
Proposal to Allow Local Waiver of Course Prerequisites

Summary and Rationale. The Senate Rules currently provide **no general local authority** to waive Senate-approved course prerequisites. This proposed Senate Rule change (on next page) would allow waiver of a course prerequisite in cases where no other waiver option is specified. In those cases, the prerequisite could be waived on a student case-by-case basis if (1) the **student** makes the request, (2) the **instructor** believes the student will be successful, and (3) the **unit faculty** body or its delegate agrees. Local faculty bodies can always propose formal changes to course prerequisite allowances and, if approved by the Senate, those more specific allowances would be controlling and would override the authorities created by this proposed rule.

Questions / Answers

- Aren't instructors currently allowed to waive prerequisites?

In general, no. Instructors are not allowed to waive any Senate-approved prerequisites. However, there are four narrow exceptions. **First**, instructors may waive prerequisite courses if the course description explicitly allows them to do so (e.g., "...or consent of instructor"). **Second**, SR 3.2.3.2 allows "seniors with superior ability or preparation" to be admitted to courses numbered 600 to 799 "upon approval of the instructor, the dean of the student's college and the dean of the Graduate School." **Third**, SR 4.2.1.4.2 allows non-degree-seeking students to enroll in a course without satisfying the course prerequisites if the student "obtain[s] the consent of the instructor." **Fourth**, SR 5.1.3 allows instructors to waive prerequisites for courses taken on a pass/fail basis.

If the Senate intended the general rule to be that instructors may waive course prerequisites (e.g., for all students and all courses), the Senate Rules need not have articulated a special rule for non-degree-seeking students or for pass/fail courses. The existence of those rules imply that no general allowance exists to waive course prerequisites.

- How do instructors waive a course prerequisite if none of the four narrow exceptions above apply?

If not excepted otherwise, the only way to waive a Senate-approved course prerequisite is to get approval from the Senate Council or its Chair under SR 1.1.1.3.

- Why allow local faculty bodies to interfere with instructors' preferences about prerequisite waivers?

While course instructors may be best able to decide the merits of waiving course prerequisites in most individual student cases, the parent faculty body and/or program director (e.g., Director of Undergraduate Studies or Director of Graduate Studies) may not want instructors to make this decision without oversight. Consequently, the Senate should assign the faculty body the option to be involved in course prerequisites waiver decision while preserving the Instructor of Record's privilege to prevent such waivers, if desired. Instructors of Record should have final disapproval authority since (1) they bear the burden of having unprepared students in their courses and (2) local faculty bodies have authority to change course prerequisites and prerequisite authorities, if desired, using formal Senate processes.

- Why not just strictly enforce the Senate-approved course prerequisites without a waiver option?

Course prerequisites serve purposes beyond just the need for students to have specific prior knowledge. **For example**, some course prerequisites are designed to signal—admittedly imperfectly—a need for general, not specific, prior learning. [STA 296](#) requires but does not use calculus; the calculus prerequisite mostly provides students with a useful—but imperfect—signal about what it takes to do well in STA 296. **Alternatively**, course prerequisites may also be used to impose—again, imperfectly—structure on programs that facilitate common cohort progression (e.g., sophomores take certain courses together, juniors take certain courses together, etc.).

Finally, strict enforcement of course prerequisites might prompt an unwanted wave of minor course change proposals to change the course prerequisite language (e.g., to add "...or consent of instructor"). Such proposals require activity in Curriculog and the approval of the Senate Council Chair.

- Why involve the college deans and the Registrar?

This proposed rule would require all such course prerequisite waivers to route to the Registrar through the dean or the dean's delegate. The college dean "is responsible for the implementation of the curricula of the college" ([GR VII.F.2.c](#)). Deans can monitor that course prerequisite waivers are used appropriately (e.g., in specific student cases) and, if warranted, advise faculty to consider formally changing a course prerequisite if waivers become the norm for a course.

