May 30, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: PSU Deans and Department Chairs

From: Mary Ann Barham, University Curriculum Committee; Kris Kern, Academic Requirements Committee

This memo is meant to communicate and clarify three motions passed by the Faculty Senate in April 2002. In addition, the ARC has created a system of decision-making that affects UNST clusters. Please distribute this memo to anyone who may need to know these important changes in University policy.

From University Curriculum Committee (UCC):

Motion 1: All 400 level courses should have prerequisites, such as one or more of the following:
   a. Specific course(s)
   b. Specific class standing or credit hours (e.g. junior, senior)
   c. Relevant experience/other (such as permission of instructor)

Rationale: The UCC made this recommendation in the interest of maintaining a high level of rigor in the University's curriculum. This is in keeping with the historical understanding that 400-level courses are taught at a level appropriate for upper-division majors or students with a high level of academic and/or intellectual achievement. Confusion seemed to exist with regard to the use of prerequisites, partially due to the advent of the University Studies program and the upper division clusters. However, the UCC assumed that 400-level courses require and rightfully expect students to have prior coursework and/or relevant experience for successful completion of the course. Thus, it seemed appropriate for the University to expect that students registering for these courses need a particular level of preparedness in order to be successful and that those expectations be stated explicitly in the course description to communicate them clearly and to allow students to make appropriate and informed choices.

Motion 2: Given that clusters were initially designed to include only courses without prerequisites (other than SINOQ) and, that in reality many courses have them (although the prerequisite issue may not be so large a problem),
   d. Clusters should rely less on 400-level courses, such that no more than 50% of each cluster is at the 400-level; and
   e. Cluster courses with prerequisites should be flagged in the time schedule with a notation that refers to the catalog or department for prerequisite information.
Rationale: The UCC made this recommendation because it believes that the University needs to be clear about the expectations it has for students taking cluster courses. Historically, it has been assumed that cluster courses would have no prerequisites. But, given the reality that courses in clusters are often serving multiple student audiences this is often not the case. The UCC understands that many faculty find it difficult to teach courses which may include both majors and students meeting a UNST requirement. Thus, it is essential that the expectations be clearly stated. The UCC believes that both students and faculty would be better served if the clusters included fewer courses at the 400-level. And, if any cluster courses have prerequisites, they are duly noted. This can be done by marking these courses in some fashion in each of the cluster list.

Note: This motion was written in conjunction with the UNST cluster coordinator, Mark Trowbridge. The content of the clusters has been surveyed and a limited number of clusters do not meet this criteria. However, over the next few years the content of these clusters can be brought into alignment with these criteria via the addition and deletion of courses.

From Academic Requirements Committee (ARC)

Motion 3: Students cannot use courses, including cross-listed courses, from their major to satisfy upper division cluster requirements (Effective 2002-03).

Rationale: The purpose of general education as a philosophy is to broaden students' academic knowledge/exposure beyond the major. Given the large number of transfer students who enter at the junior level, the upper division cluster may be the only opportunity to expose students to upper division coursework outside their major. The policy also makes a clear statement for advising purposes.

New Guidelines: ARC will no longer consider non-U courses for required courses in clusters (Effective Fall 2002).

Rationale: A major issue has been the growth in the number of ARC petitions received from students requesting that they be allowed to substitute a non-U course at PSU for a cluster course. Academic Requirements Committee members expressed concern that allowing any course at PSU to meet the cluster requirement undermines the value and purpose of cluster courses and their approval process. There is an established process in which faculty state how University Studies goals will addressed in the course. Cluster courses have elements beyond appropriate content that are, or should be, explicit in the pedagogy of the courses. Therefore, a non-U course should not be allowed to meet a cluster requirement.

In addition, for transfer students, the three upper division cluster courses and the capstone are often the only coursework which give them the opportunity to be exposed to the skills and goals of the University general education curriculum. Since they account for only 18 upper division credits, it was decided that non-U courses from other institutions would also not be accepted for cluster requirements.

Exceptions would be made for students involved in Study Abroad programs. These students would be able to petition to use other courses for their cluster provided they work with advisors or cluster coordinators prior to the experience abroad to plan their program. As part of the petition process, upon their return they would also need to write an essay addressing how the course(s) met the University Studies goals. Furthermore, if a cluster coordinator believes that a student has extenuating circumstances, ARC will consider “special circumstance” petitions.