

MEMORANDUM TO THE SENATE GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC COUNCILS ON THE NUMBER OF SHARED RESOURCES COURSES

Background and Summary

The current university policy specified in the Graduate Bulletin limits the number of Shared-Resources Courses (SRC) to five offerings per semester for every department. However, in the last few years this cap has not been enforced, so the limit has been exceeded on several occasions. The Graduate and Undergraduate Academic Councils have charged a **joined** committee with evaluating the current policy and with making recommendations for either enforcing the existing cap or making modifications.

The committee consisting of 13 members has evaluated the arguments for and against the existing cap, and it has made two sets of recommendations. First, the committee recommends **removing the cap at the university level and leaving the decisions on SRC offerings to individual departments.** Second, the committee identifies the set of **best practices to guide the departmental decisions.** Combination of these two recommendations ensures maximization of the benefits provided by SRCs without compromising the quality of graduate education.

The remaining part of this document consists of four parts:

- The arguments for keeping the existing five-course cap;
- The arguments for removing the cap;
- The recommendation for changes in the Graduate Bulletin;
- The list of best practices to be shared with academic programs.

Arguments for restricting the number of Shared-Resources Courses:

- Mixed graduate-undergraduate audiences may compromise the level of coverage expected in graduate courses.
- The SRCs should have different evaluation schemes for graduate and undergraduate students, but this requirement is not enforceable at the university level once a course is approved.
- Large number of SRCs may compromise certification of graduate programs.

Arguments for relaxing the existing policy:

- Highly-specialized courses target only small groups of students, and **often such classes would not meet enrollment thresholds without undergraduates.** Severity of this problem varies by program, so the universal 5-course limit is not ideal.
- Most SRCs cover special topics, which are not parts of the core curriculum. **Advanced undergraduates are as prepared for such classes as graduate students,** and they make positive contributions to the intellectual atmosphere of the courses.
- SRCs challenge advanced undergraduates, and they can be used as recruitment tools for undergraduate and BS/MS programs.
- Any cap that varies by program (e.g., a cap on a fraction of SRCs among graduate offerings per semester) may lead to objections, and **it would be hard to enforce.**

After extensive discussions of these general issues and specific examples of problems caused by them, the committee felt that individual departments are in the best positions to determine the number of SRCs offered by their graduate programs. However, while making the decisions, the departments should keep in mind potential negative effects of SRCs and establish practices to avoid such effects. Therefore, the committee arrived at two sets of recommendations.

Recommendation to the Graduate Academic Council:

The committee recommends two modifications of the "**Shared-Resources Courses and Registration**" section of the Graduate Bulletin:

1. Addition of the statement

Offerings of shared-resources courses that are not 400/500-levels (e.g., 400/600) must be approved by the Graduate School and the Office of Undergraduate Education.
at the end of the first paragraph.

2. Removal of the last paragraph:

Any department that proposes "shared-resources courses" in excess of five (5) must submit such excess courses to the Graduate Academic Council for review and approval.

The remaining language in the "**Shared-Resources Courses and Registration**" section of the Bulletin should remain the same.

Additionally, the committee recommends calling attention to Shared Resources Courses in the schedule of classes to inform students whether a specific class is an SRC. Academic departments are responsible for reviewing this information for accuracy every semester when a SRC is offered.

Recommendation to individual graduate programs:

To avoid the negative effects of SRCs on the quality of graduate education, the committee recommends all departments **to** establish clear procedures for dealing with such courses. In particular, the committee recommends including the following practices in the decision making process:

- The SRC offerings for every semester should be reviewed by the undergraduate and graduate directors to ensure the balance appropriate for specific programs.
- The undergraduate and graduate directors should also review the syllabi to ensure that every iteration of a SRC clearly specifies the difference in the grading schemes for the graduate and undergraduate students.
- The instructors are strongly discouraged from comparing graduate and undergraduate students taking a class. For example, if a curve is used to calculate grades, two groups of students should be evaluated separately.
- To ensure the high standards of graduate education, the instructors should teach SRCs at the level appropriate for graduate students. The only difference between graduate and undergraduate options should be in assignments and grading schemes.
- To maintain the quality of graduate programs, the departments are encouraged to be careful with offering core graduate courses as SRCs.
- While the number of SRC **offering** per semester does not affect certification of the

university-wide graduate program, individual departments are encouraged to review the rules in their own fields to avoid potential problems with certification/accreditation.

- To develop additional practices for SRCs, the departments are encouraged to work with ITLAL.

These recommendations are adopted by a committee vote 13-0-0.