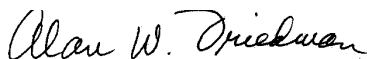


DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE POLICY FOR
ACCEPTING TRANSFER CORE COURSEWORK IN THE *GENERAL INFORMATION CATALOG***

On behalf of the Educational Policy Committee, Seema Agarwala (Committee Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Molecular Biosciences) submitted the following proposal with rationale to change the three-week transfer policy in the *General Information Catalog*. The secretary has classified this as legislation of *general* interest to more than one college or school. It will be considered by the Faculty Council at its meeting on January 23, 2017.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

**EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE POLICY FOR
ACCEPTING TRANSFER CORE COURSEWORK IN THE *GENERAL INFORMATION CATALOG***

Following is proposed language to change the policy for accepting transfer core coursework in the *General Information Catalog*. The policy can be viewed online at <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/admission/undergraduate-admission/#undergraduateapplicantswithcollegecredit>

UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION

...

Undergraduate Applicants with College Credit

...

Awarding college credit.

...

The following policies govern evaluation of credit:
[*Change to second bulleted item only.*]

- **Courses that are not transferable:** Workforce (vocational) courses, developmental and remedial courses, courses with the duration of less than one week per credit hour, and courses classified as below freshman level by the institution at which the student took them are not transferable and will not count toward a degree.

Background

Brent Iverson, Dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies and an administrative adviser on the Educational Policy Committee provided a detailed rationale for the proposed change.

The number of courses, especially core curriculum courses, available to our students from other institutions continues to grow. Unfortunately, these courses represent a wide range of quality and academic rigor. The School of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) is responsible for oversight of the core curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin. It is therefore appropriate for UGS to develop policy governing the transfer of courses originating elsewhere that satisfy the core curriculum requirements of our students.

We are particularly concerned about courses that are offered on-line in such an abbreviated amount of time that in-depth learning is not feasible. It is important that UT Austin has a definite policy covering the transfer of courses taken in very short time periods. The policy should be clear and easy to understand. It is expected that a policy covering the transfer of abbreviated format core courses will stimulate a broader conversation at UT Austin with respect to which courses, whether or not they are in the core curriculum, are appropriate for transfer by degree-seeking UT Austin students. The following proposed policy was discussed at length by the Undergraduate Studies Advisory Committee (UGSAC), who voted unanimously in favor of its adoption.

Proposed Policy Summary

UT Austin will not accept for credit toward core curriculum requirements courses of less than 3 weeks (fewer than 21 days) duration taken at another institution by a degree-seeking student at UT Austin.

Justification

Any course that satisfies a core curriculum requirement must count for at least three credit hours. Therefore, the above policy amounts to preventing the transfer of any core curriculum course that would award more than 1 credit hour per week of work by a student. As such, this proposed policy is consistent with the overall intent as well as detailed guidelines in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rules as described in the Texas Administrative Code:

Title 19, Part I, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, Rule 4.6 (b)

Minimum Length of Courses and Limitation on the Amount of Credit that a Student May Earn in a Given Time Period

(b) Every college course is assumed to involve a significant amount of non-contact hour time for out-of-class student learning and reflection. To ensure the quality of student learning, institutions should not allow students to carry more courses in any term (that is, regular or shortened semester), which would allow them to earn more than one semester credit hour per week over the course of the term.

Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter B, Rule 4.28 (d).

Concurrent Enrollment

1. A student concurrently enrolled at more than one institution of higher education shall follow the core curriculum requirements in effect for the institution at which the student is classified as a degree-seeking student.
2. A student who is concurrently enrolled at more than one institution of higher education may be classified as a degree-seeking student at only one institution.
3. If a student maintains continuous enrollment from a spring semester to the subsequent fall semester at an institution at which the student has declared to be seeking a degree, the student remains a degree-seeking student at that institution regardless of the student's enrollment during the intervening summer session(s) at another institution.