Proposed Rewording of Senate Rule

(black text is original; add [blue underline](#) text)

3.2.2 COURSE NUMBERING SYSTEM

3.2.2.1 Standard numbering system

The number system reflects the level of course material and associated rigor. With the exception of upper graduate level and professional courses, any prerequisite restrictions limiting the level of a student accepted into a course shall be specified in a course's prerequisites. [US: 11/14/2016] Courses shall be numbered as follows:

001-099	No credit, non-degree and/or developmental courses; [US: 9/10/2001]
100-199	Freshmen-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]
200-299	Sophomore-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]
300-399	Junior-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]
400-499	Advanced junior- and senior-level course; undergraduate credit only;
400G-499G	Senior and first-year graduate-level course; graduate credit for non-majors only; [US: 11/14/2016]
500-599	First-year graduate-level course; undergraduate and graduate credit; [US: 11/14/2016]
600-799	Upper graduate-level course; open only to graduate students; [US: 11/14/2016]
800-999	Professional programs course; open only to students enrolled in professional degree programs (see SR 9.20). [US: 2/13/2012; 11/14/2016; 3/19/2018]

3.2.2.2 Exceptions

Exceptions to the requirements for admission to courses may be made as follows [US: 11/14/2016]:

[3.2.2.2.1 Waiver of a Course Prerequisite](#)

[The description of a course that is approved by the University Senate may indicate one or more prerequisites. Such prerequisites indicate that the faculty body that is responsible for the course \(SR 3.2.4.3.1\) has decided that students must have certain background knowledge to be successful in the course. The Senate has established this rule to ensure that course prerequisites are waived only when appropriate and as authorized by the faculty body that is responsible for the course.](#)

[3.2.2.2.1.1 Student Contacts the Instructor](#)

[A student may request in writing that the Instructor of Record of a course waive one or more prerequisites. If the University has not yet identified an instructor for the course, or if the instructor is unavailable or unresponsive, the Director of Graduate Studies or the Director of Undergraduate Studies of the educational unit responsible for the course, as appropriate, shall assume the role of the instructor.](#)

[3.2.2.2.1.2 Instructor Makes Initial Decision with Conditions](#)

[The instructor may accede to the student's request if *all* of the following conditions are met:](#)

- [1. The course proposal that was approved by the Senate does not identify an alternate process \(e.g., "consent of the Director of Undergraduate Studies"\) for approving prerequisite waiver requests.](#)
- [2. Another Senate rule, such as SR 3.2.3.2 \(access to 600- and 700-level courses by undergrad students\), SR 4.2.1.4.2 \(access to courses by non-degree students\), SR 4.2.2.2.5 \(access to courses by post-baccalaureate students\), SR 5.1.3 \(access to P/F courses\), or SR 10.3.1.2.5 \(access to certain Health Sciences courses\), does not apply to the student's situation.](#)
- [3. The instructor is satisfied that, in the student's request for the waiver, the student has shown sufficient command of the prerequisite material that the student can be successful in the course. A student may show](#)

such command with any measure that the instructor deems relevant, such as work in another course, an exam grade, or work experience.

To allow for efficient processing, instructors may delegate decision authority in writing to any other University employee associated with the course, including graduate teaching assistants.

3.2.2.2.1.3 Faculty Body Considers Waiver

If the instructor accedes to the student's request, the instructor shall convey the decision to the chair of the faculty body responsible for the course for final approval. To allow for efficient processing, the faculty body may delegate decision authority to one or more faculty employees with administrative responsibility for the program or department, such as a Director of Undergraduate Studies, a Director of Graduate Studies, or a department chair.

3.2.2.2.1.4 Dean Processes Approved Waiver

If the faculty body or its designee also accedes to the student's waiver request, the body's chair or designee shall convey that decision to the dean responsible for the educational unit or unit equivalent, and the dean shall process the waiver using procedures defined by the Registrar. To allow for efficient processing, deans may also delegate their responsibilities under this rule.

3.2.2.2.2 Admission of Senior Undergraduates to Courses Numbered Between 600 and 799

Seniors with superior ability or preparation may be admitted to courses numbered between 600 and 799, upon approval of the instructor, the dean of the student's college and the dean of the Graduate School.

Updates since last presented to Senate Council on October 16, 2023:

- reworded the rule to enumerate four steps for approval: (1) student makes request to instructor, (2) instructor makes initial decision with conditions, (3) faculty body considers waiver, and (4) dean processes approved waiver.
- embedded in subsection 1 that the DUS or DGS substitutes for instructor if none is listed (e.g., "TBD").
- clarified in subsection 2 that the instructor can delegate decision authority to any other UK employee.
- clarified in subsection 3 that the faculty body can delegate decision authority to the DUS, DGS, or unit manager (e.g., chair).
- clarified in subsection that deans can delegate processing authority.