

**Report
Of
The Faculty Senate
Of
Northwestern University
On
The Faculty Responses
To The
Recommendations
Of
The Task Force on The Undergraduate Academic Experience**

Ratified by the Faculty Senate

June 8, 2016

Executive Summary

In December 2015, the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience disseminated its Report containing multiple recommendations. At the subsequent meeting of the Faculty Senate, Senate Leadership asked each Senator to poll their respective departments regarding the recommendations of the Task Force and to report the results to the Senate's Educational Affairs Committee (EAC), Prof Michele McDonough, Chair.

The EAC tallied the responses, analyzed them, and made recommendations regarding them to the Senate as a whole at its meeting on June 8.

All of the recommendations of the EAC were ratified by the Senate. The vote to ratify was 35 to 2.

This Report summarizes the responses from the Faculty and the recommendations of the EAC ratified by the Senate.

Responses were received from 33 of the potentially affected departments— a 71.6% response rate. Departments in the Pritzker School of Law and the Feinberg School of Medicine were polled, but Faculty responding from those schools did not offer specific responses.

Within the 33 departmental responses, the response rate to specific Task Force recommendations varied considerably. All 33 respondents addressed the calendar change

issue. Thirteen responded to the ten hours of homework per credit recommendation. The number of responses per recommendation fell off from there. Many recommendations received no responses.

In a few of the instances where there were minimal or no responses to a specific recommendation, the EAC provided their own recommendations. All of these recommendations were ratified.

The Faculty responses were noteworthy in their seriousness, their praise for the hard work of the Task Force members, and their genuine concern for the welfare of undergraduates and the University as a whole. The responses were not motivated by Faculty convenience but rather by a commitment to a higher purpose.

In addition to its specific curricular and institutional recommendations, the Task Force recommended that “a working group of faculty be appointed... to undertake a comprehensive discussion of requirements and... examine... curricular policy across all schools” (p. 26). The Senate ratified that recommendation and a proposal that its Educational Affairs Committee, expanded with additional faculty to increase its breadth across the University, be designated as that working group. A number of the Task Force recommendations and a number of the Senate’s own recommendations were identified as appropriate to be addressed by that working group.

Highlights of the Faculty responses are summarized below:

The Proposed Calendar Change:

33 departments responded to the 10-5-5-10 calendar change recommendation.

23 were opposed (70%); one was in favor; and nine were split.

The Faculty Senate ratified maintaining the current academic calendar.

Other Task Force Recommendations:

- 1) Opposed** (Number of responses in parenthesis): Though the number of departmental responses was low, Faculty sentiment was opposed to: limiting the work load to ten hours per one credit course (n=15); normalization to a 4-year foreign language requirement (n=11); development of a set of standard common experience courses (n=10); the proposed normalization of distribution requirements (n=10);
- 2) Supported:** Normalization of AP Credits accepted across all schools (n=6); decreasing the total required academic work load (n=3); supporting wellness through counseling and expanded psychological services
- 3) No Departmental Responses but Ratified by Senate:** Allow courses to be dropped as needed; facilitate and reward effective teaching in and out of the classroom; refer recommendations regarding: Orientation to, Placement in, and Access to Academics; Assessment; and Classrooms to the Faculty working group for further consideration.

The breakdown of the responses by Department is given below in this Report as well as, for many of the recommendations, a list of “Faculty Concerns” and “Alternative Solutions Expressed.”

The Faculty Senate and its Educational Affairs Committee look forward to continuing to work closely with the Administration and Faculty from across the University to enhance the academic experience of undergraduates as well as all students of the University.

Introduction and Process:

In December 2015, the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience disseminated its Report containing multiple recommendations. At the subsequent meeting of the Faculty Senate, Senate Leadership asked each Senator to poll their respective departments regarding the recommendations of the Task Force and to report the results to the Senate's Educational Affairs Committee (EAC), Prof Michele McDonough, Chair.

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Results:

There are 74 Departments represented in the Senate, excluding Qatar. Twenty-eight of these Departments are in the Feinberg School of Medicine or the Pritzker School of Law. These Departments were polled, but the few Senators responding did not offer any responses to the Report's specific recommendations— possibly due to the fact that each School has its own academic calendar, the proposed calendar change being the most salient issue at the time of the polling.

Of these remaining 46 Departments, 33 responded to the Senate Leadership's request for comment on the Report's recommendations— a response rate of 71.6%*.

All 33 respondents addressed the calendar change issue. Thirteen responded to the ten hours of homework per credit recommendation. The number of responses per recommendation fell off from there. Many recommendations received no responses.

In a number of the instances where there were no responses to a specific recommendation, the EAC proposed to the Senate ratification of the original recommendation of the Task Force. All of these recommendations were ratified.