Legal Consultation

We have consulted with Jeff Graves in Patty Ohlendorf's office, and he provided an opinion supporting the position that UT Austin is within legal bounds to create the proposed policy. Per Jeff Graves, "it appears that the university has discretion to accept or reject core curriculum courses taken concurrently while students are enrolled at UT Austin, unlike when a student transfers to UT Austin, in which case there is no discretion and we must accept all core courses completed at the previous institution." Further, the THECB staff have confirmed that the "degree-seeking" status of a student at one institution does not change during periods between regular long semesters, such as during summers or winter breaks, even when the student is not concurrently enrolled at that institution.

Unheeded Past Concerns

The UT Austin community was warned that this policy would be needed as far back as 15 years ago, when on-line courses were referred to as "distance education". I was involved in raising these early concerns. For example, these two quotes come from the year 2000.

"The same criteria and protocols currently used to determine academic transfer credit for courses taught on campuses of other institutions should be used to determine the appropriateness of a DE (distance education) course to satisfy UT Austin course prerequisite or degree requirements. If the scope of this problem mandates, departments and other academic units may wish to set up committees analogous to the course and curriculum committees to evaluate externally produced DE course offerings on a continuing basis." (Recommendation number 24 from the Technology Enhanced Learning Committee (aka "Gilbert Report") March 8, 2000.)

"When should we give transfer credit for distance-education courses offered by other institutions? It is easy to envision a scenario in which even resident students go "shopping" online for their courses from other universities, whether or not similar ones are offered on the UT campus. Each department and degree program will thus need to develop guidelines for evaluating distance-education courses- and for determining exactly how many and which distance-education courses from other universities will be acceptable substitutes for our own. Without such guidelines, academic chaos might result as every student would have a unique course sequence chosen from universities around the world." (Iverson, B., and Trimble, J. "From a Distance," *The Alcalde* Volume 89, No. 1. (September/October 2000), 40-41.)

Student Attitudes – the Focus of Our Concern

Our investigation into courses being transferred by UT Austin students has revealed an unfortunate and widespread student culture of taking courses known to be easy in order to avoid the academic rigor of a course covering similar content that is taught on the UT campus. Too many students believe that core requirements are merely impediments to graduation, to be overcome using a "path of least resistance" while simultaneously hoping to inflate their overall college GPA by seeking easy courses. The following post by a UT Austin student

was discovered during a casual scan of social media on a UT Austin-centered public website devoted to the exchange of ideas and advice called “Reddit”.

“I’ve taken online classes through Midland College. I’d look into getting rid of some of your gen ed requirements done there (history, govt, english, etc). Also, look into transferring your AP scores there if you have any and claiming credit for classes there then transferring them back to UT. This last winter I took the first history online through Midland College and transferred my AP Gov credit there and claimed credit for their GOV 312L equivalent and then transferred both the government and history credits back to UT. /r/UT Austin (Reddit)”

The Midland College course taken in the winter that was referred to in the above post is one of the online courses being targeted by the current proposal. The upcoming version to be offered by Midland College over the winter break would begin on Dec. 14 and finish by Dec. 30, spanning only 16 days total, amounting to 13 business days *including* the Christmas holiday (No, I am not kidding about those dates).

Our Students Need/Deserve Guidance to Help Them Make Appropriate Course Choices.

For reference, based on an analysis of the graduates in May of 2015, undergraduates who started at UT Austin (FTIC) transferred in close to 30% of their core curriculum requirements from other institutions of higher education (Appendix 2). This compares to 25% transferred in because of AP exams taken in high school (That number will increase in the future because of HB 1992). The combination means that the most recent graduating UT Austin students transferred in 55% of their core requirements.

In order to provide a more in-depth analysis of attitudes and educational experiences when our students transfer abbreviated format classes, this past summer we received 335 anonymous completed surveys that were sent to two groups of students. We selected students known to have transferred at least one Midland College course, then as a control group we sent identical surveys to current UGS students. The surveys did not mention any courses or institutions by name, and referred only to transferred courses generally. Students were asked to answer identical questions about transferred courses that they had taken online, face-to-face, or blended (a blended course has both online and face-to-face classroom requirements). The most significant data are summarized in Appendix 1. Although there were seven possible answers to choose from for the first question, the students’ number one answer (37% of respondents) as to why they were taking an online transfer course was that they thought it would be easier than the corresponding UT Austin course. This compares to 30% and 21% for face-to-face and blended courses, respectively. Interestingly, a lack of availability of the corresponding UT course was *not* a reported concern for these students and that is why this possible answer (it was one of the seven choices) does not show up in the survey summary.

