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TO: Simon Bott, Chair
Undergraduate Council

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FROM: Richard Scamell
Academic Policies and Procedures Committee

SUBJECT: UC 11281 11S: Proposal to Change the University of Houston Repeat Rule

DATE: March 9, 2011

The Academic Policies and Procedures Committee met on Wednesday, February 9 and again on Wednesday, March 2 to consider a proposal to change the University of Houston repeat rule from the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Participating in one or both of the discussion were committee members Betty Barr, Martha Dunkelberger, Debbie Hermann-Henry, Peter Lam, Willie Munson, Richard Scamell, Larry Williams, and Louis Williams. Jyoti Cameron, Ian Evans, Natalie Merritt Sumrow, and Sara Lee attended one or both of the meetings as guests and offered valuable input.

Background

UC 11281 11S addresses a problem that occurs when a student retakes a course to improve his or her grade (perhaps to improve chances for admission to a graduate program). For example, suppose a student has taken a course in a degree program where a grade of C or above is required for the course to count toward satisfying the degree requirements for that program and earns a grade of C. Subsequently, the student decides to retake the course in an effort to improve his or her mastery of the subject material and/or to improve their cumulative grade point average.

- Under the **current "repeat rule,"** should the student retake the course and earn a grade of C-, the student's initial grade of C in the course would no longer count toward satisfying degree requirements. In an extreme case, this could put a student in a position where he or she could be denied graduation because the initial grade of C cannot be used.
- Under the **proposed "repeat rule"** in UC 11281 11S, the C-, while certainly not improving the student's grade point average, would not jeopardize the course as having fulfilled degree requirements.

The "Repeat Rule" Through the Years

Credit for repeated courses was first addressed by the Undergraduate Council in November 1989 when Shirley Ezell, Associate Vice President for Academic Programs, asked the Council to "clarify the status of course credit when a student repeats a course in which a passing grade was made and earns a lower or failing grade in the second attempt. Does the student lose credit for the course if the second grade is an 'F' or a 'D' in a course in which the department accepts no grade lower than a 'C')?" (UC 3160

89F). The Academic Operations and Standards Committee made the following recommendation in UC 3946 92S).¹

Students do not lose credit for courses they pass and subsequently fail, but cannot satisfy any degree requirements with courses in which the latest grade they earn is below the minimum necessary to meet requirements, unless they receive permission from the dean of the college of their major.

Repeated courses were next brought to the attention of the Undergraduate Council in UC 9184 06F, a proposal from the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences which among other things asked that "the repeat policy be explicitly stated in the catalog and that the policy clarify that when a course is repeated (other than courses listed in the catalog as repeatable), only the course taken later is to be used towards a student's degree."

The Academic Policies and Procedures Committee responded to UC 9184 06F in a report dated April 4, 2007 (UC 9275 07S). This report called for the following language to be added to page 63 of the Undergraduate Catalog. The new language added in UC 9275 07S is indicated in bold.

Cumulative Grade Point Average

The cumulative grade point average is based upon all work taken at the University of Houston, including courses that are repeated, for which grade point values are assigned.

A repeated course, including courses repeated during a summer session, is equivalent to a new course both in the determination of classification and in computing the cumulative grade point average.

Students may not repeat any course more than three times, including W, F, and I grades, without permission from the college of their major. When a course is repeated, only the most recent attempt will count toward satisfying degree requirements. This does not mean that the later course grade replaces earlier grades. All attempts will remain on the student's official transcript. This policy does not apply to courses listed in the catalog as repeatable (e.g. Selected Topics courses).

Please note that the first sentence of the third paragraph in the current *Undergraduate Studies* catalog now begins: "Students may not enroll in any course ..." as opposed to "Students may not repeat any course" When and why this change of wording occurred is not known by the Committee.

¹ The two-and-a-half year difference between the Fall 1989 Semester and the Spring 1992 semester was caused by a delay in the court case initiated by a College of Engineering student whose graduation had been delayed as a result of taking a course a second time and failing it, after having successfully passed it the first time around. It was the situation surrounding this student that precipitated Shirley Ezell's question to the Undergraduate Council.

Discussion

The issue addressed in UC 11281 11S is quite clear: do we want to deny a student graduation when they may have already satisfied a degree requirement by successfully completing a course once but subsequently failed to satisfy the same degree requirement after retaking it a second time? Although it should be noted that the number of cases is small where the current policy impacts a student's graduation, the current policy says that we choose to deny these students graduation until they retake the course and receive a grade in that course that satisfies the degree requirement.

After considerable discussion, the Committee recommends that the following language be added to the General Requirements for a Baccalaureate Degree section of the catalog.

A repeated course, including courses repeated during a summer session, is equivalent to a new course both in the determination of classification and in computing the cumulative grade point average.