The specifics of the responses to the Task Force recommendations and the Senate's own recommendations are given below:

*One response was received from the Medill School suggesting it represented the view of three Senators' departments and one response from the Bienen School of Music similarly suggesting the views of two Senators' Departments. Hence, in our results, these two responses are counted as 5 Departments.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation A1: Implement A Modified Quarter System—A “10-5-5-10” Calendar.**

All of the 33 Departments that responded and were potentially affected by the proposed calendar change responded to the calendar change proposal— a response rate of 71.6% of the units regarding the proposed calendar change. 70% of the Departments responding were opposed to the calendar change.

Unit Responses To The Proposed 10-5-5-10 Calendar:

Opposed: 11 WCAS Departments, 5 McCormick Departments, 3 Kellogg Departments, 2 Communication Departments, Bienen School

In favor: 1 WCAS Department

Split: 2 WCAS Departments, 2 Kellogg Departments, 2 Communication Departments, Medill School

Faculty Concerns Expressed With Proposed 10-5-5-10 Calendar:

- The proposed calendar change having negative impact on academics, foreign travel, and study abroad; creating a "competitive disadvantage" in not coinciding with any other schools; and "no real student vacation"
- "Increased stress" due to additional "multiple stops/scheduling"
- Difficult "logistical coordination"
- "Less summer research time"
- "No track record from other schools"

Alternative Solutions Expressed:

- Lengthen the number of minutes in each class (9 weeks with an increase within each class ~10')
- Be flexible with exams
- Eliminate senior week
- Consider experimenting with some 5 week classes in the spring quarter, enabling students to leave early if needed
- Shorten winter and / or spring quarters to 9 weeks (with student course-loads limited to three classes for the shortened quarters)

Action Step: *Based on feedback from the Senators, the Educational Affairs Committee recommended the Senate vote against the 10-5-5-10 calendar. The Senate so voted. The current calendar is considered preferable to making the proposed changes.*

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B1. Develop A Set Of “Common Experience” Courses That Would Bring Together Students From Multiple Schools In One Classroom.**

The Senators responded to this broad topic in regard specifically to distribution requirements and diversity/inclusion classes.

Unit Responses To The Proposed Standardization Of Distribution Requirements And Diversity Classes:

10 responses: 8 oppose and 2 not opposed

Oppose: 3 WCAS Departments, 2 McCormick Departments, Medill School

In favor: 1 WCAS Department, 1 McCormick Department

Faculty Concerns Expressed Regarding The Proposed Standardization Of Distribution Requirements And Diversity Classes:

- Most thought decisions belonged within School’s purview
- Some sentiment that some students chose Northwestern because it did not have a common core requirement
- Some concern that adding additional requirements would add stress and increase the number of credits required for students to graduate

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B2a. The Proposed Normalization OF AP Credits Accepted In All Schools.**

Unit Responses To The Proposed Normalization OF AP Credits Accepted In All Schools.

6 responses: 0 oppose and 6 not opposed

Oppose: none

Not Opposed: 2 McCormick Departments, 1 WCAS Department, Medill School

Faculty Concerns Expressed Regarding Normalizing AP Credits:

- Most thought decision of whether AP credits would count toward major belonged within School/Department’s purview
- Recommend enforcing residency requirement to ensure students still getting NU education (prevent early graduation) versus allowing students to graduate with lower financial burden

Alternative Solutions Expressed:

- Use for placement or allowing to take other “electives”

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B2b. Normalize Foreign Language Requirements**

There was an inquiry from the Senate as to whether four years of language should be required. While this was not proposed in the Task Force Recommendation, many responses specifically addressed to this four-year question.

Unit Responses To The Proposed Normalization To A4 Year Foreign Language Requirement:

12 responses: 7 oppose, 2 in favor, 2 favor proficiency

Oppose: 3 McCormick Departments, 1 WCAS Department, Medill School

In favor: 1 WCAS Department, 1 McCormick Department, 1 WCAS Department

Proficiency: 2 WCAS Departments

Faculty Concerns Expressed Regarding The Proposed Normalization To A 4 Year Foreign Language Requirement:

- School specific requirements preferred
- Too many other obligations for majors to add this
- Relevance to field varies
- Proficiency preferred over number of courses

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B2c. Update And Normalize Distribution Requirements Across Schools (Range 10 - 12)**

Unit Responses To The Proposed Normalization Of Distribution Requirements:

10 Responses: 8 oppose and 2 not opposed

Oppose: 3 WCAS Departments, 2 McCormick Departments, Medill School

In favor: 1 WCAS Department, 1 McCormick Department

Faculty Concerns Expressed Regarding The Proposed Normalization Of Distribution Requirements:

