

November 11, 2019

If you remember during the last Senate Meeting on Oct 28, we had some discussion about the Curriculum Committee report, and changes to 3 chemistry courses (Chem 200, Chem 260, and Chem 354) were returned to the curriculum committee for further review and were not approved by the faculty Senate. In the discussion on the senate floor, however, I am concerned that some senators may have come away with some misunderstandings of the process and I think that it is important to make some clarifications.

To remind everyone, Senator Halkin of Biology raised the question about the 3 Chemistry courses because they seemed to be adding several math prerequisites, to include calculus, that she did not recall having ever been discussed amongst the biology department faculty. This is important not only for Biology students, but also for Biomolecular Science Students, because they must take a sequence of up to 4 semesters of chemistry, plus some Bio courses require chemistry prerequisites, and for that reason Bio and BMS students are usually encouraged to complete their chemistry courses earlier in their program. If, however, calculus is being added as a prerequisite, even though calculus is also a required course of the Bio and BMS programs, we need to make sure that the SEQUENCE of all required courses and their prerequisites can reasonably be completed within 8 semesters or else we could end up with hundreds of students having their graduations delayed.

What I want to clarify is that in the discussion on the senate floor at the last meeting, senators were asked to remind their departments that their department curriculum reps, or their alternates, should attend ALL curriculum meetings and the department chairs should be attentive when reviewing the curriculum agendas. I have no doubt that this was intended to be a very GENERAL statement about a long-standing problem in curriculum, and as a former chair of the curriculum committee I was also frustrated by this and I absolutely understand this sentiment. However, I am afraid that, given the context of the discussion, it is reasonable for one to infer that the Bio and BMS reps had not attended any of the curriculum meetings and thus had not done their due diligence in detecting this potential problem before it came to the senate floor for final approval. I want to clarify that this is not the case. Not only did both the Bio and BMS reps attend the sub-committee and full-curriculum meetings, I personally checked the minutes of previous meetings and the BIO and BMS reps have nearly perfect attendance going back for more than a decade. The problem was that these Chem proposals were incorrectly listed on the agenda as a special category of curriculum proposal called a "MINOR" change, which are intended to only be used for changes of course number, course title, or extremely minor edits to the description, but only if there is no possibility of a change in the nature of the course or any impact on any other department. However, adding prerequisites should never be done as a minor change because they have a great potential impact. The result of this incorrect designation of the Chem revisions as "minor" changes is that they were not actually ever discussed in committee, they were only listed on the agenda as "minor" changes. In my investigation, the curriculum reps told me that they had read them on the agenda, and that the prerequisites were shown, but they interpreted the minor change to be simply a clarification of what the current prerequisites are by rearranging them or adding "or's", but they did not think that new prerequisites were being added. Without any other justification or clarification, I can perfectly understand why someone would make this assumption. So, I wanted to take this time to make sure that no one came away from the last senate meeting thinking that the Bio and

BMS department curriculum reps were not doing their job, I think it is perfectly understandable that they missed this.

However, the entire process worked correctly because of the eagle-eyed attention to detail by Senator Halkin. As a former curriculum chair and long-time curriculum committee member myself, I can tell you that curriculum is hard. There are a lot of curriculum meetings and they are long, and there are often lots of drawn out discussions outside of committee meetings. And it's not about turf wars between departments. In this situation Chem, Bio, and BMS are not at odds with each other, they simply need the opportunity to discuss these proposals in detail because the bigger picture is to balance academic rigor without creating unnecessary barriers to timely graduation, all an important part of student success. For this reason, we have to make sure that we get curriculum right, and there is always an advantage to having as many eyes on it as possible. This episode illustrates well the important role of the Faculty Senate as being a final check point in the curriculum process. Please take your time to review the curriculum reports in advance of senate meetings, they are listed on the agenda, and if you see something, by all means say something so that we can discuss it and make sure that it is what we really want to do.

To conclude, I want to thank all of the members of the curriculum committee for doing a really important and really difficult job. I also want to express my thanks to the Curriculum Chair, Beth Merenstein, because I understand how difficult her job is and how well she does it. And I would also like to thank Senator Halkin of Biology for bringing the senate's attention to this potential problem.

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