

MINUTES

Meeting of the Hunter College Senate

12 May 2004

The 441st meeting of the Hunter College Senate was convened at 4:10 PM in Room W714.

Presiding: Joan Tronto, Chair

Attendance: The elected members of the Senate with the exception of those listed in Appendix I.

Agenda: The agenda was adopted as presented.

Report by the President: There was no report.

Report by the Administrative Committee: The Chair presented the report as follows:

Approved Curriculum Changes

The following curriculum changes as listed in the Report dated 14 April 2004 were approved as per Senate resolution, and were submitted for the Senate's information: Items UR-1407 (Anthropology), UR-1408 (Theatre), US-1374 (Biological Sciences), US-1376 (Anthropology), US-1373 (Economics), US-1382 (School of Nursing), US-1377 (Geography).

Committee Reports: **Special Advisory Committee on the Structure of the School of Arts & Sciences**
Professor Tronto presented the Final Report dated 12 May 2004 as distributed.

The motion on the floor was approval of the following Committee Recommendations:

- a. that this report be adopted by the Senate and be forwarded to the President
- b. that implementation of the plan adopted begin as soon as possible, and
- c. that the search procedure(s) begin in September 2004.

Professor Hausman moved that the motion be amended to read as follows: a. "that this report be adopted by the Senate and be forwarded to the President with the Senate's endorsement of Plan A..."

After discussion the question on the amendment was called and carried. The amendment was approved by hand vote with 37 in favor, 25 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Professor Hausman moved that the motion be further amended by adding the following: "that the Senate form an advisory committee to the President on the implementation of whatever option she chooses."

Professor Sherrill moved that the amendment be amended to read as follows: "that the Senate establish an advisory committee on the implementation of whatever option the President chooses."

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After discussion the question on Professor Sherrill's amendment was called and carried. The amendment was approved by voice vote and became part of the main motion on the floor.

After further discussion the question on the main motion, as amended, was called and carried.

The main motion as amended was approved by voice vote.

It was moved that the Senate thanks the members of the Committee for their service. The motion carried by voice vote.

UARC Re: Course Repeat Rule

Professor Jason Young, Chair of the Committee, presented the report dated 12 May 2004, as distributed.

After discussion the report (see Appendix II) was accepted.

UARC Re: Proposal to Limit Enrollment for Students on Probation

Professor Jason Young, Chair of the Committee, presented the report dated 12 May 2004.

The following resolution was on the floor:

BE IT RESOLVED that any non-SEEK student on probation must limit their course load to 12 credits per semester until he/she is off probation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this proposal will become effective in Fall 2004 for a period of two years, at which time its effectiveness will be assessed by the Senate.

After discussion it was moved that the motion be amended by changing "12 credits" to "13 credits." The amendment was defeated by voice vote.

Professor Sherrill moved that the motion be tabled for one week. The motion carried by voice vote.

UARC Re: Course Withdrawal Policy

Professor Jason Young, Chair of the Committee, presented the report dated 12 May 2004.

There was brief discussion. The report (see Appendix III) was accepted.

It was moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 5:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Picciano,
Secretary

APPENDIX II

UARC Report Re: Course Repeat Rule

The UARC is submitting the following recommendation to the Senate:

The UARC recommends **against** extending the current course repeat rule for F grades to D grades.

Rationale:

The UARC was asked to explore the possibility of modifying the course repeat rule. Currently, following a provision required by the CUNY Central Office, students have the option of retaking a course for which they received an F grade. Once retaken, only a grade of C or better in the repeated course is included in the calculation of the student's GPA, although both grades—the original F and the new grade—are included on the transcript. The UARC was asked to consider extending this privilege to allow students to repeat courses in which they receive a grade of D. It was suggested that students indicated that it was unfair that those receiving an F had an opportunity to improve their GPA (through a course repeat), whereas those receiving a D did not have this option. The logical step, some students and faculty argued, would be for students to petition faculty to give them an F instead of a D so that they have the chance to retake the course for a better grade.

The committee considered this matter at some length. There was unanimous opinion among the committee members that the original course repeat rule imposed upon Hunter is unfortunate for a number of reasons. Most prominently, the GPA is the single most-used index of student academic standing. Providing too many caveats (or, as some feel, **any** caveats) as to what may be excluded from the calculation of the GPA impugns the integrity of this index as a marker of academic standing. In addition, although students are led to believe that a higher GPA following the course repeat is desirable, they may overlook the fact that the F remains on the transcript and is likely to be calculated into students' GPAs by graduate programs and, possibly, employers. While students deserve every opportunity to succeed and improve their record, the course repeat opportunity may provide a specious sense of improvement. It is not that repeating courses is a poor idea, but we feel that leading students to believe that "history is rewritten" on their record is unwise.