- Most thought decision belonged within School's purview
- Some sentiment that some students chose Northwestern because it did not have a common core requirement
- Some concern that adding additional requirements would add stress and increase # of credits to graduate

Action Step: The EAC felt that the ideas outlined in Recommendations B1 and the three parts of B2 were complicated and should be further assessed. As previously stated, the Task Force had recommended the creation of a working group to undertake a comprehensive discussion of curricular policy across all Schools. The EAC recommended that the Senate vote in favor of the creation of such a working group of faculty. The Senate ratified the creation of such a working group and recommended that the Senate's Educational Affairs Committee, expanded by adding non-Senate faculty from across the University constitute that working group.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B3a: Limiting Each One Credit Course To An Average Of Up To 10 Hours/Week**

Unit Responses To The Proposed 10 Hour/Credit Limit:

15 responses: 14 oppose and 1 in favor

Oppose: 5 McCormick Departments, 4 WCAS Departments, 1 FSM Department, 1 Communication Department, Medill School

In favor: 1 WCAS Department

Faculty Concerns Expressed Regarding The Proposed 10 Hour/Credit Limit:

- Too hard to enforce
- Students work at different rates
- Some classes require more time

Alternative Solutions Expressed:

- Classes requiring more than 10 hours/week should be given a gradation # of credits based on the number of hours anticipated
- This could be a guideline perhaps but not a requirement

Action Step: Based on the above feedback from the Senators, the Educational Affairs Committee recommended that the Senate vote against limiting each one-credit course to an average of up to 10 hours/week. Such traits may be recommended as guidelines but current department-focused policies are preferable to making the proposed changes. The Senate so voted.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B3b. Decrease The Total Required Academic Workload Through School Specific Reductions Of Required Credits (Where Possible) Or Committed Hours (Elsewhere).**

Central Administration approved this Task Force recommendation to reduce the graduation requirement for credits from 45 to 42. Senator feedback indicated that as long as this was a lower level and not a cap, this proposal was acceptable.

Unit Responses To Task Force Proposal To Reduce Graduation Requirements By Three Credits From 45 To 42 Credits:

3 responses: 0 oppose and 3 in favor

Oppose: 0

In favor: 2 WCAS Departments, 1 McCormick Department

Action Step: The Educational Affairs Committee recommended the Senate affirm its support for the decision to move forward with changing the university wide policy from 45 to 42 credits required for graduation. This policy will still allow for flexibility for units that require more credits. The Senate so voted.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation B3c: Make The Workload More Flexible By Allowing Courses To Be Dropped As Needed, Without Unrelated Long-Term Negative Consequences Related To Financial Aid.**

This recommendation was not specifically addressed in Senate responses. The Educational Affairs Committee recommended, however, that this task force proposal be delegated to the Faculty working group for further consideration. The Senate ratified the EAC's recommendation.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation D: Supporting Wellness Through Counseling And Psychological Services And Advising**

D1: Provide additional resources to increase the availability of counseling and psychological services, in terms of both number of providers and session numbers.

D2a: Provide resources to decrease the number of students seen by a single academic adviser.

D2b: Coordinate interactions among advisers, possibly through a personalized advising site for each student.

The University has already initiated steps to increase the number of providers available and increase the number of CAPS sessions allowed. Information has also been distributed that the University is working to create a system to allow advising to be tracked across schools. Senate feedback that was received on these items was in favor of these measures.

The Educational Affairs Committee recommends the Senate voted to affirm its support for the decision to move forward with this Task Force recommendation to enhance the counseling and advising services provided. The Senate so voted.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendation E: Facilitating, Supporting, And Rewarding Effective Teaching In And Out Of The Classroom**

The recommendation was not specifically addressed in most Senate responses and the Reports' recommendation did not provide a lot of the details about how merit would be determined and what types of rewards would be provided. The Educational Affairs Committee recommended, however, that the Senate affirmed the need to facilitate, support, and reward effective teaching and this Task Force proposal be delegated to the Faculty working group for further consideration. In particular, the types of credits and valuation methods should be addressed. The Senate voted to ratify the EAC's recommendation.

◇ **Feedback In Response To Task Force Recommendations G (Orientation to, Placement in, and Access to Academics), H (Assessment) and I (Classrooms):**

These recommendations were not specifically addressed in most Senate responses. The EAC recommended, however, that these Task Force recommendations be referred to the Faculty working group for further consideration in the fall. The Senate voted to ratify the EAC recommendation.

Concluding Comment:

The Faculty Senate and its Educational Affairs Committee look forward to continuing to work closely with the Administration and Faculty from across the University to enhance the academic experience of undergraduates as well as all students of the University.