

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council

Date: April 12, 2010

REVISIONS TO UNIVERSITY POLICIES ON THE REQUIREMENT OF MINORS FOR DEGREE COMPLETION

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

- 1) That the following revisions to the University's policies on the requirement of minors for degree completion be adopted for inclusion in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* beginning with the 2010-2011 edition.
- 2) That this policy take effect for the Fall 2010 semester.
- 3) That this proposal be forwarded to President George M. Philip for approval.

Bachelor of Arts Requirements

- 1) A minimum of 120 credits.
- 2) At least 90 credits in the liberal arts and sciences.
- 3) The completion of the general education requirements. [The specific general education requirements are determined by the student's matriculation date and basis of admission to the University—see the General Education section of this bulletin.]
- 4) The completion of a writing requirement whereby students must satisfactorily complete with grades of C or higher [for students matriculating Fall 1997 or thereafter; otherwise C- or higher], or S, two writing intensive courses, including one at the lower level and one at the upper (courses meeting this requirement as identified in the course description).
- 5) 30–36 credits in a major that has been registered with the education department of the state of New York.
- 6) Completion of a minor or completion of additional upper division coursework. The completion of a minor consisting of 18–24 graduation credits which must include a minimum of 9 graduation credits in course work requiring one or more prerequisite courses or courses at or above the 300 level. The minor requirements may be combined with the major requirements but the total may not exceed 60 graduation credits. Alternatively, the completion of a minimum of 24 graduation credits in course work at or above the 300 level may be used in place of the minor requirement. (Credits associated with a 300-level GINS course number are not automatically included; transfer credits and credits earned on a SUNY study abroad program that are evaluated and assigned an equivalent at this level will be included)

Bachelor of Science Requirements

- 1) A minimum of 120 credits.
- 2) At least 60 credits in the liberal arts and sciences.
- 3) The completion of the general education requirements. [The specific general education requirements are determined by the student's curriculum date and basis of admission to the University—see the General Education section of this bulletin.]
- 4) The completion of a writing requirement whereby students must satisfactorily complete with grades of C or higher [for students matriculating Fall 1997 or thereafter; otherwise C- or higher], or S, two writing intensive courses, including one at the lower level and one at the upper (courses meeting this requirement as identified in the course description).
- 5) 30–42 credits in a major that has been registered with the education department of the state of New York.
- 6) Completion of a minor or completion of additional upper division coursework. The completion of a minor consisting of 18–24 graduation credits which must include a minimum of 9 graduation credits in course work requiring one or more prerequisite courses or courses at or above the 300 level. The minor requirements may be combined with the major requirements but the total may not exceed 60 graduation credits. Alternatively, the completion of a minimum of 24 graduation credits in course work at or above the 300 level may be used in place of the minor requirement. (Credits associated with a 300-level GINS course number are not automatically included; transfer credits and credits earned on a SUNY study abroad program that are evaluated and assigned an equivalent at this level will be included)

The current *Undergraduate Bulletin* states “A student with two or more majors or a major that is either an approved “combined major and minor” or an approved “departmental major” is not required to have a discrete minor, but the student may elect to have one or more minors listed on the academic record.”(p.39)

The current proposal would amend the minor regulations to add the following option in addition to those listed above: “Students who complete a minimum of 24 graduation credits in coursework at or above the 300 level are not required to complete a minor.”

Rationale

The University at Albany is dedicated to providing the highest quality education possible to our undergraduates and to maintaining high academic standards. At the same time, it is important that we deliver that education in a manner that is responsive to the needs of a diverse student population.

In keeping with the concern that we deliver that highest quality education, it should be noted that the current proposal is not a proposal to eliminate minors at UAlbany. The current proposal is designed to offer students more breadth and depth in a wider set of fields than a single minor would permit by allowing alternative options for students who do not seek or wish to have a secondary area of study as well as potentially make courses and resources more accessible to those students who do have a specific focused interest. The UAC firmly believes that the minors on this campus are valuable and important for students who are committed to exploring an advanced course of study in any particular discipline. The current proposal is designed to provide the opportunity for students who may not be inclined to pursue a secondary course of study (in the form of a minor) to explore additional areas of study at an advanced level.

The UAC believes that an option to select from a wider set of courses at or above the 300 level would help to ensure that students can shape (to the extent possible) individual goals and educational aspirations without being bound to a particular area of study (via a minor). Thus, this proposal provides the opportunity for students to take additional upper-level coursework in any area of study (including the major) to best suit their educational needs.

