

Portland State University Faculty Senate Motion  
June 2021

## UNST Proposal #1: Reduce the required number of SINGs from three to two. (Effective AY 22-23)

### Background and preliminary discussions

The University Studies Council proposes two changes to the UNST curriculum and requirements. These changes were approved for consideration by UNST Council by the UNST Curricular Leadership Team. In addition, this proposal was sent out for feedback to Cluster Coordinators, Advisers, Department Chairs who contribute SING and Deans (the responses received are below).

Current requirement: The UNST second year requirement is for students to take three SINGs and that one of the SINGs corresponds to the Junior Cluster the student pursues.

We are proposing changes to the current requirement based on assessment data, advising issues and budget.

We propose to reduce the required number of SINGs to two instead of three. For students transferring in at the Sophomore level their transfer requirements will be adjusted. We are proposing that transfer Sophomores take at least one SING (30-74 transfer credits - 2 Sophomore Inquiry courses required; 75-90 transfer credits - 1 Sophomore Inquiry course required).

### Rationale

We have been looking at the impact of UNST courses on student retention and have found that Sophomore Inquiry, when taken during the time students "should" take it (second year for students who started as freshmen or during the first PSU year for transfer sophomores), has a significant impact on fall-fall persistence. In the figure below you can see that there is >10 % increase in fall-fall persistence for students who enroll in SING the year they "should" take it. Students report that mentors, advisors and faculty play a significant role in their persistence. Using logistic regression, UNST Director of Assessment and Research Rowanna Carpenter determined that this difference in retention was significant even when taking into account GPA, prior credits, etc. The effect of SINGs on retention diminishes after the first SING, though the second SING seems to have an effect.

## Sophomore Retention by SING Status

FA 17 & 18 SO cohorts



All sophomores enrolled FA 17 or 18 matched to enrollment in a SING course during the academic year. Retention is enrollment in the fall following the cohort year.

35

In addition to the diminishing impact of the number of SINGs on retention, we are also having difficulty funding the number of graduate mentors needed to support the SING program. The SING mentor stipends are paid with SING student fees (\$59/term) and the graduate remissions come from E&G funds. In the last few years, due to budget cuts in UNST, we have asked the Colleges to help support the mentor program with their graduate remission funds. This is an increasingly difficult approach as budgets shrink. By reducing required SINGs we are reducing a fee burden to students as well reducing the need for graduate remissions.

Finally, although this was not planned, it does seem like an opportune time to reduce UNST requirements as it is likely some version of the Ethnic Studies requirement will become a degree requirement. Our goal is to align the UNST proposed change with the Ethnic Studies requirement to start in 22-23 so that there is only one major catalog change.

## Motion presented by the University Studies Council

The Faculty Senate reduces the required number of SINGs to two instead of three.

For Transferring Sophomores transferring in 30-74 transfer credits, 2 Sophomore Inquiry courses required; for those transferring in 75-90 transfer credits, 1 Sophomore Inquiry course will be required.

## Feedback and Response

After this motion was passed by the UNST Council, it was brought to the Steering Committee for next steps, specifically to recommend other committees that should be consulted before bringing these motions to the Senate. They recommended the Academic Requirements Committee, the Budget Committee, and the University Curriculum Committee. Those committees provided the following feedback.

The Academic Requirements Committee supported this revision because it better aligns with the needs of transfer students.

The Budget Committee agrees with our assessment that overall, the budget impacts will be positive or neutral and agrees that it will “likely have positive impacts on retention and recruitment as a result of greater flexibility.” However, they caution that graduate programs which depend on the UNST Mentor positions may suffer due to the corresponding reduction of graduate student funding. They also note that while demand for elective courses should increase due to increased flexibility this demand may be unevenly distributed across departments. Thus, the UNST Council hopes that programs and departments will use next academic year to revise their strategies to account for these possibilities before the reduction of SINQs occurs the following year (AY 2022-23).

Finally, the University Curriculum Committee supports the proposal but wants to ensure that UNST continues to work with the Writing Council to ensure that our student writing skills continue to be properly supported. The UNST Council is currently in the process of revising its Communication Goal and will take this motion into revision as it continues this work.