

Dear Faculty Chair Wurtz:

The Educational Policy Commission met on Oct. 1, Oct. 13, and Oct. 22. During these meetings the committee reviewed the letter from the LAC Committee sent to the Faculty Senate on November 2, 2009, and Study Abroad Center's policy on proposing a new faculty-led short term study abroad course. Additionally, we invited Yana Cornish, Director of the Study Abroad Center to our Oct. 13 meeting to discuss the process of proposing a new study abroad course. After discussing the issues raised by the LAC Committee, we agreed that the LAC's concerns are largely a matter of perception rather than an actual problem. We will first address each of the three concerns raised by the LAC Committee, followed by a set of recommendations.

1. The LAC Committee asked that a separate set of definitions and guidelines be created for awarding academic credit for study abroad courses.

We understand it is problematic to determine what constitutes a credit hour in a study abroad class where students and faculty arguably spend much more time together before, during, and after a course. However, we believe that the Definitions of Types of Instruction as outlined by the Registrar's Office is sufficient to address study abroad courses. In truth, many on-campus courses do not strictly fit into just one of these types of instruction. Additionally, although on-campus courses are subject to the same contact hour requirements, the university does not attempt to micromanage how time is spent in these courses. Perhaps more importantly, the majority of study abroad courses are departmental in nature, and therefore go through the regular curriculum process with faculty oversight. We believe any attempt to regulate the creation of courses and the application of credit for these courses would circumvent the faculty governance process. Departments are capable of approving courses that they believe are appropriate for their students.

2. The LAC Committee recommended that a set of pre-travel requirements be established for study abroad courses.

We agree with the LAC Committee that the issue of awarding or not awarding credit for pre-travel requirements seems unclear, inconsistent, and perhaps unfair. However, it is our understanding that the amount of pre-travel work is dependent on the nature of the study abroad program. Some courses require far more pre-travel or post-travel work than others. Some faculty members require students to take a class for credit in the semester before travel abroad. Others require that their students meet regularly (in some cases weekly) and have assignments to complete in the semester before travel abroad, but that no credit is awarded for this work. Although we recognize that there is inconsistency in these requirements, we also recognize that requiring a minimum number of contact hours and/or a for-credit class may disadvantage students and faculty.

3. The LAC Committee raised the issue of acceptable instruction as it relates to time abroad and number of credit hours assigned to specific courses.

The EPC is also concerned with the large number of credit hours awarded for very short study abroad courses. However, we reiterate that the majority of study abroad courses are located in specific departments, and are therefore subject to the curriculum review process.

Recommendations:

The EPC carefully considered its responsibility to address the issues raised by the LAC. However, we believe that several mechanisms are already in place to address issues of credit assignment, work load, etc., as they relate to study abroad courses. We reiterate that perhaps the issue of disparate application of academic credit for study abroad programs is more of a perception problem than an actual problem.

It is our understanding that the LAC Committee's concern focuses primarily on university capstone study abroad courses. Yana Cornish, Director of the Study Abroad Center indicates that there is very little variance in the number of credit hours for capstone study abroad classes. However, the EPC agreed that there is a work-load and knowledge issue in expecting the LAC to review all new capstone study abroad courses. To that end, we recommend that a new committee is formed to review new university capstone courses (both study abroad and on-campus courses), in line with the subcommittee that currently exists to review nonwestern world courses.

Furthermore, we recommend that the Study Abroad Center attach the Registrar's Office UNI Definition of Types of Instruction document to all new proposals for study abroad courses. Currently this document exists on pages 16 and 17 of the Study Abroad Center's handbook. However, we believe attaching these definitions to the proposal will remind both the proposing faculty member and the department head (whose signature is required on the new course proposal form) of the expectations for work load associated with class type.

Respectfully,

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