

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bobbi Owen, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education

FROM: Erika Lindemann, Interim Associate Dean for Undergraduate Curricula

DATE: April 6, 2009

SUBJECT: What is a major for the BA degree?

I request that the Administrative Boards of the General College and College of Arts and Sciences define the minimum and maximum number of courses and credit hours that comprise a major for the bachelor of arts degree in the College of Arts and Sciences. Currently, no authoritative policy document contains such a definition, yet it is necessary for several reasons:

- Major grade point averages are computed on the basis of the number of courses in the major.
- All majors require students to earn grades of C or better in at least 18 hours in the major, but it can be unclear to what courses this regulation applies
- Since more than half of the courses and credit hours for a major must be unique or exclusive to the major and not double counted or shared with a second major, it is necessary to know how many courses make up the major in order to compute “half.”
- Defining the major is necessary in order to determine which courses lie outside the major and can potentially be used to satisfy the Supplemental Education requirement (three courses numbered above 199 and offered in each of the three divisions of the College of Arts and Sciences outside the major field of study).
- Custom and tradition define the major for the bachelor of arts degree as eight to ten courses. At the same time, some units require students to take an additional course or courses before entering the so-called “major core”; such gateway courses may also have their own prerequisites. The function of a gateway course is to insure that students have

adequate preparation for the major, but these courses also increase the number of courses students must take to fulfill major requirements. Honors thesis courses count toward the major core in some units but not in others. Courses that are cross-listed between a student's major and another unit count toward the major, but this regulation is a matter of tradition, not documented policy.

Following discussions with Dean Carolyn Cannon and the senior advisors in the Academic Advising Program, I seek the approval of the Administrative Boards for the following recommendations:

1. To define the major core for the bachelor of arts degree in the College of Arts and Sciences as eight to ten courses or a maximum of 35 credit hours. This core forms the basis for computing a student's grade point average in the major and determines whether or not more than half of the courses/hours in the major are unique to the major and are not double counted across majors or between the major and the minor.
2. To permit one course (a maximum of four credit hours) to serve as a gateway for majors for bachelor of arts degrees in the College of Arts and Sciences. Such a gateway to the major differs from a common or "core" course or courses that all majors must complete, in that a gateway course is often taken as an exploratory or preparatory first course. It is often, but not always, a prerequisite to all or most of the courses in the major proper. A gateway course shall not be counted among the eight to ten courses making up the major, shall not be counted in computing the grade point average for a student's major, and may be used to satisfy the supplemental education requirement if the course is numbered above 199 and satisfies divisional distribution requirements.
3. Some majors for the bachelor of arts degree in the College of Arts and Sciences give students the option of selecting courses from lists of approved courses, or require students to take additional courses, offered by units outside the school, department, or curriculum in which the student is majoring. Courses from these lists may be used to satisfy the supplemental education requirement, so long as they are not being used to satisfy the major, are numbered above 199, and are appropriately distributed across divisions of the College of Arts and Sciences.
4. Units in the College of Arts and Sciences may determine whether or not honors thesis courses make up the major core of eight to ten courses or increase it. However, no more than one honors thesis course (three credit hours) may be used to increase the number of courses in the students' major, bringing the total number of courses to eleven courses.