SCIENCES CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES OF THE SCIENCES CURRICULUM COMMITTEE held on Friday, April 6, 2018 at 9:30 am in the Dean’s Conference Room, 2nd Floor, Sidney Smith Hall

Present

Mary Pugh (Acting Vice-Dean)  
Rick Collins  
Rebecca Jockusch

Thomas MacKay  
Asher Cutter  
Nohjin Kee

Martha Harris  
Georgia Dryden  
Terry Lago

Kevin Mak  
Michelle French  
Thierry Mallevaey

Stavroula Andreopoulos  
Alison Gibbs  
Elizabeth Page-Gould

Michelle Arnot  
Andrew Hardy  
Ryan Woolfrey

Christine Babikian  
Tony Harris  
Ulrich Wortmann

Dror Bar-Natan  
Karen Ing  
Yufei Zhang

Call to Order and Acting Vice-Dean’s Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 9:36 am by the Acting Vice-Dean, Undergraduate & International, Professor Mary Pugh, who welcomed everyone. As this was her last curriculum committee meeting as Acting Vice-Dean, she thanked the committee for the discussions, collaboration, and engagement over the last few months.

1. Report from the Acting Vice-Dean, Undergraduate & International

Vice-Dean Pugh addressed the committee on two items.

Credit/No Credit (CR/NCR):

In response to the recent change to the Credit/No Credit policy at UTSC, which changed the deadline for choosing the CR/NCR option until the last day of classes, Vice-Dean Pugh would like to solicit feedback from the committee to see if there was a desire to amend the existing CR/NCR policy.

The CR/NCR option was introduced after the last curriculum renewal about ten years ago to encourage exploration of elective courses not normally taken by students for fear of poor performance and the resulting impact on their GPA. Initially, the threshold required to attain a CR notation was set at 60%. The policy was later revised to lower the minimum mark threshold to 50% and to allow students to select this grading scheme for up to 2.0 full course equivalents.

Two main observations/trends have surfaced in recent years:

- Different professional programs (e.g., law or medical schools) might view and interpret the CR/NCR notations on students’ transcripts differently
- Faculty members regularly observe students performing and engaging in a course until the minimum 50% threshold has been reached and then withdraw from the remaining course activities

Several members acknowledged the positive effects of this policy in reducing the anxiety of students, particularly those who are struggling academically and in need of counselling or those who genuinely want to explore courses.
However, others expressed concerns about the easing of the terms and conditions, and the potential for students to “game”/manipulate their GPA. Another member felt that students are thinking short term and do not have an idea of how the CR/NCR arrangement may affect their long-term goals.

A member asked about the existence of a document that would encapsulate the different views and perspectives from professional schools and programs about the CR/NCR notations. Another member, who is currently teaching large courses filled by students looking to fulfill breadth requirements, expressed interest in seeing the course average breakdown for regular students versus students who have selected the CR/NCR option.

A member thought that students would not be eligible to select the CR/NCR option for required program courses. This prompted a clarification that a course that has been opted in as CR/NCR cannot be used by students to fulfill their program requirements. This does not mean, however, that students are not eligible to select the CR/NCR option for a required program course, as these are two separate matters.

There was no strong consensus from the committee to Vice-Dean Pugh’s question of whether there would be a preference as to the last date for students to select the CR/NCR option.

*Arts & Science Self-Study: Commencement Data:*

Vice-Dean Pugh stated that the self-study is still being written but the Dean’s Office now has commencement data that could be incorporated in the report. From the review of graduating students’ program of study combinations, there was a minor increase in the number of students pursuing double majors in the humanities sector, and a minor increase in the number of students pursuing double majors in the sciences sector. About 30% of the Arts & Science graduating students have completed double majors across sectors (e.g., one in the social sciences and the other in the sciences).

**2. Presentation and Discussion: “When does the academic year start – May or September?”**

Mr. Thomas MacKay, Director of Faculty Governance & Curriculum Services, and Dr. Martha Harris, Manager of Governance & Curriculum Services at the Faculty of Arts & Science presented a new proposal to introduce a formal effective date for, as well as the fall implementation of the Arts & Science Calendar.

Academic changes can impact students significantly, yet the current Arts & Science Calendar does not explicitly state the time period for which it is in effect. The current situation is such that the Calendar is primed for a mid-March publication and is implemented in systems as being in effect from May to the following April. In theory, this means that all changes to course prerequisites and program requirements, albeit last minute on occasion, can be in effect as of the summer following the publication of the Calendar. This would therefore come as a shock to students who have been using the previous year’s Calendar to map out their academic plans.

By implementing the Calendar with course and program changes effective in the fall, students would have more time to absorb the new information and requirements. It would also allow the Enrolment and Records unit at the Office of the Faculty Registrar to implement the necessary changes across various student information systems, most notably ROSI and Degree Explorer.

Two questions were raised by committee members concerning the fall implementation proposal. The first question sought clarification of the program enrolment period; the second question inquired about possible changes to the 2018-19 governance cycle dates. Mr. MacKay responded that the program enrolment period spans from March to September, and that the Arts & Science Governance unit is still aiming for three rounds of meetings in the 2018-19 academic year. Furthermore, the Curriculum Management (CM) platform is open all year round for academic units to propose (minor) curricular changes but that they should be mindful of workflows concerning timetabling and scheduling.
Vice-Dean Pugh commented that while academic units believe approved changes to program requirements should be implemented as soon as possible, it is not fair to students who have been planning their courses using the previous set of published requirements. She encouraged committee members to reach out to the Office of the Dean and the Governance unit at the Faculty of Arts & Science should they foresee potential problems with the fall implementation proposal.

