

## **Report of the Governance Subcommittee of the Provost's Curriculum Oversight Committee: Enhancing Student Learning Across College Boundaries**

**Charge:** The Governance Subcommittee of the Provost's Curriculum Oversight Committee will identify opportunities to enhance synergies (and avoid duplication or antagonism) in curricular areas or disciplines that are shared across colleges and programs and propose a process and structure for creating collaboration and dissemination amongst teaching faculty in these areas.

### **Evaluation of the problem**

- We requested information from deans and department chairs about new courses offered each year from 2011 to 2016. New courses varied from 468 to 777 per year. 20-25% of these courses were introductory (1000, 2000 level) while the remainder were split between upper division undergraduate and graduate level courses. While all colleges and departments generated new courses, over half of the total were from the College of Arts and Sciences, and in particular, humanities departments. Thus, monitoring potential overlap in courses is a big job.
- We requested input from associate deans and department chairs for examples of course overlap. We received 33 responses; although many instances of overlap in course offerings were described, the large majority of these were justified based on pedagogical value (offerings aimed at a specific audience; multiple courses offered for a course which otherwise would have a very large student enrollment; both large lecture-style and small seminar-style presentation of the material). There were very few examples of duplication in course offerings that raised any concern. There was somewhat more concern about overlap at program levels, though this appears to be handled by informal meetings and discussions.
- We asked the colleges to describe their process of looking for course overlap during development of new courses. Most colleges depend on the faculty proposing the course to identify possible courses of overlap; at a higher level, most (but not all) colleges have curriculum committees charged with identifying problems with overlap. With a few exceptions, it is not clear that these committees look outside their college boundaries for instances of course overlap. At a meeting with the Engineering College Curriculum Governing Board, concerns were raised over changes in timing of course offerings and limited space for larger courses and labs. The CCGB also raised concerns about prerequisites for courses designed for multiple college constituencies and whether this could form a barrier to registration from other colleges.
- The general feeling of the subcommittee is that there are few instances of deliberate course duplication or overlap and no instances where this appears to be driven by the new budget model. Where there are problems, they seem to arise from lack of knowledge about course offerings and timing from other programs.
- On the other hand, there appear to be many opportunities for new collaborations and synergies between departments across college boundaries, which could greatly enhance the student learning experience. These opportunities include cross-listing of courses, guest lecturing across courses, addition of courses to satisfy program requirements, and new ways for students to search for innovative courses outside their own departments or colleges.

### **Proposed process to enhance curriculum coordination across colleges**

- We limited our analysis to issues of course coordination at the undergraduate level; graduate level courses are typically fine-tuned to a very specific audience within a department, and courses rarely overlap in content and focus, even if they have the same name and general area of coverage.
- Our analysis suggested that curriculum coordination across college boundaries can be split into two overall levels: at the programmatic level and at the single-course level. We propose separate solutions for these two levels.
  - **At the program level** (departmental majors, undergraduate programs of study, and minor programs), **issues of coordination should be dealt with at the level of the deans and associate deans, under the supervision of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE).** If new programs are being considered, they should be announced as early as possible in the planning process, to allow other programs and faculty members to consider overlap and time coordination in course offerings, or to adjust the curriculum or prerequisites for a course to adapt to a new student constituency. These deliberations should explicitly include discussion of possible overlap with programs in other departments or colleges, including the use of courses already offered elsewhere where possible and desirable. The pathway for approval of new programs, including all required steps of approval, is not well understood by faculty. A clear explanation of the steps should be provided for all interested parties. Final decisions at the university level should be made by the VPUE.
  - **Issues of coordination at the level of individual courses should be discussed twice a year at meetings of the associate deans of all the colleges, supervised by the VPUE.** They will be given a list prepared by their college curriculum committees which indicate courses (new and existing, see below) which show significant overlap with currently existing courses in other departments and colleges. They will examine evidence that there are potential possibilities for synergy (“green-flagged”) or conflict (“red-flagged”), as prepared by the individual college curriculum committees (see below). The VPUE will act as final arbiter to obtain consensus among the associate deans. The concerned associate deans will then work together to encourage new synergies or resolve potential overlap conflicts, interacting with the concerned faculty and curriculum committees of the colleges.
- For this process to work well, the associate deans must get appropriate information on courses that interact across college and department boundaries. This could occur in two steps—at the departmental and college levels.
- At the departmental level, the director of undergraduate studies (DUS, with possible input from the departmental curriculum committee) must approve any new courses before submitting them to the college curriculum committee for approval. The approval form for new courses should include questions about overlap with other courses, both within the college and specifically in other colleges. These questions should seek to identify possible positive synergies between courses as well as problems related to overlapping course content. Examples of such questions could include: “Which students in other colleges

might benefit from this course, and why?” “What is the closest course in this college or another college that could cover this material if yours was not offered?” The DUS should summarize both positive synergies as well as potential problems in their submission to the college curriculum committee.

- At the college level, the associate dean, working with the college curriculum committee, should carefully go over each DUS course submission with regard to positive and negative interactions with courses in other colleges. If there are none, then the course will not be flagged. If there are potential interactions, the course should be flagged with a careful description of the possible benefits or risks of overlap with courses in other colleges. This list of flagged courses will be submitted by the associate deans to the VPUE who will prepare a summary from all colleges for the associate deans meeting described above.
- Cornell now offers over 7000 courses for our students. In theory, it would be optimal to seek new synergies between all existing courses as well as newly offered courses. However, given the size of the problem, we suggest that the formal search for synergies and overlap be initially limited to new courses. Individual faculty are urged to look for courses across campus that offer new opportunities for collaboration with their current courses. We are aware that many courses currently listed in the Courses of Study are not currently offered and will not be offered in the future (due to faculty retirements, etc.); we encourage individual departments to review their course offerings and remove these “phantom courses.”
- Further, since most upper division and graduate courses are specialized for a specific audience within the department, we also suggest that the analysis be initially limited to lower division courses (1000 and 2000 level). Upper division courses will be evaluated as time permits.

The overall goal of this process is to enhance the quality of teaching for our students. By combining interactions between individual faculty, DUS and their departmental curriculum committees, college curriculum committees, and the meetings of the associate deans of all the colleges, working both up and down this administrative chain, this proposal will enhance flexibility to maximize positive interactions between courses across the university.

**Subcommittee members:**

Ronald Harris-Warrick (Chair); Neurobiology and Behavior, CALS

Patricia Ard; Provost’s Office

Kathryn Boor; Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Marin Clarkberg; Institutional Research and Planning

David Delchamps; Electrical and Computer Engineering, ENG

Varun Devatha, Student, Hotel

Michael Fontaine; Classics, CAS

David Pizarro; Psychology, CAS

David Sherwyn; Hospitality Labor, Hotel

John Siliciano; Deputy Provost, Law