

TO: Council on Academic Affairs

FROM: Subcommittee A (Neeli Bendapudi, Kathy Corl, Larry Baum)

RE: Review of Minors

DATE: May 29, 2009

Working from Dan Mendelsohn's Charge to our subcommittee of February 11, 2009, the subcommittee considered several issues relating to minors. We consulted with the Arts and Sciences Committee on Curriculum and Instruction and with people in two of the colleges to get ideas and information. This memo is to provide our thoughts about the issues we considered.

Uniformity

The Minor Guidelines Comparison Table put together for the Committee highlights some differences among colleges in various characteristics of minors. We should note that the table mixes two types of rules. Some rules are for students in the college listed, regardless of where they take their minors; others are for minors in a college, regardless of who takes the minor. This difference is not made explicit, and it might be that on a few items the information for some colleges relates to the first type of rule and the information for others relates to the second type.

The comparison table highlights some differences among colleges in various characteristics of minors. Overall, the differences are not great, and our feeling is that most of the differences that exist are not very consequential and certainly can be allowed to continue without creating any problems. The differences that might be more consequential are in the minimum course grade, in overlap between the major and minor, and in prerequisites for the minor.

On the minimum course grade, most colleges require that a student in the college receive at least a C- in a course to include it in the minor. Engineering has no minimum grade requirement; the absence of a requirement relates to the overall place of minors in engineering, which we will return to shortly. Leaving engineering aside, the outlier is Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, which allows students to include in the minor courses in which they received a D, so long as the overall grade average in the minor is at least 2.0.

The FAES policy concerns us. At the same time, we recognize that the policy exists for what the College sees as a very good reason. FAES is unique in requiring some students (B.S. students in agriculture) to take a minor. (This is an example of a difference among Colleges that we do not see as undesirable.) Some majors require specific minors. Perhaps half of FAES students take minors outside FAES, and some take minors (general business, life sciences) that have difficult courses in which some

students get D grades. From the perspective of FAES, it is desirable that students get the benefit of those minors, even with a D grade in a course.

We think that the Committee should consider the FAES policy, though we should make it clear that we have not concluded that the policy is undesirable. It would be desirable to talk with representatives of the College to get a full sense of their point of view and then to make a judgment about whether we think it is appropriate to override the FEAS policy.

On overlap between the major and minor, only two colleges allow any overlap: Allied Medical Professions allows a 5-hour overlap, and Engineering allows all courses to overlap with the approval of the department in which a student majors. The 5-hour overlap in AMP is small and not problematic.

The Engineering rule is puzzling, but like the absence of a minimum grade requirement it probably reflects the fact that the major and GEC requirements for Engineering students are sufficiently numerous that there is no room for a minor for those students. The only minors in the College are the recently approved Engineering Sciences and Technological Studies minors, which are designed for non-engineering students. We might seek clarification from Engineering; even though the rule on overlap and the absence of a rule on a minimum grade probably have no practical impact at this time, the College might want to adopt rules that are in line with those of other colleges. The College might also consider a third issue on which it differs from other colleges, its absence of any general limits on the allowance of transfer credits in the minor.

On prerequisites, most colleges list no general requirement for their minors. In contrast, Public Health requires one of two specific courses (or the equivalent) in Statistics for its minor, and the Business requires courses in three areas for its minor. This difference is somewhat misleading, in that Public Health and Business have specific minors for which the prerequisites were listed, while some other colleges have multiple minors, some of which have prerequisites. We will return to that matter after discussing Public Health and Business.

The Public Health requirement is small, and students can meet that requirement with a course that also meets the GEC data analysis requirement.

Business requires courses in college algebra (Math 130 or 148 or equivalent), in microeconomics (Econ 200 or equivalent), and in basic computing (CS&E 100 or higher, or Engineering Graphics 167, or equivalent). This is a substantial set of prerequisites. However, the College perceives the prerequisites as necessary for success in the minor, and students can meet the prerequisites with courses that also meet GEC requirements.

The entry for Arts & Sciences lists no prerequisites for its minors in the comparison table. However, it is common for individual departments in Arts & Sciences to have prerequisites for their minors or for courses that are part of their minors. For

instance, some language departments list five courses as prerequisites for their minors. Thus Business certainly is not an outlier.

This raises the question of whether we should discourage colleges and departments from having substantial sets of prerequisites for minors. We think this judgment should be left up to the colleges and departments. They want students to take their minors, so they have good reason to establish prerequisites only to the extent needed for students to succeed in the minor. We do not want to discourage units from making this judgment.

Structure for Approval of Minors

After CAA approves a minor (that is, a minor offering, not a minor for a specific student) in a college other than Arts & Sciences, CCI then determines whether to accept that minor for Arts & Sciences students. This double approval process, which appears to be unique to Arts & Sciences, slows down the approval of courses for Arts & Sciences students. One specific problem is that departments outside Arts & Sciences are not always aware that separate CCI approval is required.

It may be appropriate that Arts & Sciences determines whether a minor should be allowed for its own students, though this issue merits some consideration; perhaps CAA approval should suffice for Arts & Sciences as it does for other colleges. If the double approval is retained, the process could be less cumbersome. We think that CAA and CCI should consider making their rules for minors uniform, a step that would ease the process of approval for minors outside Arts & Sciences. (We have not examined the rules to determine in what ways they differ.) If the rules *are* made uniform, CCI should then consider whether to treat CAA approval of a minor as sufficient to allow a minor for Arts & Sciences students.

A related issue is the intended audience for minors. Some minors are intended primarily for students in the college offering the minor, while others are intended to have a broader audience. When minors are proposed, the proposing unit could indicate what the intended audience is (to the extent that this is not already done).

Minors for Honors Students

Some departments have minors for honors students for which the requirements differ from their regular minors. However, only Mathematics and Spanish require honors students to take the honors version of the minor. In other departments with honors versions of the minor, an honors student could take either the regular or the honors version.

We do not think there is a problem if some departments require honors students to meet special requirements for a minor and others do not. However, the existence of honors versions of the minor in other departments creates some confusion for students, who may not understand that they are not required to take the Honors version. The

Committee might recommend to these departments that their materials for students make it clear that Honors students can choose between regular and Honors versions of the minor.