

AMENDMENT TO LIBERAL STUDIES GENERAL POLICIES

Approved

The following amendment to the last paragraph on page 10 of the Liberal Studies Program, May 1987 is proposed:

Current policy as stated on page 10:

Students may not fulfill requirements in the knowledge areas with courses bearing their major prefix. This supercedes all specific knowledge area requirements to the contrary. Students may fulfill the knowledge area credit requirements for those specific courses by electing additional non-major prefix courses in any of the knowledge areas.

Change to:

Students may not fulfill the requirements of the Liberal Studies electives with any course bearing their major prefix.

Rationale for change: See Cashdollar and Duntley memoranda attached.

LIBERAL STUDIES

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November 8, 1988

SUBJECT: Modification of Rule on page 10 of May 1987 Liberal
Studies document

TO: UWUCC

FROM: Liberal Studies Committee

The Liberal Studies Committee is proposing that one regulation in the May 1987 Liberal Studies document be changed.

The item in question is the final paragraph on page 10 of the document. We are proposing that it be replaced by the new wording on the attached sheet. (If the UWUCC wishes, we could simply eliminate the paragraph since the new wording duplicates what already appears on page 15 of the document; there is probably merit in being redundant, however, when making a change of this sort.)

We do not take lightly the prospect of modifying the rules. We realize that this will create some short term confusion. But we are convinced that the rule causes problems, and will continue to cause problems, which we should not tolerate. We have finally, and reluctantly, concluded that this rule is not going to work well. Indeed, as we will point out, it has some ironic side effects.

A bit of history: This paragraph was not in the original document as it emerged from the Task Force chaired by Arlo Davis. This was an amendment made during the Senate approval process. At the time it seemed both wise and feasible.

Almost from the beginning, however, the LSC became concerned that the wording was not very clear, and we spent considerable time last year talking about what it actually meant. Read literally, it could mean that students, in substitution for a category that included only courses with their major prefix, could take a course "anywhere else" they chose. We knew that this would be virtually impossible to administer well--how would an adviser at graduation check-out know where to find the substituted course? So we decided to "interpret" the rule to mean that such students should take an additional Liberal Studies elective. That seemed within the spirit of the rule, and it meant that when a student was checked out for graduation, the adviser at least knew where to start looking for the substitution. We submitted that "interpretation" to the UWUCC, which chose to accept it as "information." So, we have been saying in print:

"No course with your major prefix may be counted in any Knowledge Area; if your prefix is the only one available in a category, skip that category and add one more Liberal Studies elective." (LSC Minutes, 4/10/88)

We thought, and we assume the UWUCC thought, that this settled the matter. Unfortunately, it has not. This Fall, as we began to examine the implications of Liberal Studies for requirements for degree programs, additional problems emerged. We received written requests from three departments, and informal expressions of concern from others. Significant concerns were also raised by those responsible for enforcing academic policy. (See memo from Dr. Duntley).

The factors which entered into our thinking are summarized below:

(1) Complexity. We have spent a great deal of time trying to explain this rule to people. We say "trying," because nothing in the entire package seems so difficult for people to understand. The rule really is more complicated than anything else in the Liberal Studies package, and it is just subtle enough, we have concluded, that unless individuals are putting full attention to Liberal Studies, they miss the nuances. We think we will continue to have a problem with the rule as long as it exists. Students will become confused, advisers will become confused, and the problems will show up as deficiencies at graduation check-out. We think we now better understand the importance of simplicity and clarity when setting rules for large numbers of people.

(2) Undeclared majors and Changes of Major. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of our students are now admitted as "undeclared," and the number is rising. This means that for many students "avoiding their major prefix" is something that cannot be considered until after the fact. How do we advise these students? Many of these students finally choose a major after (and often because) of a Liberal Studies course in the department. Including these initially undeclared students, approximately 40 percent of IUP students change majors during their four years here. Under the current Gen Ed rules, there is little or no cost for this; under the new rules there will be a cost. For example, a student enters as an undeclared major, takes the Humanities: Literature course (EN 120), and decides to become an English major. What happens? The English department will tell the student to go back and take EN 210, "Literary Analysis" which the other students who were declared from the beginning took in place of the LS course. Then the LSC will tell the student to take another Liberal Studies elective because the LS Lit course no longer counts for Liberal Studies. A similar example situation occurs for a change from one major to another. We do not believe that we should implement a policy which unduly confuses or burdens the choices of such a large percentage of our students.