The academic experience portion of the survey indicated a significant decrease in the levels of connection to the instructor, other students and campus resources for the online courses compared to the other formats. Substantial research has shown that such connections are critically-linked to academic investment and achievement by students in college level courses. Please keep in mind that the student population surveyed was intentionally heavily weighted in favor of students taking the abbreviated format Midland College online courses, so the results should not necessarily be applied to online courses in general. There is a lot more detail to our findings, but the bottom line is that our student survey has provided *strong* support for the concern that the students taking these abbreviated format classes are primarily motivated by a reputation for low academic rigor, i.e. an easy high grade with minimum effort.

Scope of the Problem

Our non-exhaustive search of abbreviated format core course offerings in Texas have identified the following colleges and their course schedules:

Midland College

Standard fall, spring, summer semesters

Winter term 12/14-12/30 (13 business days including holidays; 16 total days) all winter term courses online

Collin County

https://www.collin.edu/gettingstarted/register/online_registration.html

standard fall/spring/summer semesters
 Maymester 5/16-5/31 (12 business days; 15 total days)
 Wintermester 12/14-1/8 (includes break from 12/22-1/3) so it's (11 business days; 13 total days) offer both in person classes and web based classes

Dallas County Community Colleges
<https://online.dcccd.edu/index.php/calendar>
 have 100% online classes with the following terms
 Standard fall, spring, summer semesters
 Flex term semester classes 11/9-12/17 (5.5 weeks)
 Winter Term 12/18-1/2 (11 business days including holidays; 15 total days)

Alamo Colleges
<http://alamo.edu/nvc/academics/distance-learning/schedules/online-courses/>
 Online courses offered in standard fall/spring/summer semesters
 Flex semesters that are 7 weeks long
 Maymester (5/18-6/4) (14 business days; 17 total days)

Lone Star Community College
<http://www.lonestar.edu/academic-calendar.htm>
 Standard fall, spring, summer semesters
 Wintermester-have both a 3-week version (12/14-1/3) (15 business days including holidays; 21 total days) and a 4 week version (12/14-1/10) (20 business days including holidays; 28 total days)
 May Minimester 5/16-6/5 (15 business days including Memorial Day; 21 total)

Estimated Impact

It is critical that a UT Austin policy gets out in front of this situation before such an intervention becomes significantly disruptive. Student interviews conducted over the past year indicate that Midland College is the major source of abbreviated format courses being transferred by our students. In order to estimate the potential impact of the proposed policy, we determined the total number of Midland College courses of any type that were transferred by undergraduate students who graduated in the Spring of 2015 (Appendix 2). Percentages were calculated from the number of credit hours transferred from Midland College compared to the total number of credit hours transferred in a given core course area. The Midland College transfer percentages measured this way ranged from a high of 24% of the humanities hours transferred, to 9% for visual and performing arts, 9% for government and 6% for history. These student data refer to FTIC UT Austin students only, as those students graduating in the spring of 2015 who started at other colleges or universities are not included. There is at least one caveat to this summary: It is likely that not all of the Midland College courses that were transferred were of the abbreviated online format (we cannot identify the abbreviated format courses at this time, *vide infra*), so we consider the percentages listed above to be worst case scenario estimates of the current problem.

The bottom line is that we believe implementing this new policy is feasible now, but we are worried that a substantial delay could lead to significant disruption if, as we anticipate, the practice of taking these classes grows in popularity among UT Austin students.

Potential Roadblocks to Success

We can think of three potential roadblocks to success of the proposed policy.