Students may not enroll in any course more than three times, including W, F, and I grades, without permission from the college of their major. When a course is repeated, only the best attempt will be considered toward degree requirements. Please note that minimum grades may be required in specific courses in the student's degree plans. All attempts will remain on the student's official transcript and count toward the student's major and minor grade point averages and cumulative grade point average calculations. This policy does not apply to courses listed in the catalog as repeatable (e.g. Selected Topics courses).

Thus the student cited in the example on page 1 who made a grade of C- in a course that he had taken previously and earned a grade of C would still be considered as having fulfilled the degree requirements for the course. It should be noted that the "best attempt" must satisfy the degree requirements for the course. In other words, should a student retake a course and earn a grade of C-, after having received in initial grade of F in the course, the C- "best attempt" grade would not satisfy the student's degree requirements if a grade of C or better is the requirement for the course.

Implementation Recommendations

During its discussions, the Committee and guests jointly discussed and wish to recommend that four steps be taken to implement what has been proposed in UC 11281 11S.

1. The Cumulative Grade Point Average section of the *Undergraduate Studies* catalog currently reads as follows <http://www.uh.edu/academics/catalog/policies/academ-reg/grades/index.php#grades>

The cumulative grade point average is based upon all work taken at the University of Houston, including courses that are repeated, for which grade point values are assigned.

A repeated course, including courses repeated during a summer session, is equivalent to a new course both in the determination of classification and in computing the cumulative grade point average.

Students may not repeat any course more than three times, including W, F, and I grades, without permission from the college of their major. When a course is repeated, only the most recent attempt will count toward satisfying degree requirements. This does not mean that the later course grade replaces earlier grades. All attempts will remain on the student's official transcript. This policy does not apply to courses listed in the catalog as repeatable (e.g. Selected Topics courses).

The Committee recommends deletion of the paragraph 3 from the Cumulative Grade Point Average section.

2. In the *Undergraduate Studies* catalog, the General Requirements for a Baccalaureate Degree appear at http://www.uh.edu/academics/catalog/policies/degree-reqts/index.php#genreq_bacc. The current version of the catalog list eleven minimum requirements for a bachelor's degree. The second requirement reads:

2. A repeated course **cannot** be counted as elective credit toward satisfying the requirement for graduation or counted toward the minimum of 120 hours credit toward graduation, unless the course is identified in the *Undergraduate Studies* catalog as repeatable. Repeatable courses, such as Special Problems or Selected Topics courses, are often designed to be taken more than once for additional credits each time.

The Committee recommends that the following language be added to this section of the catalog as a twelfth requirement and labeled requirement 3.

3. *A repeated course, including courses repeated during a summer session, is equivalent to a new course both in the determination of classification and in computing the cumulative grade point average. Students may not enroll in any course more than three times, including W, F, and I grades, without permission from the college of their major. When a course is repeated, only the best attempt will be considered toward degree requirements. All attempts will remain on the student's official transcript and count toward the student's major and minor grade point averages and cumulative grade point average calculations. Please note that minimum grades may be required in specific courses in the student's degree plans. This policy does not apply to courses referred to as repeatable in Requirement 2 above (e.g. Selected Topics courses).*
3. During its discussion of UC 11281 11S, the Committee learned that the requirement prohibiting students from enrolling in any course more than three times, including W, F and I grades, without permission from the college of their major, though present in

the catalog since 2007, had not been implemented in PeopleSoft. It is the understanding of the Committee that the implementation of this requirement can begin immediately in PeopleSoft 9.0. **We recommend that the Advising Coordinators Team review the processes and impacts of this implementation and work with PeopleSoft developers to implement this as soon as possible.**

4. There are at least two issues accompanying the ability of PeopleSoft 9.0 to block enrollment after three course attempts at the University of Houston. One involves determining who decides if more than three attempts should be allowed. Should this decision be made by the student's major advisor, the department of the course, or perhaps both? For example, suppose a History major who is weak in math needs to enroll in MATH 1310 for a fourth time? Is this decision the responsibility of the Department of History or the Department of Mathematics? **The Committee recommends that this decision continue to rest in the hands of the college of the student's major as stated in the *Undergraduate Studies* catalog.** A second issue that came up was whether the three attempts rule can be applied retroactively. Since the three attempts rule has been in the *Undergraduate Studies* catalog since the approval of UC 9275 07S, **the Committee recommends that it can and should be applied retroactively.** For example, beginning in the Fall 2011 semester, a student who has already attempted a course three times should be blocked from enrolling in that course for a fourth time until permission to do so has been received and the block removed.

Once the Advising Coordinator's Team and PeopleSoft analysts have addressed all implementation concerns, the Committee suggests that the Office of Records and Registration contact all University of Houston students via email and make them aware of the fact that (a) PeopleSoft will now block enrollment after three course attempts at the University of Houston and (b) permission is required from the college of their major² in order for them to be granted an exception allowing them to enroll in the course again. In addition, we recommend that the PeopleSoft implementation of the three course attempts policy include a warning any time a student attempts to enroll in a course that they have previously attempted.

² The Committee assumes that the student will have selected a major by the time an attempt is made to enroll in a course for the fourth time.