5. Course and Program Proposals for Full Review

Vice-Dean Pugh moved this item forward in the agenda to accommodate presenters’ schedules.

Psychology, Department of:

Professor Elizabeth Page-Gould, Acting Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies from the Department of Psychology presented the proposal to create a new Category 2 Certificate in Psychology of Economics and Management. The creation of this Certificate is in response to the number of Economics and Rotman Commerce students who have been enrolling in the Psychology Minor. The goal of the Certificate is to provide students with more guidance and enrolment priority with respect to relevant courses. Students enrolling in this Certificate will be exposed to themes such as social and cultural psychology, motivation, and leadership in organizations.

A member inquired about the number of courses required for the Certificate. Professor Page-Gould replied that once students have completed 1.0 full course equivalent from introductory psychology, management or microeconomics, they would complete a half-credit course in social psychology, a half-credit course in organizational behaviour, plus two additional half-year courses in social cognition, cross-cultural psychology, intergroup relations, or positive psychology.

Vice-Dean Pugh emphasized that the Certificate in Psychology of Economics and Management is the Faculty’s very first undergraduate certificate program and that it will get reviewed in accordance with the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP). In addition, there would be limited enrolment in this program due to enrolment pressure faced by the Department of Psychology.

A member asked if the students would then pursue the new Certificate program as opposed to the existing Psychology Minor. Vice-Dean Pugh responded that the Certificate presents an opportunity for students to enroll in and complete something that is curated as opposed to random courses.

A follow-up question was raised to inquire where academic units could get more information about certificate programs. Vice-Dean Pugh replied that the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources currently offers a certificate program for students who have completed undergraduate degrees. There is also the example of what the Department of Psychology is offering with its new Certificate. Mr. MacKay remarked that there are also Category 3 certificates, which are not-for-credit certificates, typically offered through continuing, professional and executive education. Dr. Harris added that she would be able to circulate more information to the committee at a later time.

3. Approval of Minutes of the February 2, 2018 Meeting of Sciences Curriculum Committee

This item resumed immediately after the review of the new proposal for the Certificate in Psychology of Economics and Management. The meeting minutes were approved.

4. Course and Program Modifications for Abbreviated/Expedited Review

No issues were raised.
5. Course and Program Proposals for Full Review (Continued)

Earth Sciences, Department of:

Professor Ulrich Wortmann, Associate Chair of Undergraduate Affairs from the Department of Earth Sciences presented the proposal to modify its existing Earth and Environmental Systems Major. This program modification proposal was approved.

Statistical Sciences, Department of:

Professor Alison Gibbs, Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies (Statistics) presented proposals to create one new course as well as modify one existing course. The new ACT350H1 (Applied Probability for Actuarial Science) course is part of the broader program modifications that were approved at the February 2018 Sciences Curriculum Committee meeting. This course would expose students to a different flavour of probability necessary for them to prepare for the Society of Actuary requirements and examinations.

STA201H1 (Why Numbers Matter) was initially designed for Humanities students to take to fulfill their breadth requirements. It was observed that a large number of Rotman Commerce students had been taking this course. In consultation with the Director of Rotman Commerce, first-year mathematics courses including MAT133Y1 were added as exclusions to this course. Vice-Dean Pugh noted that some first-year students would benefit from this course and suggested allowing them to enrol while keeping exclusions to other mathematics courses.

Immunology, Department of:

Professor Thierry Mallevaey, Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies from the Department of Immunology presented proposals to modify an existing program and an existing course. Both proposals were approved.

Mathematics, Department of:

Professor Dror Bar-Natan, Associate Chair, Undergraduate from the Department of Mathematics presented the new course proposal for MAT377H1 (Mathematical Probability). In response to this course proposal, Vice-Dean Pugh identified in the Rationale field of the proposal some text that could be incorporated in the course description to better inform students of the content of this course. The course description was subsequently updated with additional text following this meeting.

A student member expressed concerns that the Rationale field of the proposal had appeared to imply that this course would not be suitable for students following a physical sciences pathway. The Rationale field of the proposal was subsequently updated with additional text following this meeting. This course proposal was approved.

Chemistry, Department of:

Professor Rebecca Jockusch, Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies from the Department of Chemistry presented the proposal for a new First-Year Seminar course (Biosensor Technology and Applications for the Non-Scientist).

[Addendum: Following further consultation with the Department, it was confirmed that this would be a half-credit course.] This course proposal was approved.
Physiology, Department of:

Professor Nohjin Kee, Undergraduate Coordinator from the Department of Physiology presented the proposals to retire PSL444Y1 (Neuroscience II: Cellular and Molecular) and create two new half-credit courses instead. The creation of PSL445H1 (Neuroscience: Cellular and Molecular) and PSL446H1 (Neural Disorders) would give students enrolled in the Physiology Major and Specialist programs more options to satisfy their completion requirements. Feedback from consultation with the Human Biology Program also suggested that Neuroscience students would be more likely to take courses offered in the half-year format. The department confirmed that students would be able to enroll in PSL446H1 without having completed PSL445H1. All of the course proposals were approved.

Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Department of:

Professor Asher Cutter, Associate Chair, Undergraduate of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology presented two new course proposals. In response to the proposal for EEB462H1 (Phylogenetic Systematics), it was confirmed that STA261H1 and not STA251H1 would be included as one of the prerequisite course choices. In addition, the creation of NUS201H0 (Life Science Course A) would allow the department to keep track of students who are taking courses at the National University of Singapore to fulfill the completion requirements of the Biology Minor that is jointly offered with that institution. Both course proposals were approved.

6. Other Business

There was no other business.

7. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 11:03 am.

Minutes prepared by Kevin Mak, Curriculum and Governance Assistant, Faculty of Arts & Science