

Pass, Fail proposal, new co-terminal degree, and more move closer to reality at UGSC meeting

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On Tuesday, April 12, representatives of the majority of Illinois Tech’s various academic departments met in a Wishnick Hall classroom to discuss, propose, and approve new policies impacting undergraduate students at the university. The Undergraduate Studies Committee (UGSC), which assembles twice every month during the academic year, is one step on the route from an idea to an enforced institutional practice for any item which impacts undergraduate education, pushing its own initiatives as well to increase the quality of academic life afforded to the growing undergraduate population of the Illinois Institute of Technology. While most of the committee’s decisions must be finalized and approved by the University Faculty Council (UFC), the UGSC plays a vital role in the administrative life of the university and some of its most important academic decisions.

During the April 12 meeting, a great variety of topics were covered. To start, Dr. Greg Pulliam, the group’s Secretary and representative of the Department of Humanities, presented a summary of a recent review of courses with communication-intensive designations (C-courses) within the biology and biomedical engineering

departments. An internal designation with loose requirements, C-course criteria are meant to ensure that certain classes expose students to “discipline-specific” communication skills in a manner that allows them to practice and develop those skills. BIOL 490 and BIOL 491, both independent study courses, were unanimously stripped of their C-course designation, BME 491 and BME 492 were unanimously turned over to a representative of that department for annual review, and all other classes surveyed were approved for continuing C-course designation. These decisions were unanimously approved by the UGSC and forwarded on to the registrar.

After some discussion and UGSC approval of a new co-terminal degree (BS in Chemistry and MS in Sustainability Management), the representative of the chemistry department was advised to bring that proposal to the next step in the process so that the degree could become a reality in the next year or two. Following that vote, the group elected a new Chair, Ray Trygstad, Vice Chair, Dr. Greg Pulliam, and Secretary, Dr. Becky Steffenson, a decision now pending UFC approval.

The dominant discussion of the meeting, though, came with some final haggling over the language of the SGA-proposed pass/fail proposal, which has been

considered continuously throughout this semester. In the end, the UGSC voted nearly unanimously to adopt the following language:

Undergraduates at IIT may take up to 3 courses as Pass/Fail, provided that any such course meets the following criteria:

1. The department offering the course has designated it as eligible for the Pass/Fail grading option, and
 2. The course is:
 - a. A free elective within the student’s major program, or
 - b. Designated as eligible for Pass/Fail grading by the academic unit or other authority which oversees the student’s major and/or minor programs, or
 - c. A course taken above and beyond all of the student’s programs’ requirements for graduation.
- If a student takes a course as Pass/Fail, a Pass will be earned for the equivalent of a standard grade of A, B, C or D, and will not figure into GPA calculations; a Fail will equal the standard grade of E, and will figure into GPA calculations.
 - Students must declare their intention to take a course pass/fail by the end of the add/drop period.
 - A course taken initially as pass/fail may only be repeated for a grade change as pass/fail; likewise, a course taken initially as a

standard graded course may only be repeated for a change of grade as a standard graded course.

While it has been approved by the UGSC, this policy must go through the process of UFC approval before it can become an official part of the university’s undergraduate programs. Given the scheduling and grading system logistics involved, it will likely not be in place until Spring of 2017 even if immediately approved by UFC.

The final topic of discussion during the UGSC meeting was an issue that had also been discussed briefly at the previous meeting on March 22: improving midterm feedback from professors, especially in 300-level courses and above (which currently have no strict feedback requirements at the midway point of each semester). It had been determined since the last meeting that the majority of such courses did not have any midterm grades entered at the time of the withdraw date, and two alternate proposals were put forth for inclusion in official university materials with the aim of making midterm feedback standard practice among faculty. Discussion was cut short due to time constraints, but the topic is set for expanded consideration at the UGSC’s next (and last) meeting of the spring semester.

All documents related to meetings of the UGSC can be found at iit.edu/~ugsc.

Great Lakes Student Conference brings Steel Bridge competition, more to campus



The Illinois Tech chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers hosted the Great Lakes Student Conference from April 14-16. 550 students from 19 schools competed in a series of different civil, architectural, and environmental events such as concrete canoe and steel bridge.

Photos by Khaleela Zaman