

Proposal For A Requirement For Augmented Courses

This document is in response to the Educational Development Committee's Preliminary Report of October, 2001. The document outlines a proposal for a requirement for augmented courses to encourage students and faculty to work together beyond the classroom setting to apply the lessons of the class. It also addresses the inequities in faculty and student involvement under a course-based system versus a credit-based system. For the sake of discussion, the proposal assumes a change to a course-based system. However, it could also be implemented under a credit-based system if augmented courses were assigned four credit-hours. The proposal does not favor one general education requirement model over another.

Proposed requirement: One quarter of the total number of courses required for graduation must be augmented courses.

Rationale

The Educational Development Committee's Preliminary Report of October, 2001 contains two new alternative proposals for Rhodes general education requirements. The committee's Report to the Faculty and the Board of Trustees (4/25/01) cites six areas of concern that the committee is attempting to address with the proposed models. The committee also states it is suggesting modifying the existing scheme and states that one means of doing might be to designate "certain courses as 'qualitative options', such as writing-intensive, quantitative, diversity, service-learning, research, environment, global citizenship, etc." Engaging students within and across the various disciplines by encouraging student and faculty involvement in such courses is a goal that threads through many of President Troutt's ten initiatives.

Neither the Educational Development Committee report nor the proposed models address how such courses would factor into the general education requirements. Also, implicit in the report is a proposal that Rhodes move from a credit-based system to a course-based system. However, the report does not address how student and faculty involvement would be affected by moving to a course-based system under the different models.

As noted above, Rhodes currently offers a variety of courses that go beyond the traditional classroom lecture/discussion format and that are augmented with some practical or experiential involvement. Some of these courses, such as those with laboratories or conversation sections, award students four hours of credit. Others, such as those that involve service-learning components, award students three hours of credit. Under the proposed models in a course-based system, traditional and augmented courses might all be weighted equally. Thus, students in fields such as the laboratory sciences that require many augmented courses would be disproportionately burdened with a change to course-based accounting.

Furthermore, faculty involvement in teaching augmented courses must be considered. Under the current system for four-credit-hour courses, most faculty members are assigned one or two laboratories or their equivalents as one of the faculty member's teaching

involvements - a fact that represents the additional contact time between students and faculty. Yet such assignments are not now consistent between different departments. Changing to a course-based system and counting an augmented course as one involvement would exacerbate the inequities across campus and result in even more faculty engaged with students for additional contact hours at a time when Rhodes is trying to encourage more professional development and more mentoring of students in research, scholarship, and creative activities. To address this problem, the proposal includes the provision that a professor teaching an augmented course with the requisite increased student/faculty contact time over a current three hour course would be assigned two teaching involvements for the augmented course.

Ramifications and Possibilities

- Assuming that students are required to take four courses a semester for a total of 32, then this proposal would require them to take at least 8 augmented courses for an average of 1 augmented course a semester. This would be roughly equivalent to a 13 hour course load under our current system.
- The Curriculum Committee would establish guidelines for defining an augmented course. Presumably, such courses would entail significant contact time between students and faculty spent in activities that may be defined as "experiential learning". These activities would be beyond those normally included in our current three-credit-hour courses and the concomitant expectation of two hours of out-of-class time per hour of in-class time. The professor and department proposing an augmented course would need to justify the proposal based on the increased faculty and student involvement and its educational goals.
- Faculty teaching augmented courses would normally receive credit for two teaching involvements for the course. This would ensure equitability across the campus and would facilitate a faculty member's substantive involvement in the additional course requirements without taking away from the faculty member's other important activities. The Dean of the College would need to oversee the allocation of augmented course involvements to departments. Although a change to 32 courses may increase faculty availability, proliferation of augmented courses would likely require increased staffing across the campus.
- There would have to be a balance between augmented and regular courses in all departments and at all levels so students of different interests and majors would have enough options.
- The requirement could be simple and not specify a range of augmented courses one must take, or the requirement could specify that a certain number of augmented courses must be taken outside one's major or within certain areas (e.g. a natural science requirement might specify that at least one such course be augmented). It should be kept in mind that requiring too many (e.g. more than two) from outside one's major would disproportionately affect those majors that are likely to include many augmented courses within the major. Therefore, augmented courses taken to satisfy major requirements should be included in the total.

- Some courses could be designed to be taken as regular courses or as augmented courses. Only those students in a course taking it as an augmented course would participate in the additional activities that designate the course as augmented.
- Students might be able to satisfy an augmented course requirement on foreign study by designating in-country courses with a significant cultural component as augmented courses.
- This proposal may facilitate recommendations forthcoming from the Initiative on Enhancing Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities. Some of the recommendations will address ways to increase opportunities and incentive for faculty and student interactions in scholarly activities.
 - With a requirement for augmented courses, departments might institute specific courses in research, scholarship, or creative activity that encourage students and faculty to work more closely in a mentor/apprentice or collaborative way. (Some departments already have such courses) Students would get credit for an augmented course (which may or may not satisfy a major requirement as determined by the department) as long as the time commitment was at an appropriate level similar to that of our current four-credit-hour courses.
 - Currently, few if any faculty obtain teaching credit for supervising student research, scholarship, and creative activity outside of the traditional classroom setting. The augmented course idea might be extended to credit such faculty. Faculty might get "teaching involvement" credit for engaging a given number of students beyond a regular course. The credit might be defined by the number of students mentored and the quality of their experience.

For example, if a biology professor teaches at least three students in a research course (defined as an augmented course and equivalent to Biology's current four credit-hour research course), then that involvement might count as teaching one course.

As another example, if a literature professor finds that a number of students in his/her courses have exemplary papers, the professor may work closely with those students out of class to encourage and mentor the students in developing their ideas further and presenting their works at a regional or national conference on undergraduate scholarship.

In such cases, each department may be staffed to allow a certain number of "reassigned involvements" that the chair may allocate based on a department member's involvement in mentoring students. Credit toward mentoring students might be banked such that two or three semesters work with one or a few students each semester would be rewarded with a reassignment allocation during a later semester.

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