences. Cluster proposals for this pilot program are currently being developed. The Council on Academic Affairs believes the establishment of Freshman Clusters represents a technique that can improve the delivery of the general education curriculum at Ohio State and will review the assessments at the end of the pilot program.

Resolutions:

In the course of its deliberations, the Council on Academic Affairs drafted a set of resolutions to highlight a series of important issues. At the May 2, 2007 CAA meeting, the Council voted on each of the resolutions. A copy of the resolutions has been included as an attachment. The core subject of each resolution is the following:

- 1) Resolution #1: CAA has requested the new University-Level Advisory Committee on the GEC to monitor and evaluate the student-selected courses in the Breadth categories; specifically to monitor the breadth of education that students obtain.
- 2) Resolution #2: CAA has requested that the Art and Sciences CCI develop a mechanism for using middle and upper-level courses to fulfill GEC requirements.
- 3) Resolution #3: CAA has requested that the GEC templates for each college be organized in such a fashion that they are as clear as possible and contain all the information necessary for students to navigate through the choices.

- 4) Resolution #4: CAA has suspended the implementation of the new GEC templates for colleges that have not yet completed the investigation of an additional 5 credit hour reduction outside the GEC. The resolution does not **require** this 5 credit hour reduction actually occur, merely that CAA complete the discussion with the college on this issue.

Final Thoughts:

The process of GEC reform has extended over several years. The Council on Academic Affairs expresses its appreciation for the hard work and dedication of all the individuals who have contributed to this endeavor. The discussions about what constitutes a broad liberal arts education have occurred at all levels of the university. The discussions were, at times, contentious, but the core of this discussion focused on what is best for the university's undergraduate students. The fact that the university has engaged in this level of dialogue for the first time in over a decade is extremely positive. We have put in place mechanisms to continue reforming General Education. We have a pilot program that will explore new ways to deliver general education courses. However, these are only first steps. There are still areas where we must continue to improve. The university must adopt a strategy of continuous assessment followed by appropriate reform. The dialogue on general education must continue.