

Committee on Academic Operations Meeting Minutes
21st CAO Meeting of 2015-2016
Tuesday, February 9, 2016 in Salisbury Labs 124

Chair: Stephan Sturm (MA)

Secretary: William Clark (CHE) for VJ Manzo (HUA)

In Attendance:

Mark Claypool (CS), William Clark (CHE), Stephan Sturm (MA), Kris Wobbe (Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies), Paul Reilly (Academic Advising), Kristin McAdams (Administrator of Academic Programs), Cathy Battelle (Academic Scheduler – as guest)

Called to order at 4:02 pm

Announcements:

1. Cathy Battelle was welcomed as a guest/representative from the Registrar's office to discuss course registration restrictions.
2. Mark Claypool announced that a web portal for submitting motions to CAO and tracking their progress is nearly completed and will be ready for testing soon. Once validated, those wishing to submit motions for new courses and programs or changes to courses and programs will access the portal on the Faculty Governance/CAO web page.

Minutes of the February 3rd meeting were reviewed but approval was postponed due to a shortage of voting members.

Old Business: None.

New Business:

1. CAO Administration and Support.
 - a. Support for the Committee, particularly photocopying motions to be reviewed at meetings, will be shifted from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies office to the Faculty Governance Office.
 - b. The CAO Chair will determine the committee meeting time and the Faculty Governance Office will schedule a room.
 - c. In an attempt to save paper, CAO members are encouraged to bring an iPad or other tablet or notebook computer to the meetings. The chair will send agenda items and motions in a large pdf file in advance. Those members continuing to use paper are encouraged to bring printed copies of unfinished business from each meeting to the next meeting. A minimum number of fresh copies of all items will continue to be provided.
2. Report on Major-only Course Restrictions.

Cathy Battelle presented a list of all WPI courses that currently have major-only restrictions for registration. CAO has no jurisdiction over the approximately 30 graduate courses on the list. Only four undergraduate courses were identified, three MA courses and two CHE laboratory courses. The committee believes that major-only restrictions should be discouraged and only used as a temporary

solution for over prescribed courses. In the future, any major-only restriction will need to be submitted by a department (or program) head and any such restriction will expire in 3 years. Moreover, if a restriction is imposed, it should be lifted as soon as possible within the registration period. The Academic Scheduler will determine if the registration system can be set to automatically remove any major-only restrictions on a given date; one week after sophomore registration ends, for example.

3. Student Petition for Readmission after Academic Suspension. Approved.

4. Statement of WPI Policy/Philosophy on Curriculum Flexibility.

VJ Manzo's drafted a motion to CAP requesting guidelines on how flexible or restricted major, minors, and programs at WPI should be. The WPI plan called for maximum flexibility with each student developing his/her own course of study as opposed to many traditional schools that require a fixed set of courses for each degree or program. The current norm at WPI is a set of distribution requirements that some believe should be as flexible as possible. CAO is concerned that recent motions for new programs and changes to programs have proposed more required courses and less flexibility. There does not seem to be a consensus among the current WPI faculty regarding maintaining flexibility in degree requirements. CAO needs guidelines to follow and would appreciate a written statement on curriculum flexibility policy. Kris Wobbe will modify the draft motion on this issue to be sent to CAP and COG once approved by CAO at a future meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm

Respectfully submitted,
W. M. Clark, CAO

SUMMARY NOTES: REPORT ON MAJOR RESTRICTED COURSES

As WPI undergraduate courses do not have formal prerequisites, there should be a limited number of courses that have restrictions limiting students' ability to register.

Following the report on courses requiring special approval (see minutes of 16th meeting of CAO, Dec. 8, 2015), CAO reviewed reports by the Registrar and Academic Scheduling listing all previous course offerings that were restricted to specific majors. In total, there were 38 such courses, with breakdown as follows:

Graduate classes (33 courses)

CHE 4401, UNIT OPERATIONS OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING I (Chem. Eng. majors)

CHE 4402, UNIT OPERATIONS OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING II (Chem. Eng. majors)

MA 2610, APPLIED STATISTICS FOR LIFE SCIENCES, sections (Math and Actuarial majors)

MA 2631, PROBABILITY, (Math and Actuarial majors)

MA 3211, THEORY OF INTEREST (Math and Actuarial majors)

CAO discussed the courses and made some observations:

1. Unlike undergraduate classes at WPI, graduate classes *do* have formal pre-requisites. Moreover, graduate classes are not under the purview of CAO.
2. The chemical engineering courses are labs with scarce lab space, the restriction enables the students to get in the labs they need to graduate in their major.
3. The restrictions for the MA courses were explained as being a mechanism to enforce students to consult with the instructor to be sure they intended to take that particular course and not an alternate MA course (e.g., one designed for non-MA majors). CAO recommends the MA department consider other ways to achieve the same effect (e.g., changing course names).

Overall, there does not appear to be rampant course restrictions at WPI. With the exception of a few MA courses, the special approvals required seem appropriate if seen as temporary measure to deal with restrictions as limit class space. However, CAO believes that this cannot be a long term solution: if a course is permanently overregistered, new resources have to be provided to enable students to take the course.

However, there is currently no formal policy in place. As it currently stands, the registrar can, and does, get requests from faculty members to require a particular course to be restricted to a given major . CAO recommends that CAP make a policy regarding such requests, allowing special approval only under unique academic circumstances. Major-only restrictions should be only temporary (e.g., for three years) as they should be meant as temporary measures to deal with shortcomings in class space, and also to avoid restrictions rot. CAO would also suggest that individual faculty members not be able to request special approval for his/her course, but that such infrequent requests should come either through a department head or being approved through CAO. Moreover, CAO suggests that restrictions for majors are only temporary for the first part of the registration period (e.g., until one week after sophomore registration ends).