The Undergraduate Academic Council has dedicated a significant amount of time to reviewing the requirements for the undergraduate degree and has focused much attention on the *requirement* that students complete a minor. To have an informed discussion about this issue, the UAC formed a small subcommittee to collect data about current campus policy and practice in relation to minors. Attached to this report are the various findings of that committee. The data are by no means exhaustive, but the UAC believes it to be relevant to the discussion at hand. Utilizing these data, the UAC conducted an in-depth evaluation of the minor requirement, exploring the impact of this requirement for students, faculty, staff, and the quality of the undergraduate education. The results of these discussions led the UAC to propose this alternative pathway for the baccalaureate degree.

STRENGTHENING THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

Flexibility in Undergraduate Programs

- The current proposal would provide greater flexibility for students to become more active participants in their educational choices and development. In allowing students additional options to meet degree requirements, they become more empowered to examine and explore what is most important for their own educational goals and subsequently make important decisions based on that reflection.
- The current proposal provides students with the opportunity to take a greater breadth of coursework. This proposal would provide the flexibility for students to build on the foundations obtained in general education courses and introductory courses without forcing them to complete a minimum of 18 credits in that area of study. Thus, they may expand their coursework to include upper division coursework in two or three different disciplines that they choose as relevant to their course of study and future goals.
- Alternatively, for some students, this option will provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the major and explore more fully all that their major discipline offers. This is particularly relevant to our transfer students (discussed in greater detail below) who are often limited in their choices of coursework due to the high number of requirements most are faced with completing upon transfer to UAlbany.

Peer Institutions

- As with many explorations of university policy and decision making, we looked to peer institutions to understand how similarly situated universities responded to the issue at hand. It is striking to note that we are an outlier in **requiring** a minor – none of our peers or aspirational peers **require** completion of a minor for degree completion.
- While most of these institutions have minors available, they instead offer their students the option of completing a minor or fulfilling the requirements for a BA degree with upper division coursework that can span broadly across the curricula.
- The incongruence with our peer institutions and our inflexibility in this area may be impacting our ability to compete for the best and brightest students. While we are able to offer some selection in requirements for degree completion (choices of major/minor, combined programs and departmental programs) within our current framework, we simply cannot offer the next level of flexibility that our peers and aspirational peers have already adopted.

MAINTAINING RIGOR IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Current UAlbany Requirements for Completion of Upper Level Coursework

- A minor consists of 18—24 graduation credits which must include a minimum of 9 graduation credits of “advanced coursework” (defined as coursework requiring at least one prerequisite course and/or courses at or above the 300 level) of which 6 must be earned in residence. Following current requirements for minors, a student can complete a minor in certain fields with zero credits at the 300 level or above provided they complete appropriate credits in lower level courses which require prerequisites.
- For the B.A. and B.S. degrees, a minimum of 18 graduation credits, including 12 credits at or above the 300 level, must be completed in the major on the Albany campus. Majors are free to regulate for themselves the number of upper division courses required (if any) above the 12 credit residency requirement.
- Currently a student completing a 36 credit major and 18 credit minor *could* graduate with a minimum of 12 credits of coursework at the 300 level or above (12 in the major and 0 in the minor).

Current Proposal Requirements for Completion of Upper Level Coursework

- The current proposal would require students who choose not to complete a minor to complete a MINIMUM of 24 credits of coursework at the 300 level (or above). This requirement is comparable to, and in some cases greater than, the total number required in the options currently available to students, including students who complete a Major and Minor, Combined Majors, or Departmental Majors.
- This increased threshold is designed to ensure that students who choose this option are participating in courses that have advanced learning objectives that provide for a deeper understanding of various disciplines and topical areas.

Data Reflecting Current Student Involvement Greater than the Minimum

- A number of students actively choose to double major, double major with a minor or double minor (Table #3). These data suggest that a significant number of UAlbany students are motivated and interested in seeking knowledge beyond the minimum requirements and there is every indication that these students would continue to incorporate these experiences into their degree regardless of any university mandate.
- There was some concern that students would focus on lower-level electives. However, the data clearly suggest that is not the case (Table #6). In fact, the lower-level courses that most juniors and seniors enroll in are directly related to major and minor interests (Table #7).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

- At this time, more than 40% of our graduating students come to UAlbany as transfers. These students represent a unique population with unique obstacles to fulfilling the degree requirements.
- **Requiring** a minor can become a significant obstacle for transfer students as they have limited time to complete the requirements. Providing alternatives to the requirement of a minor would afford transfer students greater opportunity to explore various disciplines. Alternatively, students could opt to take additional coursework in their major discipline at UAlbany and still graduate in a timely manner.
- Additionally, many transfer students do not become aware of the minor requirement and its component of credits which must be earned in residence prior to transfer and therefore are ill-prepared to complete a minor once here (Tables #1 and #2). This obstacle is compounded by the fact that few transfer students come to the university with any clustering of courses that would easily lend themselves to a minor, thus leaving the student to begin the minor upon transfer. Given that the minimum number of credits for a minor is 18, of which 6 must be earned in residence, transfer students are often required to take at least six classes in a sub-field of study.
- Students who transfer to UAlbany with an Associate's Degree typically transfer in a minimum of 60 credits, thus leaving them with 60 credits to complete a Baccalaureate degree at UAlbany. *Requiring* a student to take 18 of those credits in a sub-field of study reduces the students' ability to explore a breadth of courses at an advanced level or to go further in their major area of study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEPARTMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION

