

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMITTEE
FOR INFORMATION ONLY

PRESENTED BY: Roy Dobson, Chair, Academic Programs Committee of Council

DATE OF MEETING: October 24, 2013

SUBJECT: Item for Information: Resolution of Challenge

COUNCIL ACTION: For information only

BACKGROUND:

The University of Saskatchewan is one of the few universities in North America which approves most curricular changes through the University Course Challenge procedure. This procedure combines collegiality and autonomy in making decisions about curricular changes. Since 1998, when the Procedure was implemented, the University of Saskatchewan has approved hundreds of curricular initiatives and changes with fewer than 15 Challenges being made. These challenges have been based on substantive issues relating to academic rationale, program direction, interdisciplinarity, and use of resources. Of those, only six Challenges could not be resolved informally and had to be referred to the Academic Programs Committee for resolution.

SUMMARY:

In the April, 2013 University Course Challenge, the College of Arts and Science submitted for approval a curricular change to allow students in Bachelor of Arts programs in Humanities and Fine Arts to use PHIL 140 Critical Thinking and PHIL 241 Symbolic Logic toward their Science Requirement. This curricular change was challenged by the Division of Science.

RESOLUTION:

Following discussions over several meetings, the Academic Programs Committee approved the following motions:

That PHIL 140 and 241 be listed as meeting the distribution requirement in BA programs in the Humanities (Type A) and Fine Arts (Type D), provided that the label of the requirement is changed to reflect the nature of the range of classes available to students in this category, such as “Science, Mathematics or Logic”.

In view of the difficulty APC experienced in adjudicating this issue due to lack of discussion at the college level about the academic and jurisdictional issues raised, the committee also approved the following motion

That the Committee strongly recommend the College of Arts and Science revisit its bylaws regarding requirements for inter-divisional consultation on curriculum matters.

The Committee also agreed to encourage the divisions in Arts & Science to undertake a review of distribution requirements.

The rationale for these motions follows:

1. Discussions about the academic rationale of college distribution requirements, the label of these requirements, and the list of courses to meet the requirements should more appropriately have been held within the College of Arts and Science, before this curricular change was approved. However, it appeared that the college bylaws or procedures did not allow such discussion to occur. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the college review its bylaws so that these discussions can be held within the college in the future.
2. Despite the jurisdictional and administrative issues identified, the Committee agreed that its resolution of this Challenge should be based on the academic issue of whether logic courses could meet a "science" requirement. The Committee had a number of questions about other courses already permitted in this requirement, such as mathematics, statistics and computer applications. The courses listed for the requirement already seemed to be broader than "science" as described by the Division of Science, which defined science courses as those which teach "the scientific approach to solving problems." Therefore, the Committee agreed that it would be a misnomer to continue to label the requirement as a "science" requirement when it includes courses outside this definition. The Committee agreed that the label of this requirement should be changed.
3. The Committee agreed that it was the prerogative of the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts to define its own degree requirements for Type A and Type D programs. Whether these requirements should include any science courses at all, and what kind of courses should be listed in these programs, is up to the division itself, based on its understanding of Canadian and international norms for Bachelor of Arts degrees. Therefore, the Committee also encouraged the division of Humanities and Fine Arts to continuously monitor its degree requirements to ensure they are in line with national and international standards.