

SENATE COMMITTEE ON CURRICULAR AFFAIRS

Curricular Consultation Suggestions and Guidelines

(Informational)

Introduction

The effective flow of communication between academic units is essential for maintaining a University-wide curriculum that meets the needs of its many stakeholders. The importance of this task is further heightened by Penn State's "one campus, many locations" approach, which results in the geographical (and sometime philosophical) separation of academic stakeholders within a specified disciplinary community. ***The purpose of consultation, therefore, is to ensure that all units affected by a proposed change in curriculum have an opportunity to voice concerns and/or suggest improvements.*** Units affected by curriculum changes are generally those that have a history of offering the course (being changed) or similar courses within the same academic discipline. Units may also be affected by changes/additions in course prerequisite requirements or the addition/deletion of required courses within a changing degree program.

The spirit of consultation must be one of collegiality, whereby the faculty work together to maintain the quality of the curriculum for the institution as a whole. Care should be taken to assure that consultation is broad enough to enable input from all affected units, but not overly broad as to produce a flood of unneeded requests. Such overly broad requests for consultation act to weaken the entire system by producing noise that can drown out instances in which consultation is vital. ***Therefore, a thoughtful, targeted approach to consultation is the best strategy.*** The guidelines below serve to suggest possible avenues for this consultation and are to be included into the University Faculty Senate's Guide to Curricular Procedures.

Suggested Consultation Guidelines

A. *For courses where a change is requested...*

- Consult all campuses/departments where that course has been taught in the last five years. Previous offerings of the course are provided by the CSCS.
- Consult all departments or programs affected by a change of prerequisites in the proposed course. This includes all campuses where the course has also been taught.
- If the change involves altering the course name such that overlap may occur with similarly named courses outside the proposed course's disciplinary community, consult the affected departments or programs. For example, suppose a course is proposed with the word "Engineering" in the title that will be taught by a non-engineering department or program. The College of Engineering should be consulted. This is not to imply that programs have ownership of certain words. Rather, caution should be exercised (and consultation sought) when courses contain words or terms that lie outside the course's home disciplinary community.

- If the course change involves altering the content of the course such that there is risk of significant content duplication with another course, the affected department or program should be consulted.
- Consult any department or program that requires or lists the altered course in their program/degree requirements.
- Campus or subject librarians should be consulted to ensure appropriate resources are available to support teaching and research related to course changes.

B. For new courses (Add)...

- Consult all campuses that have a similar department or program and/or are eligible to teach a certain course. For example, if course XYZ 456 is being proposed, then other campuses that teach 400-level XYZ courses should be consulted.
- For lower-level courses (and specifically general education courses), care should be taken to consult with all of the campuses that have the faculty resources to teach the proposed course. Such courses potentially have a much broader consultation list than specialized, upper-level courses.
- Consult all departments or programs affected by the addition of *NEW* prerequisites. For example if course XYZ 456 requires CHEM 112, then the chemistry department should be consulted. This consultation should include every campus that expresses interest in teaching XYZ 456. This is especially important if a proposed course will significantly increase enrollments of a course listed as a prerequisite.
- For new courses with course titles that may resemble courses outside the proposed course's disciplinary community, consultation should include departments/programs that also use those course titles. For example, suppose a course is proposed with the word "Engineering" in the title that will be taught by a non-engineering department or program. The College of Engineering should be consulted. This is not to imply that programs have ownership of certain words. Rather, caution should be exercised when courses contain words or terms that lie outside the course's home disciplinary community.
- If a new course is proposed such that the content of the course is at risk of significantly duplicating content offered by another course, the affected department or program should be consulted.
- Campus or subject librarians should be consulted to ensure appropriate resources are available to support teaching and research related to new courses.

C. For course drops...

- Consult any campus that has taught this course in the last 5 years.
- Consult any department or program that requires or lists the course in their program requirements.

D. For Degree Program adds and changes...

- For program changes (and particularly adds), Administrative Council on Undergraduate Education (ACUE) consultation alone is not sufficient. Although Associate Deans at various departments and campuses are certainly stakeholders, consultation should be conducted at the unit (program or departmental) level at all affected campuses.
- Consult any campuses that offer the same degree or discipline-similar majors.
- Consult program representatives regarding any additions to *required courses* that lie outside of the department or program. This is especially important for small-enrolling, upper-level classes that may experience a significant change in enrollment due to the course addition on the proposed program.
- Campus or subject librarians should be consulted to ensure appropriate resources are available to support teaching and research related to curriculum additions and changes.

E. For a Program Minor change or add....

- Consult any campuses that offer the same minor.
- Consult program representatives regarding any additions to *required courses* that lie outside of the department or program. This is especially important for small-enrolling, upper-level classes that may experience a significant change in enrollment due to the course addition in the proposed program.
- Consult all departments affected by the addition of *new* prerequisites.
- Consult with departments/campuses which offer majors that commonly populate the minor. For example, the Engineering Leadership Development minor is largely populated by students in engineering majors; all of those engineering majors should be consulted. This is especially important for “specialization” minors rather than minors with broad appeal (e.g., Psychology, Spanish).
- Campus or subject librarians should be consulted to ensure appropriate resources are available to support teaching and research related to program additions and changes.

Evidence of Consultation

Formal consultation should be requested and acknowledged in writing. For courses, this consultation should take place through the CSCS system. For program proposals, an email correspondence is usually sufficient to request, receive, and address any feedback from the consulted parties. Any concerns or suggestions made by the consulted party should be addressed by the proposer. This is not to say that the proposer must acquiesce to concerns or suggestions made by the consulted party. However, in the spirit of collegiality, an effort must be made to address those suggestions and concerns either through improved justification or changes to the proposal. Consultation correspondence (including the request, the reply, and any follow-up communication) should be included with the course proposal.

Conclusions

We have found that cases lacking proper or sufficient consultation arise not from a proposer's reluctance to perform formal consultation, but rather from a lack of knowledge about whom to consult. It is often difficult for proposing faculty members to consider the implications of curricular changes beyond their own department or program. We hope that by providing such guidelines we can assist the formal consultation process. Furthermore, we hope that such guidelines will provide a model of appropriate consultations both within and between disciplinary communities. Such a model of consultation might extend well beyond curriculum matters and encompass a wide range of changes sought by various University stakeholders.

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