- 1) We believe that Midland College is the major source of abbreviated format courses being transferred in by our students. If this is not true and there are other sources of these courses being taken in large numbers by our students, then the proposed policy could be more disruptive than assumed. We believe that although this is formally a possibility, all indications are that Midland College is far and away the predominant source at this time. Unfortunately, because course format is not currently coded when courses are transferred, we cannot verify this using the current registrar's database (Potential Roadblock to Success number 2).
- 2) Abbreviated format courses are not currently designated in any characteristic way when they are transferred in by students. We will need to work with the registrar's office to develop a mechanism to

identify which courses will fall under the new policy. Although I do not underestimate the challenge here, I am not willing to let current technical or administrative concerns override sound academic policy.

- 3) It will be a challenge to communicate the new policy to incoming students so that they do not waste their time and money on courses that will not count. We propose that the policy would not affect current students, but only those that enter UT after it has been adopted, ideally those entering in the fall of 2016.

Appendix 1

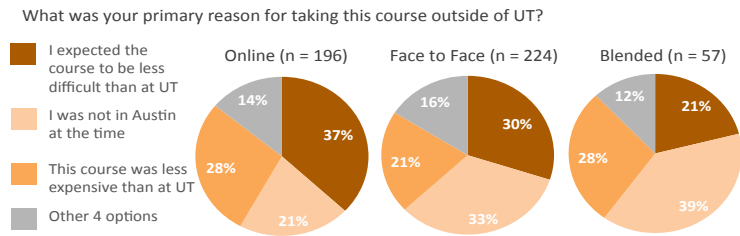


Respondents Surveyed: June 9th to June 23rd, 2015
 Population: 3,092 students enrolled at UT in 20152
 Response Rate: 11% (335 respondents)

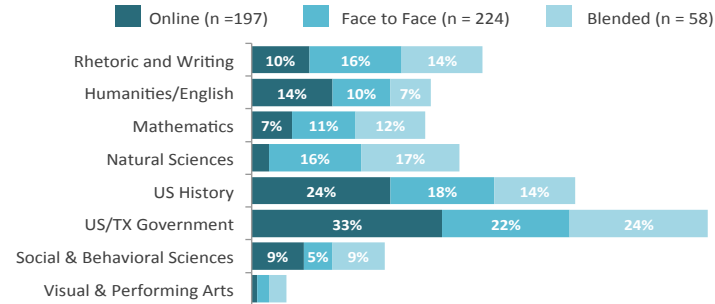
Core Transfer Course Survey Results

Students were asked to respond to questions about one core course of their choice that they took outside of UT within each type of course delivery format (Online, Face to Face, and Blended; if applicable). Graphs show respondent % for each course delivery format.

Course difficulty, location, and cost were top 3 reasons why students took courses outside of UT (out of 7 options)

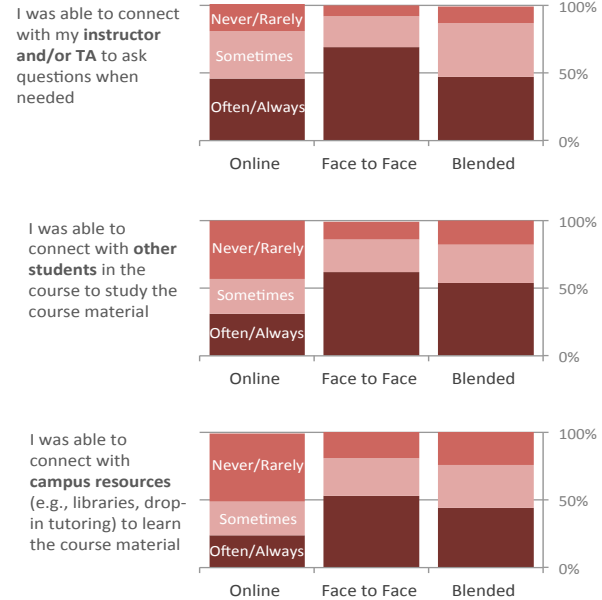


Government, History, and Rhetoric were among top core courses taken outside of UT



Student connections with faculty, students, and campus resources varied across course delivery formats

Online (n = 197), Face to Face (n = 225), Blended (n = 57)



