

Reformulation of chemistry degree programs discussed at latest UGSC meeting

Soren Spicknall
COPY EDITOR

The most recent meeting of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (UGSC), the body composed largely of faculty and staff which makes major decisions about the future of undergraduate education at Illinois Tech, covered a range of proposals stemming from previous discussions and from new material presented by various departments. At the beginning of its biweekly meeting on Tuesday, November 8, the gathered representatives discussed the merits and drawbacks of three separate proposals meant to address a debate from the previous meeting, focusing on how pass/fail credits should be counted when calculating a student's GPA for graduating with honors.

The first proposed solution was not a proposal in the formal sense, as it suggested making no change to the existing policy, which requires at least 60 "graded" hours to be taken at Illinois Tech for a student to be considered for honors. Since "graded" has a specific definition at the university level, pass/fail courses would not be counted toward that 60-credit total or in the honors GPA calculation. The second proposal sought to remove the word "graded" from that statement, allowing pass/fail courses to count toward the required credit total for an honors designation, but leaving the issue of GPA calculation unresolved. The final proposal was formatted as follows:

"For purposes of Honors or High Honors designation, PASS/FAIL courses are considered graded courses. However, if the student has elected PASS/FAIL grading, a lower bound on GPA will be calculated utilizing the lowest letter grade qualifying as PASS for those courses, and this lower bound on GPA will be used to determine eligibility for honors designations.

If the course is only offered as PASS/FAIL (i.e. not student elected) it will not be included in this minimum bound calculation."

Because this full range of proposals was not available at the previous UGSC meeting, discussion on them was relatively limited compared to the extended debate two weeks before. Representatives were asked to take all three proposals back to their departments for feedback, and to reconvene for a decision at the next meeting.

Next, slight revisions to the Neural Engineering and Imaging Tracks of the Biomedical Engineering curriculum were presented as an information item, consisting of a change of a single course requirement and no change in the number of required hours to complete the degree.

Discussion quickly moved on to the next agenda item, a proposed B.S. in Molecular Biochemistry and Biophysics (MBB) Co-Terminal degree with the M.S. in Molecular Biochemistry and Biophysics. Because the degree was being presented for the first time that Tuesday, an approval vote will not be held until the next UGSC meeting. There was some opposition to a change made in the co-terminal degree which removed a required specific elective in the master's degree it is based upon, highlighting the principle held by some that co-terminal degrees should be as closely linked to their individual undergraduate and graduate degrees as possible. Some were concerned that significant changes in degree programs while creating co-terminal degrees could lead to a requirement that those degrees be accredited additionally as individual degree programs, which is not currently the case. Others in the group pointed to the existence of certain co-terminal degree programs which already slightly modify the requirements of their undergraduate or graduate portion,

saying that any precedent there might have been for requirements to remain untouched had been usurped by practical implementation of different co-terminal degrees over time. With those in the room agreeing to disagree for the time being, the proposed program was put aside for further discussion at the next meeting.

The most substantial topic of the afternoon came when two representatives of the Department of Chemistry gave a formal presentation previewing a complete overhaul of their degree programs, excluding the baseline B.S. in Chemistry with no specialization. The presenters explained that their department currently offered six specialized degree programs, created in 2005, each with four or five additional course requirements beyond the regular chemistry degree. Those programs had been plagued by extremely low enrollment numbers (three of them experiencing zero enrollment at one point or another), attributed to poor marketing and the programs' lack of relevance to modern chemistry careers. The chemistry department hoped to close its current programs and launch five new programs in the Fall semester of 2017 after assessing tracks that are currently in demand, wishing to create a diverse array of degrees that are more easily marketable than their previous specialized options. Those five degrees would be in bioanalytical, computational, environmental, forensic, and medicinal chemistry, each of which would be a "first" for Chicagoland universities, the state of Illinois, or even the U.S. as a whole.

The chemistry department's proposal included a plan to refresh discipline-specific expertise in its ranks, as well as expansion of research work. Only two new faculty members would be needed between all five programs, since the programs were largely

formulated in such a way that credits would be shared with other departments. That said, eight new plans were still planned to be created within the department to fit the needs of the new degrees. Solving the other half of the department's ongoing recruitment issues, its staff announced plans to aggressively market its new degrees in a way that had never been done for the programs formulated in 2005, attracting students from across the country and abroad.

Some UGSC members expressed worries about the burden that having low enrollment in the future might put on the department to maintain and staff courses with very few students, but the department's representatives highlighted the high degree of crossover between credits as a way of mitigating potential strain. A number of typos were found in the department's proposals for the credit breakdown of its five new degrees, as well, all of which must be corrected before the degrees are approved by the UGSC.

After the Department of Chemistry's presentation, the UGSC briefly reviewed and voted upon reports generated by the Communication Across the Curriculum program, a subcommittee of the group, which had evaluated coursework in the Department of Humanities and the Department of Math & Science Education. The reports were voted through without much discussion, aside from a clarification from UGSC chair Ray Trygstad about why the materials required a vote in the first place.

UGSC meetings take place biweekly in various rooms within Wishnick Hall, and documentation of its members, decisions, and discussions can be found at iit.edu/~ugsc.



Stuart School of Business
ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

GRADUATE PROGRAM
INFORMATION SESSION
+ RECEPTION

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15 | 5:30-7 P.M.

Illinois Tech Downtown Campus

REGISTER NOW! bitly.com/stuartinfo