(3) Decreased ability to add new courses to the list. We will soon be receiving a course proposal from the foreign languages (FL 201) asking that it be a Humanities: Literature course. If we accept the proposal, there will be two prefixes (EN and FL) available for this category. All EN majors must now take the FL course instead of an additional LS elective. This means, we think, that we cannot accept the proposal unless the foreign languages can guarantee seats for all EN majors. And, we will need to find some way of giving the EN majors priority in scheduling for the course. The same thing will be true of the FN proposal we will get for the Health and Wellness area.

(4) A consistency in objectives and in philosophy. We would not have suggested a change if we did not think it could be done without violating the goals of the Liberal Studies program.

In our understanding, the Liberal Studies knowledge areas are a way of ensuring that all students have basic exposure to certain areas of learning. By this logic, the course's being in the major or out of it is irrelevant. If each student must have at least three social sciences, then if an music major takes economics, sociology, and geography and if an economics major takes economics, sociology, and geography, then each has met the goals of the program. Likewise, if we want each student to have at least one history course, the fact that a history major ends up taking a dozen courses should not matter to us, and we should not feel obligated to make the student do something else instead. We realize that there might be different ways of thinking about this, but we believe that this was the thinking of the original Task Force chaired by Arlo Davis since its proposal only prohibited students' using their major prefixes in the Liberal Studies electives.

[Our guess is that most faculty think in these terms, too. This may be one reason they have trouble understanding the rule. When they confront it, their thinking runs something like this:

GOAL: Every student should have a lit course

SITUATION: English major Jones has 10 lit courses

RESULT: To make up this deficiency, Jones must take a course in math, physics, sociology, art--something else which can be anything but lit.

REACTION: Puzzled expression.]

We conclude, therefore, that we are better off going back to the simpler, cleaner rule that was in the Task Force report. Bar the use of major prefixes in the LS Electives only. This will eliminate a multitude of unintended side effects, and we still have the package on a solid, consistent philosophical base.

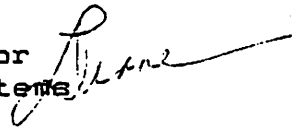
NOTE: We do think the use of major prefixes ought to be barred from the Liberal Studies Electives. We think we can administer this, and we think philosophically it is necessary. The purpose in the LS Electives is to allow the students to "explore and deepen their knowledge." In this case, we should keep the department from encroaching on that freedom, and we also want to distinguish the "deepening" in these electives from the "deepening" which inevitably occurred in a disciplinary major. Hence, students should not use their major prefix here. This was not a case of checking off "have you been exposed to a, b, c," but "how are you going to stretch yourself?"

ACADEMIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS
352 SUTTON HALL
October 21, 1988

M E M O R A N D U M

SUBJECT: Liberal Studies "Other Prefix" Rule

TO: Dr. Charles Cashdollar, Director
Liberal Studies

FROM: Diane L. Duntley, Director
Academic Information Systems 

As we have been working with the implementation of the Liberal Studies program, I have generally been excited by the options and opportunities which are unfolding. One area continues to be a problem and to grow more convoluted day by day: the requirement concerning the exclusion of the prefix of the student's major.

I appreciate the underlying values that made the idea attractive to the first Task Force when it was designed for the Liberal Studies electives; I can appreciate the bandwagon-effect of "if it's good for electives, it's good for all of the requirements". When it was in process, I had some misgivings about the administration of the rule; but in a spirit of commitment to the development that was going forward, I suppressed further questions and determined "we can find a way to handle that."

All that was before I was faced with the realities of actually fitting the generality of the rule to the specifics of each degree program for the catalog and for the ultimate computer-assisted advising and degree audit that is ahead.

Emersed in these realities, I looked again at what the underlying goals were -- what we intended as a University community when we undertook redefinition of general education. Clearly we did not set out to create a monster more difficult to administer than the funny little boggle of 2 or 3 humanities courses now. Clearly if after hours of work with the content and the elements, I was having difficulty making a simple, workable outline for the catalog, then perhaps the rule was more complex than the goals warranted.

Consequently, I write to ask that you discuss with the Liberal Studies Committee the options that might be open for modifying the rule on exclusion of prefixes related to the student's major. Please also reflect on the special concerns of students who change majors or who move from undecided to a declared major in regard to the prefixes. There will have to be a series of sub-rules or interpretations -- and the simpler, the better.

Can the present rule be administered? Of course; somehow we can patch and fix and correct and train and retrain and write more computer programs to check this-or-that from here to the next revision and administer the rule as it is written. The rule wasn't a bad idea -- just one with unanticipated byzantine ramifications that in the long run probably won't be worth the problems that will be created to administer the rule. And ultimately in the broad picture it doesn't move forward the important thrusts of the University community...the reasons for "doing" liberal studies in the first place.

I commend simplicity.