Appendix 2

Aggregated FTIC Graduates of 20152 Core Curriculum Hours

Subject Area	Total Core Hours	Flag Hours	Total in Residence	Total Non-Residence	Non-Residence from Midland	Non-Residence Core Hours by Type					Residence and Non-Residence Core hours
						Credit by Exam	University Extension	University Extension Online	Transfer Credit by Exam	Transfer Course	
Mathematics	39705	10770	23467	16238	78 (.5%)	9475	45	83	101	6422	
Social & Behavioral Sciences	35796	2988	25179	10617	333 (3%)	4893	36	135	27	5401	
Visual and Performing Arts	17448	4735	15593	1855	183 (9%)	580	2	6	6	1835	
Humanities	17239	3411	6180	11059	2700 (24%)	3774	75	165	108	6830	
Rhetoric 306	13602	1500	1500	12102	108 (.9%)	8454	27		66	3513	
Signature Course	13407	5307	13407								
Writing Flags	43377	38515	38515	4862	69 (1%)	1567	6	9	36	3623	
US History	29532	10509	11247	18285	1080 (6%)	7680	12	180	114	10422	
American and Texas Government	27801	1515	12264	15537	1386 (9%)	3561	36	534	33	10895	
Natural Science and Technology	69393	18077	53516	15877	41 (.2%)	7803	54	156	103	7549	

Degrees Awarded: 4511
 Total Course Hours: 673803

13533 = total hours if minimum (3) core hours were completed across 4511 degrees awarded
 27066 = total hours if minimum (6) core hours were completed across 4511 degrees awarded
 40599 = total hours if minimum (9) core hours were completed across 4511 degrees awarded

For questions, please contact:
 Jen Morgan, Program Manager for the Core Curriculum, (512) 471-9809, jenny.morgan@austin.utexas.edu,
 Larry Abraham, UGS Associate Dean, (512) 232-2684, l.abraham@austin.utexas.edu, or
 Laura Costello, UGS Assessment Director, (512) 471-8990, laura.costello@austin.utexas.edu



Notes about FTIC Data in Appendices 2 and 3:

This report provides a snapshot of how the UT Spring 2015 graduating class for this college fulfilled their core curriculum hours. Course data were pulled from the UT Registrar Package of Cognos for all undergraduate degrees issued to First-Time-In-College (FTIC) students in the Spring 2015 graduating class using the 10-12 Undergraduate Catalog. The following information should be taken into account while interpreting the data:

- Only FTIC student data are represented in this report. FTIC = in Texas High School, Out-of-State High School, or Summer Freshman Admission. Transfer student data were not included, which limits the generalizability of these results and may not be entirely representative of the UT student population
- This report did not attempt to make comparisons between or among core courses or colleges. Instead, data were gathered in an attempt to estimate the amount of core curriculum hours fulfilled by FTIC students at UT (in-residence) and outside UT (non-residence) by core subject area for individual colleges and across colleges as a whole
- Total Core Hours = Total core hours passed (excluding F, W, Q)
- Total Course Hours undertaken = Total hours (core and non-core) taken, including degree requirements, electives, and courses with grades that would have to be repeated to count toward a degree (ex. F, W, Q, and CR in residence courses)
- Total Course Hours earned = Total hours (core and non-core) passed (excluding F, W, Q)
- Writing flag hours include core and non-core courses; all students are required to take 3 hours of Writing flags as part of their core curriculum
- Student first semester enrolled varied. For example, some students may have been enrolled before the adoption of the university-wide core curriculum (i.e. Early 2000s, late 1990s), which would put them under an undergraduate catalog that did not require the currently defined core
- Transfer Credit by Exam (TBE) may be represented in Transfer Course (TRN) data since not all institutions distinguish between these on their outgoing transcripts
- Credit-by-Exam (CBE) includes AP credit and credit-by-exam taken through UT's testing center
- Signature courses were excluded from Writing flags
- Signature courses may be duplicated in counts if students took more than one. Students also do not need to take a Signature Course necessarily if they came in core complete or petition to have it substituted for another course
- Some degree plans require certain classes to be taken in residence based on official and/or unofficial (e.g., advisor recommended) policies
- Students may not have started in the college they graduated from
- FTIC aggregated results double counts dual degree holders