Departmental Implications

- Current policy requires departmental advisors to advise students in their major, minor and general education requirements, and also requires departments to make available advisement in the minor. Many major advisors, however, do not feel that they can advise students in their minor beyond what is stated in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*. And most departments do not have specific provisions for advising students in their minor, beyond a departmental advisor. By eliminating the minor *as a requirement*, students choosing to take a minor would more likely be those who have already developed a relationship with one or more instructors, and could rely on those individuals for advisement in the minor.
- Departments would still be expected to maintain their minor programs and make them accessible to all students as currently defined in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.

- Minor advisement would be limited to those students who hold a committed interest to that area of study, thus reducing the high demand from minors on departmental advisors' time and resources.
- Another matter of significance is the difficulty students taking courses to meet minor requirements have in securing seats in classes in their minor field of study. This proposal will likely provide some relief to departments in the form of a reduced minor population and subsequently a decreased demand for already overfilled required courses. Eliminating the minor as a requirement would allow those students who are truly interested in completing a minor access to the courses they need.

Graduation Concerns

- There is also a smaller portion of the student population that struggles with the minor requirement and is, on occasion, prohibited from graduating due to some deficiency in this area.
- These deficiencies come in many forms including (but not limited to): inability to meet minor requirements for a variety of reasons including the inability to secure the necessary courses needed to complete the minor and/or an inability to choose a minor based on lack of interest or desire to focus in another area. While there are multiple ways to address these problems, they typically involve the advisor and other administrative units on campus altering the minor or making substitutions to relieve the audit of any deficiencies (Table #5).
- The data suggest that if we provide the opportunity for students to meet degree requirements without fulfilling the specific **requirement** of a minor, but instead meeting the rigor of a greater number of upper level courses, we would ease the burden on those students for whom the minor poses a significant obstacle and allow them to graduate with a strong degree program. (We maintain the overall requirement of a 2.0 for a UA degree.)

Overall, minor programs continue to have value for our undergraduates, and it appears that many undergraduates would continue to take advantage of the opportunity to complete a minor. However, given the structure and the administration of minors, their value is arguably limited for those students who wish to explore a greater breadth of disciplines at the advanced level. While it has been suggested that the minor as a requirement makes UAlbany unique among our peer and aspirational peer institutions, in practice this novelty does not appear to serve as a consistent benefit to our students' educational goals and aspirations. On the contrary, as indicated in the data, without intervention from departments in the form of substitutions to minor requirements, minors can become obstacles to the timely completion of student degree programs. The current proposal would create an alternative option that offers students greater flexibility and additional opportunities to shape their educational experience at the University at Albany.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

The UAC collected data about the current state of minors at UAlbany including the number of current minors, exceptions to minor requirements, and level of student selection into multiple programs of study. Furthermore, given the concern expressed regarding upper level student participation in lower level courses we also explored the current state of upper classmen in lower level courses.

In order to complete this task, we first gathered aggregate level data which included all undergraduate students across majors and academic years. This information is used to illustrate the general level of engagement in declaration of minors at various academic levels.

The next step in the analysis required a sampling of the undergraduate population to gain some insight into how upperclassmen use their “seats” in classes. In order to best explore this area, 10 majors were chosen for a full evaluation of upperclassmen registration. The programs included are: BUS, COM, CRJ, CSI, ENG, MAT, POS, PSY, SOC, and SSW. The information from these sampled populations illustrates which lower level courses upperclassmen are choosing and allows for some analysis about why upperclassmen are choosing the specific lower level courses.

Included with this memo are the following documents:

- Declaration of Minor by Class Year/Enrollment Status
- Declaration of Minor for Transfer Students by Class Year
- Aggregate Level Examination of Minors
- Review of Double/Triple Majors/Minors
- Number of Students in Combined Programs
- List of Exceptions made to Minor Requirements in Fall 2009
- Aggregate Review of Seniors and Juniors in Upper Level Seats (Spring 2009/Fall 2009)
- Sampled Review of Upperclassmen (Juniors and Seniors) in Lower Level Courses by Major

Table 1 – Minor DeclarationMinor Declaration: As of 2/7/2010

The following is a snapshot of both Native and Transfer student's current declaration of minors based on class year. These data give an indication of the point at which students declare minors and the number who are still in need of meeting that requirement.

