4.4: Repeating Courses

Item for: Discussion/Approval

At the June 5, 2008 Senate meeting this item was referred back to the Academic Policy Committee for further review. APC sought feedback from the Academic Advisory Council and the Associate Deans. (See pp. 2-3)

MOTION: That the revised Senate Policy on Repetition of Courses and the revised Senate Policy on the Calculation of Averages be approved.

REPETITION OF COURSES

Students may repeat any failed or passed course twice once. Students who have failed a course three times which is required for graduation in a particular program must withdraw from that program.* In the Faculty of Engineering passed courses may be repeated only in the final year of study as may be allowed by the Faculty.

*The Faculty of Nursing’s policy that a student may only repeat a course once will remain in effect. Nursing students who have twice failed a course which is required for graduation in the Nursing program must withdraw from that program.

In exceptional circumstances, permission for taking a course a fourth time may be granted by the Dean (or designate) of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the Dean (or designate) of the Faculty in which the course is offered, following a close review of the student’s academic record and documented extenuating circumstances that might have impacted the student’s success in the course. The decision of the Dean (or designate) of the Faculty in which the student is registered shall be final and shall be filed together with the rationale with the Office of the Registrar.

CALCULATION OF AVERAGES

... Provided that the course is available in a subsequent registration period, a student may repeat a course in accordance with the Senate Policy on the Repetition of Courses for purposes of upgrading a major or cumulative average. Both the original mark and the upgraded mark(s) obtained will remain on the student's official record. However, the marks received in the second and third attempts will be used in calculating the cumulative and major averages.

Rationale:

- At its January Student Committee members reviewed a concern regarding the Senate policy that a course may be repeated only once. Faculty and student members agreed that students should be able to repeat courses for a second time without having to submit to a lengthy appeal process.
- This matter was brought to an Associate Deans meeting, resulting in the proposed above changes to the policy, by majority agreement. The Student Committee approved the policy with some revisions at its March 2008 meeting and forwarded it to APC for review and approval.
- APC agrees with the proposed change to the policy. Further, APC concurred with the discussion at the Associate Deans’ meeting that additional flexibility should be brought into the policy to allow for exceptions in special cases. (e.g., a student returns to the University after a lengthy absence determined to make a fresh start and complete a degree. If s/he failed a required course three times during his/her previous enrolment at the University, s/he would not be permitted to attempt the course a fourth time based on the proposed wording and thus would not be able to complete his/her degree.)
- Concern was expressed with regard to the issue that it is imperative that students in the Faculty of Nursing are able to pass both their clinical and theory courses, within a close timeframe, as they are equally important for application in a professional nursing environment where patient care is critical. The proposed revision would negatively impact student learning in the Faculty of Nursing since it would allow for the...
uncoupling of theory and practice courses (which are closely integrated), possibly over a period of a year or two, impacting the student’s ability to attain the course and program learning outcomes. As such, Nursing has been exempted from this policy change.

- Bylaw 51 exempts the Faculty of Law from this policy.

Feedback from the Academic Advisory Council (October 2008)

Discussion:
- provide the opportunity to repeat a course up to two times and the two best grades appear on the transcript;
- the Dean or Dean’s designate should only approve a third opportunity in specifically defined exceptional circumstances so that a student can be given an extra opportunity to repeat a course more than twice, and where the last two grades remain on the transcript;
- to be reasonable and practical, an academic standing decision needs to be considered prior to allowing the repeat of a course
  - if the student cannot possibly achieve the required standing in the program she should not be permitted to retake the course;
- perhaps a small committee instead of one individual should make these decisions within each Faculty to provide consistent fairness;
- reasons for allowing the repeated course ought to automatically include health and compassionate reasons.

Feedback from the Associate Deans Meeting (November 2008):

That criteria to be used by the dean or designate, to determine whether a student should be permitted to repeat a course for a fourth time, could include:

- medical or compassionate grounds with appropriate documentation
- academic purposes (e.g., a student in good academic standing but who needs to repeat a required course; student who is within 5 courses of graduation and needs to repeat a course)
- returning adult student who may have taken a course many years before and now needs to repeat a course

The Faculties of Graduate Studies, Law, Education and Nursing should be exempt from this policy.

Letter from Faculty of Science (June 2008)

1. The Office of the Dean of Science is opposed to this change. In meetings of the Science Academic Standing Committee we have seen ample evidence that allowing more than one repetition of a course often results in a weak student being allowed to continue registration and pay fees without making any real progress towards a degree. At our last meeting I showed you an extreme example of such a case - a student that has now completed every course required for graduation, has completed every course in the major with a grade of at least C-, but it is impossible for the student to obtain a cumulative average of over 5.0.

It is possible that when the changes were being considered in mind was the record of a student that, except for difficulty in one or two courses had a successful record. It is my experience that this case is the exception, rather than the norm. In fact, my experience with Academic Standing over the last decade has resulted in a practice in the Faculty of Science to adopt a more strict enforcement of the existing Senate Policy. For the exceptional case, after consultation with the student’s faculty, we allowed more than a single repetition.
2. **Suggested Amendment**: In the Faculty of Science courses can be repeated only once.  
Note: The Faculty of Nursing and the Faculty of Law are exempt from the amendment. We ask for the same exemption. For the purposes of student retention, we wish to have the chance to speak with and offer counsel to students that have twice failed a course.

3. The proposed revised policy allows a student, under exceptional circumstances, to repeat a course a third time (take the course a fourth time) with the approval of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered. The workload associated with unsuccessful students repeating courses falls with the faculty offering the course.

**Suggested Amendment**: That students be allowed to repeat a course more than the Senate approved limit (2 under the current policy, 3 under the proposed revised policy) only with the approval of the Dean of the Faculty offering the course after a positive recommendation of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered.

4. The proposed revised policy allows a student, under exceptional circumstances, to repeat a course a third time (take the course a fourth time). Yet the revised policy only makes explicit how the average will be calculated based on marks obtained on the first, second and third attempts. The reality is that some students will be allowed to repeat courses many times. Records show that even under the existing policy that limits students to one repetition, students have as many as six course repetitions.

**Suggested Amendment** (option 1): The marks for all course attempts will remain on the student's record. However, for repeated courses, only the marks for the second and subsequent attempts will be used to calculate the cumulative and major averages. In the hopefully rare exceptions when a student is allowed to repeat a course more than once, it should be recognized that having all grades (except the first) count towards the averages may make it very difficult for students to succeed. **Suggested Amendment** (option 2): The marks for all course attempts will remain on the student's record. However, for repeated courses, only the marks for final attempt will be used to calculate the cumulative and major averages.

5. Finally, I ask Senate Steering to provide information on the practices at our sister institutions in the province, and to advise on the planned SIS changes that will be put in place to ensure enforcement of the policy.