

from Debasmita Misra <dmisra@alaska.edu>  
to Jayne Harvie <jbharvie@alaska.edu>  
12:14 PM today

Dear Jayne,

The agenda for the Senate Meeting today includes the discussion on "Course Stacking" by Prof. Newberry, Chair of the Curricular Affairs Committee. I would have been interested in joining this discussion but I am not a Senate Member and the only time I can provide any comment is during the Public Comments/Questions time at 1:10 pm. Since, I am teaching at that time, I would request you to read the following statement on my behalf.

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"The current faculty senate regulations relative to stacked courses, especially 400/600 stacking is adequate and needs absolutely no modification. The current proposal desires that the member of faculty proposing a stacked course to provide a week-by-week difference in the two courses that includes (a) reading assignments, (b) homework assignments, and (c) exams and each should be graded separately.

This motion is defeating the purpose of stacked courses. The whole objective of stacking courses such as 400/600 levels is to offer the same material but make it extra challenging for the 600 level students to get the information so that they can move on with their research. If one has to offer different (a) reading assignments, (b) homework assignments, and (c) exams that will be graded separately, then it is like teaching two different courses completely. Why should one stack a course? In small enrollment programs, stacked courses help a lot by conserving faculty credit hours and at the same time disseminating relevant information to both undergraduate and graduate students who require the background for their research.

What I disagree with the proposal, is the requirement to teach the course as two separate courses. This is humanly impossible when courses are stacked. So, if proper information is not disseminated to, e.g. the 600 level students, it is also unethical to expect a different level of assignment from them. While, we can challenge the 600 level students through some extra reading and additional challenge questions, it is impossible on the part of an instructor to deliver two different materials to the 400- and the 600- levels within the same lecture and then judging them based on these separate materials offered. This is where I perceive the breakdown, i.e. why not teach the two courses separately. If so, then small programs like mine will get affected immensely. This motion is not at all a well thought out one and does not address the basic problems of a stacked course either.

On the other hand, the senate curriculum committees are free to decline a stacked course proposal if its intention is not to provide the required background for the research progress of a 600- level student while disseminating the knowledge required for the 400- level students to be a professional practitioner in their field (engineering, business, law, etc.). This is my personal view and rationale for a stacked course. Otherwise, it should be taught separately.

If one argues that one would hope that a graduate student is sufficiently mature to be able to read and do homework above and beyond that required for an undergraduate, my feeling is that the student does not need the stacked course for his/her need. As far as the course contents go, we need to have more faith and trust on our faculty members rather than policing them for every small bits. I do not understand why there is such a lack of faith on the faculty members' responsibility/duty? We tenure someone and then question them on their responsibility every day. Is that fair? I totally agree that a stacked course should not be just a 400-level course. We need to engage the 600-level students with the background information to provide some additional input beyond the scope of the 400-level. I would like to see the faculty member offering the course, take the burden and responsibility and be ethical about it. Otherwise, we are defeating the purpose of education. If we do not trust our faculty, then what do we have to offer to our students?

Nobody is making a 400 level course into a 600 level course as the perception might be. If we trust our faculty, provide proper guidelines (not rules), perhaps show an example of a stacked course (without two separate syllabi to justify stacking), I am sure many will use the trust to offer the course as should be, if they are unaware of stacking.

In small programs, we do not have the luxury of enough faculty credit hours to teach the 400 and the 600 level courses separately (at times). I do agree that most of the 600 level courses should not be stacked. However, those that are stacked need to demonstrate a clear difference between the two levels (not necessarily on a weekly basis, but more on an overall basis). Sometimes, the same homework can be attempted quite differently by the 400 level and the 600 level students. As an instructor, I should assign those appropriately and review those based on each level of assignment that has been turned in. The other alternative could be to propose a series of 500-level courses where the advanced undergraduates can participate along with the graduate students. This approach has been existent also in many universities.

Thank you very much for listening to my argument."