Juniors and Minors – CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS

Current number of Juniors: 3680

Native Juniors without a declared minor: 550
 Combined Major (no minor required): 364
 Major with required minor: 186

Transfer Juniors without a declared minor: 659
 Combined Major (no minor required): 315
 Major with required minor: 344

Seniors and Minors – CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS

Current number of Seniors: 3971

Native Seniors without a declared minor: 468
 Combined Major (no minor required): 332
 Major with required minor: 136

Transfer Seniors without a declared minor: 503
 Combined Major (no minor required): 329
 Major with required minor: 174

Table 2 – Transfers by Admit YearTransfer Students by admit year (CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS)

In order to evaluate the point at which Transfer students declare (and presumably begin) working on minors the following data was collected to illustrate minor declaration (as for spring 2010) by admit year of Transfer.

Fall 2008 –
Transfer Admits
Total: 1032
Without minors:
261 (25%)

Spring 2009 –
Transfer Admits
Total: 333
Without minors:
108 (32%)

Fall 2009 –
Transfer Admits
Total: 1192
Without minors:
615 (52%)

Spring 2010 –
Transfer Admits
Total: 420
Without minors:
314 (75%)

Table 3 – Exceeding Minimum Requirements

The following data was collected to explore the extent to which currently enrolled students are engaging in academic rigor beyond that which is required. A total of **2286** currently enrolled students have gone beyond the required program minimums by declaring one of the following:

- Number of Students with double majors: 871
- Number of students with triple majors: 13
- Number of Students with double minors: 610
- Number of students with triple minors: 29
- Number of students in a combined major with additional minor(s): 763

Table 4: Total number of students in Combined Major/Minor Programs

These data show the number of students currently enrolled in a combined major and therefore not required to declare a discrete minor. Although, as noted above, 763 have included an additional minor in their degree program.

Seniors in Combined Programs: 1259

Juniors in Combined Programs: 1044

Sophomores in Combined Programs: 324

Freshmen in Combined Programs: 3

Table 5: Number of Declared Minors and Exceptions

A primary concern of the committee is the number of exceptions made to existing minor requirements in order for students to fulfill those requirements. Therefore, the Registrar provided information detailing the number of exceptions per department made during the fall 2009 semester. This result is typical of the number of requests received each semester by that office and speaks to the volume of alterations (via substitution and exception) made to minors.

Total number of declared minors: 6048

Total Number of Exceptions made in **fall 2009**: 516

Table 6: Upper Level Courses by Year

These data represent the number of seats held by all upperclassmen in upper division coursework over the course of two academic semesters.

Total Number of Registered Seniors as of spring 2010: 3,971

Total Number of Registered Juniors as of spring 2010: 3,680

Number of SEATS in upper level courses held by seniors: ALL COURSES

Seniors	300-Level	400-Level	500-
Level			
Spring09:	8,656	1,894	33
Fall09:	9,164	3,190	76
Total:	17,820	5,084	109
Juniors	300-Level	400-Level	500-
Level			
Spring09:	2,514	224	0
Fall09:	5,672	667	10
Total:	8,186	891	10

Table 7: Sample Enrollment for Lower Level Course

To explore the participation in lower level courses we created a sample of majors as follows: BUS, COM, CRJ, CSI, ENG, MAT, POS, PSY, SOC, SSW and examined quantity and quality of lower level courses. Summary of results below:

- Sample population constituted 18,997 seats in undergraduate courses in Fall 2009
- Of the 18,997 seats, 8262 (43%) were in lower level courses.
- Vast majority of lower level courses are clearly in the major or general education sequence. (ex. SOC – 11 of the top 12 lower level courses taken by SOC Majors are lower level SOC courses)
- ACC211 is extremely popular across disciplines

Lower Level SEATS occupied by Juniors or Seniors by Major (SAMPLE):

Business Majors

Total Seats: 2982

Total Lower Level Seats: 823 (27%)

Communication Majors:

Total Seats: 2833

Total Lower Level Seats: 1557 (54%)

Criminal Justice Majors

Total Seats: 820

Total Lower Level Seats: 365 (44%)

Computer Science Majors

Total Seats: 796

Total Lower Level Seats: 383 (48%)

English Majors

Total Seats: 2580

Total Lower Level Seats: 905 (35%)

Math Majors

Total Seats: 916

Total Lower Level Seats: 422 (46%)

Political Science Majors

Total Seats: 1869

Total Lower Level Seats: 587 (31%)

Psychology Majors

Total Seats: 3165

Total Lower Level Seats: 1102 (34%)

Sociology Majors

Total Seats: 2537

Total Lower Level Seats: 1279 (50%)

Social Welfare Majors

Total Seats: 261

Total Lower Level Seats: 74