

January 29, 2014

To: Alon McCormick, Chair SCEP

From: Tom Shield, Chair CSE CC

RE: Campus Curriculum Committee process

The College of Science and Engineering Curriculum Committee (CSE CC) is very concerned by the process being used by the Campus Curriculum Committee (CCC) and by a unanimous vote at its 2013-12-10 meeting asked me to convey this to you. We support the goals of the CCC as stated in its charge, but the process they are using raises several academic freedom issues in addition to being generally burdensome. The CCC is requiring two main pieces of information: a “student ready” syllabus and proof of consultation outside the college. The problems with each of these will be addressed in turn along with the issue of the review by the Provost’s office of changes to existing courses.

“Student Ready” syllabus

As shown in the attached CCC memo of 2013-12-6 for the BMEN 3601 course, the CCC is requiring a syllabus that meets the requirements of the campus syllabus policy.

- The syllabus policy starts with “*An instructor is required to ...*” and thus applies to instructors. It is a unit that is proposing a course and the instructor is not assigned until a course is scheduled. Thus this policy does not apply when a course is being added to the Course Catalog (approved in ECAS).
- This is by definition impossible as various items that are required (time and room) are not available until the course is scheduled, and for that it must first be approved in ECAS by the CCC.
- If one was willing to ignore these technical issues, there is still the academic freedom issue associated with the CCC appearing to want to review parts of an instructor’s syllabus such as the grading scheme. Grading is entirely up to the instructor as demonstrated by the fact that there are no approvals required for an instructor to submit grades for their course.
- There is storage for a syllabus in ECAS, however, it is not required by programming and this material is never shown in the course catalog unlike the other parts of ECAS data, such as the course description and prerequisites. In addition, there is no mention in the syllabus policy of any centrally “approved” syllabus.
- There is no mention in the CCC charge of the committee having control over syllabi.

As chair of the CSE CC, I require additional information to be submitted with a new course proposal and this is often in the form of an incomplete syllabus (sometimes it is complete if the course was first taught under a special topics number). This is useful to get a better idea of what the topics in the course are and it may include an example text book. This helps the CSE CC check that the description of the course is appropriate and consider intra-college issues.

However, it is understood that the material provided (list of specific topics, textbook, etc) is only an example and may be changed by the instructor. The CSE CC has always transmitted this additional information on to the CCC, but it has been repeatedly rejected as being incomplete. The attached memo to the CCC dated 2013-7-2 explained to the CCC that we had already provided the only meaningful parts of the syllabus and in any case these were only examples. I received no response to this memo. In addition the memo on the BMEN 3601 course appears to indicate that providing a syllabus is merely a formality, which seems to indicate that this requirement has no real purpose and that the CCC did in fact already have enough information to reach a decision.

Consultation

The CCC is charged with “*Reviews newly-established courses, keeping in mind issues of overlap, possible duplication, and the appropriate disciplinary connections.*” however “*Does not take on curricular conflicts that arise within colleges.*” Our college was involved in the initial conflict regarding an organic chemistry course that CBS wanted to offer. This course clearly falls in the core area of the CSE Chemistry Department and CSE felt that it should have the right of first refusal to teach such a course, as should any unit with regards to its core subjects. This idea of core area clearly acknowledges that consultation is not a symmetric process, that is, should the CSE Chemistry Department wish to offer an organic chemistry course (as they already do) they should not have to consult with CBS or any other unit. This issue of core areas arose with the CCC requirement that the CSCI department consult on programming courses that it wished to offer (see the attached memo of 2013-5-7). The course CSCI 1933 *Introduction to Algorithms and Data Structures* clearly falls completely in the core area of computer science. Thus there should be no need for CSCI to consult with any other unit about such a course. To make this requirement is a direct assault on the integrity and academic freedom of the CSCI department. Note that consultation was provided on the CSCI course related to design where the CCC identified an overlap. However the idea that consultation is required “*even if the proposers represent a logical intellectual home for the material*” is inappropriate. In addition, the charge of the CCC also notes that intra-college issues should be left to the colleges. In the case of most courses the units with the most closely related core areas will already be in the proposer’s college and thus college CC approval should be enough to indicate that this consultation has been done.

I would also make a technical note that the charge says “*Reviews newly-established courses*” and as the process is currently being done the CCC is refusing to allow courses to be established (approved in ECAS which puts them in the Course Catalog) instead of complying with its charge of reviewing courses that are established. Note that if the CCC were to follow its charge and review courses once they are scheduled and offered (a reasonable definition of established), then a “Student Ready” syllabus would be available at that time.

Changes to Courses

The Provost’s office was added to the ECAS approval chain for all courses by mistake (we were told) and initially they said they would be removed from the ECAS approval chain for changes to existing courses. However this has not been done. The Provost’s office is currently questioning all changes that come through ECAS, but the CCC charge makes no mention of changes to

existing courses. The college CC's have representatives from their units present at their meetings and approve courses based on the information they provide. For the Provost's office to not accept the decisions of the college CC's and to require the justification to be provided again is not supported by policy and goes beyond any possible oversight function. In addition this additional approval step adds to the processing time when units may need to make technical changes to courses related to on-going registration in a timely fashion (some courses now need college, Provost, LE, WI and Honors approvals).

Example Process

To make this discussion more concrete I have attached an example process that mimics the triage process used by the CSE CC to efficiently handle the volume of changes that come through the ECAS system. This process only applies to new course proposals, as the CCC charge does not include changes to courses. The current CCC process acknowledges the courses in category 1 (freshman seminars, topics courses, etc) and I would argue that the courses in categories 2 and 3 are also explicitly mentioned in the CCC charge by the exclusion of intra-college conflicts from their scope. The CCC should also be in charge of identifying the external units with interest in the courses and getting responses from those units in a timely fashion. If the CCC cannot identify another unit with a core competency overlap then it should be assumed that there is none. This example process also reduces the amount of information required by the CCC to what reasonably exists at the time a course is proposed. Many of the ideas in the example process I communicated to Vice-Provost McMaster when the CCC was first proposed as a way to reasonably implement such a policy.

Attachments:

1. CCC response memo of 2013-12-6 for BMEN 3601
2. Shield memo to the CCC dated 2013-7-2
3. CCC response memo of 2013-5-7 on CSCI courses
4. Example Process