

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

Minutes

240 SH

February 1, 2024

Attending: Cornelia Lang (chair), Jill Beckman, Asha Bhandary, Jean-François Charles, Rodica Curtu, Emilie Maurel-Destruel, Anita Jung, Liz Lundberg (staff), Amira Qidwai, Christine Shea, Amy Strathman

Absent: Cinda Coggins Mosher

1. The committee reviewed and approved the minutes from the January 25, 2024 meeting.
2. Next the committee reviewed the proposal recommended by the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC) to grant Sustainability GE status to CHEM:1050 *Chemistry of Our Sustainable World* effective Fall 2024. This course was already in the Natural Sciences without Lab category and has been revised to also meet the Sustainability learning outcomes; the committee supported this proposal.
3. The committee next evaluated the proposal recommended by the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC) to grant World Language and Cultural Exploration GE status to LAS:2700 *Introduction to Latin American Studies* effective Summer 2024. LAS:2700 will be offered asynchronously online this summer, giving students some flexibility and accessibility in meeting the WLCE requirement. It also has room within its design for instructors to bring in their own expertise, making it a course that could be taught by multiple instructors and possibly even advanced graduate students. The committee agreed with GECC that LAS:2700 meets the WLCE outcomes and supported this proposal.
4. Next the committee evaluated the proposal recommended by the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC) to grant World Language and Cultural Exploration GE status to FREN:1500 *Trip to Belgium, France, and Switzerland*. FREN:1500 will explore linguistic and cultural differences across multiple Francophone regions. This course has been proposed before and revised, and UEPCC agree with GECC that the revisions have deepened and strengthened the course. The committee supported this proposal.
5. The committee then welcomed Andrew Forbes, Professor of Biology and Program Director of Environmental Sciences, and Emily Finzel, Associate Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences and Academic Coordinator for the program, to discuss proposed changes to the Environmental Sciences BS. This proposal comes out of a review process that includes an advisory board and student feedback. Broadly, the major currently has four tracks that students choose from (biosciences, hydrosciences, geosciences, and chemical sciences), and each track has its own list of advanced electives. Going forward

the major will have only two tracks, environmental bioscience and environmental geoscience, and they will share the same list of advanced electives. Professors Forbes and Finzel explained that these changes will simplify the major and give students more flexibility and course availability, as well as reducing redundancy/overlap with other science majors and creating more possibility for community among environmental sciences students (because they will potentially be taking more courses together). Additionally, all Environmental Sciences BS students will be required to take GEOG:1070 *Contemporary Environmental Issues* along with ENVS:1085 *Fundamentals of Environmental Science*. This change will ensure that a policy course is included in the curriculum, and it will help guide students to their best-fit major early on (Environmental Sciences for more natural science, Environmental Policy and Planning for more social science, or Sustainability Sciences for a mix of the two).

The committee discussed the importance and popularity of the field and the ways these changes will still accommodate the same student research interests as before. They agreed with the importance of including a policy course early in the curriculum, alongside the science courses. At the same time, Professors Forbes and Finzel emphasized that this major is a science major, and clarified its distinction from Environmental Policy and Planning and Sustainability Science. There was some discussion about the way the structure of the major will allow for more community building among students, and about the possibilities for students to declare combinations of multiple programs of study—for example, a Chemistry major or minor with an Environmental Sciences major or minor—in place of the overlap being built into the one major. The committee supported this proposal.

6. Next the committee welcomed Kung-Sik Chan, Professor, Chair, and DEO, and Nariankadu D. Shyamalkumar, Associate Professor, from the Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, as well as Emma Kirk-Alvarez, Associate Director, CLAS Advising Network, to discuss a proposal to change Actuarial Science admission from selective to direct. Professor Chan explained that Actuarial Science has been selective admission for about 30 years, and the reasons for selective admission have had to do with how challenging the profession and the Society of Actuaries exams are—the admission process has been a way of signaling rigor to students. In practice, there is a low rejection rate, and students can reapply, so it does not function as a hard stop for aspiring actuarial science students. There are downsides to the current structure, however, including the psychological stress and uncertainty students feel before they apply for admission and the lack of belonging they feel before they are admitted to their desired major. It seems likely that these psychological factors contribute to the high number of Actuarial Science Interest students who change their major before they have taken any core courses of the major. Under the new direct admission system, the department plans to enhance student engagement and advising, to monitor student success and participate more actively in students' decisions to stay in the major or change to another field. They also plan to develop first-year seminar courses for students in the major, to give them more information about the major and field, and they hope to hire someone from the profession, like a retired actuary, to teach those courses. Finally, they plan to have a committee monitor the effects of direct admission to ensure continued high standards.

UEPCC discussed several aspects of this change, including the prestige of the program and how to maintain it without selective admission. Professor Chan noted that Iowa's program was considered one of the best even prior to selective admission. Providing resources and support to students will be helpful in ensuring the students who declare this major succeed in it. The committee suggested looking at honors in the major requirements and opportunities and using that program as a way to continue to appeal to and serve high-achieving students. There was some discussion about the signaling that used to happen through the admission process, which implicitly communicated the rigor of the program and students' likelihood of success. That signaling will now happen in richer and more open and frequent ways through academic advising. UEPCC also recommended that the departmental committee monitor any changes in their students' passing rate for Society of Actuaries exams to assess whether the proposed changes are achieving the dual aims of increasing access while maintaining prestige. The committee supported this proposal.

Respectfully submitted,

Emilie Maurel-Destruel
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Secretary, UEPCC