



The University of Georgia

University Council
Athens, Georgia 30602

March 21, 2012

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Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the Terry College of Business to allow departments to specify a minimum grade of “C” (2.0) for certain prerequisite courses in certain majors will be an agenda item for the March 28, 2012, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

David E. Shipley, Chair
University Curriculum Committee

cc: Provost Jere W. Morehead
Dr. Laura D. Jolly



The University of Georgia

Dale L. Goodhue
Department Head,

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Chair of Business Administration

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**Mr. David Shipley, Chair of the University Curriculum Committee
C/O Fiona Liken, Director, Curriculum Systems
Room 320 New College
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602**

February 20, 2012

Dear Dr. Shipley,

Please accept the attached proposal to the UGA Curriculum Committee. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Dale L. Goodhue

Approved

MIS Department Proposal to the UGA Curriculum Committee to allow departments to specify that for certain prerequisite courses in certain majors, a minimum grade of a “C” be required to satisfy prerequisite requirements. This should only be allowed when the “post-requisite” course clearly builds on and requires a minimum proficiency in the prerequisite course material.

As I now understand it, the current UGA policy allows majors to specify that students must get at least a “C” in all required major courses before the major requirements are met. However, it does not allow majors to require a “C” in prerequisite courses before the post-requisite courses can be taken.

This poses a serious problem for the Management Information Systems (MIS) major, and I presume, several other majors within and outside the Terry College. For as long as I have been at UGA (15 years), the MIS major has enforced its policy of requiring at least a “C” in prerequisite courses before allowing students to count the prerequisite as being fulfilled. The rationale for this is most easily seen in the following sequence of prerequisite courses:

MIST 4610 Database.

Covers concepts of designing databases to make large amounts of data accessible, and querying those databases to update or retrieve specific data.

MIST 4600 Computer Programming for Business (Java) Prerequisite: MIST4610.

Covers basic programming concepts including memory and variables; loops and array structures, object oriented as opposed to procedural oriented programming; designing, building, and using object classes, and finally, incorporating databases into programs, with retrieval and updating from Java objects. In teaching this last topic, instructors must assume students are well versed in database structure and query design. (At one point MIST 4610 was a co-requisite rather than a prerequisite for this course, with the thought that by the time databases were covered in the last half of the course, students would have enough of an understanding of databases to be able to successfully create the needed Java queries. However, students with a weak understanding of databases from their concurrent MIST 4610 course suffered from this arrangement.)

MIST 4630 Net Programming (Java) Prerequisite: MIST 4600.

Covers interacting with Java programs through the web, using HTML, Java Server Pages and Servlets (specialized Java classes) to connect all the way from HTML input on the web, through Java programs, to databases and back again to HTML output on the web. It is absolutely critical that students have a sound

understanding of Java (i.e. MIST 4600) so they will be able to make sense of the material presented in this course.

MIST 4620 Systems Analysis and Design. Prerequisites: MIST 4630, MIST 5750 (Business Process Management) and MIST 5740 (Project Management)

This is a capstone course that relies on both (1) project management and business process knowledge developed from earlier courses (MIST 5750 and MIST 5740) with (2) the technical knowledge developed in the above string of prerequisite courses. The course covers new material on requirements elicitation and determination, and additional process modeling techniques, so that students can engage in a major team project that starts with a business problem or opportunity, elicits the requirements, designs a solution, and builds a working prototype system. (At one point MIST 4630 was a co-requisite rather than a prerequisite for this course, with the thought that by the time teams were actually building their prototype system, they would be far enough along in their MIST 4630 course to have the requisite knowledge. Because this has turned out to not be effective enough preparation, we have recently redesigned the MIS major specifically to ensure that students in MIST 4620 have a strong understanding and ability in system construction before they begin to design their solutions to business problem in this course.)

As is hopefully clear from the above descriptions, (1) the MIS faculty is working hard to create an effective sequence of courses that gives our students an excellent understanding and ability to contribute to organizational efforts to solve business problems with information technology; and (2) the knowledge we need to impart to our graduates requires building conceptual understanding in successive layers, each building on the lower levels to create a powerful overall understanding at the end.

We have required a “C” in each prerequisite course because the conceptual development of each successive course requires a sufficient understanding of the concepts in the prerequisite courses before the new material can be understood. It is not enough to say that before a student graduates he or she must have a “C” level of understanding of the prerequisite material. That “C” level understanding is required to be able to make sense of what is being taught in the post-requisite courses.

Over time, instructors develop a fairly clear sense of what level of performance on assignments and exams is evidence of “enough” knowledge to move on to the next course. Along those lines, we have targeted our assignments and exams and the grading of those to distinguish between those who have sufficient understanding and those who do not. For the decade and a half that I have been in the MIS department, assignments and exams and their grading were designed so that a “C” grade meant that the minimal level of understanding had been achieved.

If we are required to allow students with a “D” in these prerequisite courses to move on to the later courses, one of two things will happen. (1) We will not adjust our grading, and students who received a “D” because they were not well enough prepared will still

enter the post-requisite courses, bringing down the general level of the class. The instructor will have to slow down the presentation of material so those unprepared students will not be left in the dust. Or (2) we will adjust our grading in the prerequisite courses so that what previously would have been "D" level work will be graded as an "F". This will essentially shift all the grades across the board to lower levels – some "A"s will become "B"s; some "B"s will become "C"s, etc. Students in the major will see their grade point averages drop. Non-major students who might have taken one of the earlier courses (MIST 4610 for example) but did not intend to continue in the major, may receive "F"s for what we would have considered "D" level work, because their performance wasn't sufficiently strong to allow them continue to the post-requisite courses they never intended taking. This last would be happening just at the time when the Terry College is trying to encourage non-majors to take some of its introductory courses. Neither of these outcomes (nor some middle ground between them) is a positive development. In addition, some faculty are concerned with the integrity of adjusting the grading system as a workaround for the problem.

We believe that changing the policy to allow only grades of "C" or above to satisfy prerequisite requirements in certain sequentially linked chains of courses is reasonable and appropriate. It is certainly preferable to enforcing a policy (of which we were unaware of until the beginning of this calendar year) that insists that a grade of "D" will satisfy all prerequisite requirements. If the committee is doubtful that such a change is a good idea, I urge it to canvas other majors in UGA where such a practice has been standard procedure for years, and where adhering to the now evident current policy would cause problems such as those described here.

Thank you for your consideration!


Dale L. Goodhue