We reviewed the grading statistics for the past 5 years and found that, in an average semester, of about 1300-1400 F grades assigned, roughly 20% of these are retaken (about 250-300 per semester). The vast majority of these retaken courses are in Introductory-level courses, with three courses in particular—Anthropology 101, English 120, and Psychology 100—the most common courses to be repeated. Similarly, over the past 5 years, there were 2400-2700 D grades assigned per semester. It is unclear how many students would seek to retake courses if the course repeat option were extended to the D grade, although using 20% as an approximation, then roughly 480-540 students might take advantage of this option each semester.

The committee feels that it would be imprudent to extend a rule like this to D grades. The potential for deception that has already been enacted via the existing course repeat rule for the F grade, imposed on Hunter College by the CUNY Central Administration, should not be extended through an expansion of this rule.

The current policy, pages 48-49 of the Undergraduate Catalog, is listed on the back page.

APPENDIX III
UARC Report Re: Course Withdrawal Policy

The UARC is submitting the following recommendation to the Senate:

At present, the UARC finds no compelling reason to modify the Course Withdrawal policy (see back page), but recommends continued monitoring of the use of this process by students to determine if advising or other mechanisms may work to decrease course withdrawal in the future.

Rationale:

Following the change in the Course Withdrawal form in 1999, the UARC was charged with periodically monitoring the use of this process by students. Course withdrawals are acknowledged to be an unavoidable necessity in emergency and extenuating circumstances facing students. Given the large number of course withdrawals, however—about 2500 per semester—there has been concern that this large number may reflect the fact that some students are withdrawing for reasons other than medical, family, or other health-related emergencies. There is concern that some students withdraw for academic reasons, and that, if the scope and details of such academic withdrawals are better understood, advising may be used to target such situations and reduce or eliminate such withdrawals.

One incentive for the College to reduce course withdrawals is that they reflect lost resources for students—particularly, those students unable to register for needed courses. If the college can provide students with better registration strategies in advance—such as guidance that would lead students to take only those courses that they reasonably feel they can complete—it may free up valuable seats in courses for other students.

The Course Withdrawal Form was modified in 1999 to enable a better understanding of the reasons students withdraw. In particular, to better understand if students' grades in a course influence their decision to withdraw, the withdrawal form asks instructors to indicate if the student is passing or failing the course at the time of requested withdrawal. The committee finds that this grading item is often left either blank, or the "unknown grade status" option is circled. Thus, the committee is unable to determine the extent to which students rely on the W option to avoid getting a poor grade.

In addition, the modified W form also requires students to obtain the signature of the instructor. One goal of this change was to facilitate discussion between the instructor and the student, since it was felt that, by encouraging discussion with the instructor, some students may be dissuaded from withdrawing from the course (e.g., if the instructor is able to provide alternative study strategies, etc.).

Thus far, the committee has reviewed course withdrawal data from two semesters—Fall 2002 and Spring 2003. Among the conclusions obtained from this review are:

- The vast majority of withdrawals are made for "personal" (as opposed to "academic" or "medical") reasons.
- The majority of withdrawals appear to occur not because students are explicitly failing the course at the time of withdrawal (though this is based on incomplete data because of a common lack of reporting on the "grade status" item).
- While the majority of Ws are requested before the 10th week (the official deadline for filing W forms), 26% of Ws are requested during the 10th week, and 15% of Ws are approved after the 10th (deadline) week.

The committee at this point is requesting further data to better understand how the W is used in the following situations:

- 1) by class standing—is the W used more by Freshmen or new transfers than by other students?
- 2) in particular courses—is the W used more in lower-level or introductory vs. upper-level courses?
- 3) by the number of credits initially registered—Are students with greater numbers of credits perhaps "hedging" their bets by over-enrolling and then dropping those course(s) in which they are doing poorly? [This may be one of the areas in which more pro-active advising could help.]
- 4) has the new form affected the use of Ws? The committee would like to compare the number of Ws requested per semester when the old W form was used vs. the new W form. Of particular interest is whether the desired "consultation" with faculty by requiring them to sign the new W form has reduced the number of Ws requested.