

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
The Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

240 SH

March 2, 2023

Attending: Cornelia Lang (chair), Melissa Bates, Jill Beckman, Asha Bhandary, Roxanna Curto, Jennifer Eimers (staff), Alan Huckleberry, Erin Irish, Cinda Coggins Mosher, Jan Wessel, Jenna Yang

Absent: Christine Shea

Guests: Camden Studer and Tejaswini Kannan from Undergraduate Student Government

1. The committee heard a short presentation from two members of Undergraduate Student Government (USG) about the resolution that Undergraduate Student Senate unanimously passed on February 28, 2023. The resolution strongly recommends that all UI colleges include two excused absence Mental Health Days in addition to their current attendance policy. (The CLAS attendance policy can be found [here](#).) Mental Health Days would not allow undergraduate students an unexcused absence from scheduled exams nor an extension of a graded assignment without previous communication and approval from their instructor.

The committee had a fruitful discussion about the causes of poor mental health in the current student population, including balancing work and family responsibilities with academic expectations. They also recommended that the University consider strategies to think about mental health holistically: students experience stress from overwork but also, and perhaps more significantly, from social isolation. Part of the solution to social isolation is for students to build community, and classrooms are a place on campus where community building happens. In this context, it was asked whether absences from class are the best solution; this is a space for students to connect with others in a safe environment.

The committee also discussed ways that faculty can help to reduce anxiety before it gets to the point where a student would need a mental health absence. Reconsidering assessment methods and structuring courses to avoid high stakes assignments are areas faculty have some control. Flexibility on due dates was also suggested. The USG representatives suggested instructors could build days into the semester when the agenda is more relaxed.

The stressful period of midterm exams, particularly for science majors, was also discussed. One suggestion from the committee was for CLAS or the Registrar's Office to coordinate mid-term exams for students who are in large enrollment science courses in a way that avoids big exams in close proximity. Faculty are often not aware of the

specific dates that colleagues in other departments are giving exams, so central coordination would be useful.

The committee asked for clarification on the difference between these mental health days and requesting Student Disability Services accommodations for mental health, which can include attendance accommodations. SDS accommodations require professional documentation, which may not be available to some students for a variety of reasons, and can take weeks to set up.

Though noting that for classes that meet only once a week, allowing two additional absences is a big percentage of the overall class time, the committee was supportive of increasing flexibility and advocating for compassion from instructors. They encouraged continued discussion between faculty and students on this topic.

2. The committee heard a proposal from Daniel Khalastchi, Director of the Magid Center for Writing, to revise the **Certificate in Writing**, which is offered on campus and online. Currently the certificate requires 22-24 hours. The Certificate has seen a downward trend in enrollment at census from 165 in Fall 2019 to 102 in Spring 2023. The steering committee believes the biggest hurdle to enrollment is that this Certificate requires more hours than the average CLAS undergraduate certificate, which is closer to 18. The steering committee would therefore like to reduce the required hours to 19.

The reduction in hours would be achieved by combining the Introductory and Core requirements, reducing those hours from 12 to 9, and by requiring 1 s.h. for the Capstone (rather than 1-3 s.h.).

Current Requirements

Introductory Courses	3 s.h.
Core Courses	9 s.h.
Focused Electives	9 s.h.
Capstone	1-3 s.h.

Proposed Requirements

Core Courses	9 s.h.
Focused Electives	9 s.h.
Capstone	1 s.h.

The committee discussed that focused electives in science writing courses for the Certificate are limited. Students in sciences are interested in writing courses; however, fitting them into their heavy science curriculum is challenging when those courses do not count toward the major. Departments are encouraged to create writing courses and allow them to count for the major and to work with the Writing Certificate coordinator to include those in the Certificate.

After a brief discussion, the committee approved the curriculum changes to this Certificate.

3. Cinda Coggins Mosher, UEPCC liaison to the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC), summarized GECC's discussion regarding a proposal for **POLI:1510 International Politics of Environmental Issues**. GECC recommended that the department's request for **Sustainability** and for **International and Global Issues** GE CLAS Core statuses be approved. After a brief discussion, UEPCC members also approved this course for GE status.
4. Adjournment of meeting

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Irish
Associate Professor, Biology
Secretary, UEPCC