
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 (see below) 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 the faculty body that is responsible for the course has established and posted policies regarding the granting of waivers of prerequisites for the course. Local faculty bodies should propose formal changes to course prerequisites through the Senate course change process if updated course prerequisites are needed. The Senate Council office may solicit data as needed from the Registrar about the frequency of course prerequisite waivers.

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 delegate to local faculty bodies final authority to decide on whatever prerequisite waiver policy works best for their local circumstances.

- 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.

Proposal History

- At the April 24, 2023 SC meeting ([agenda](#), [minutes](#) p. 5), the SC reviewed a proposal, routed through SAASC, about waiving course prerequisites on a student case-by-case basis. The SC generally agreed with the rule proposal but referred the rule to SREC for clean-up.
- Here is the proposed clean-up language for the proposal ([PDF](#)) ([.docx](#))
- The proposal routed to SC on October 16 ([agenda](#), [proposal](#)) and the SC identified several concerns, including what to do for courses listed in the Schedule of Classes as “TBD” (i.e., no instructor listed). There was also concern about instructors who are not available to respond to requests to waive a prerequisite. There was also concern that options for deans and others to delegate decisional authority were not clear. The SC voted to send the proposal back to SREC.
- SREC prepared a new proposed rule ([PDF](#)) ([.docx](#)) that went to SC ([11/6/23](#)) and then to Senate ([11/13/23](#)). No vote was taken at the Senate meeting; instead, the proposal routed back to SC for discussion ([11-20-23](#)).
- The SC office sent SREC a reviewed proposal for SREC feedback ([PDF](#)). SREC recommends this proposal for approval and updated the proposed rule edits to include a rationale. Here is the complete proposal.

Latest Changes to Proposal

The current proposal reiterates that Senate-approved course prerequisites must not be waived except by SR 1.1.1.3 or unless—and this is the new part—the local faculty body responsible for the course(s) decides and posts waiver policies for their local education unit that is responsible for the course(s). These local educational units are free to devise whatever policy they want.

The current proposal does not grant Instructors of Record final disapproval authority even though previous proposals recognized that they bear the burden of having potentially unprepared students in their courses. However, the current proposal allows local faculty bodies to create whatever prerequisite waiver policies they want and, as such, individual instructors can make their case for instructor veto directly to their local faculty bodies.

Proposed Rewording of Senate Rule

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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

3.2.2.2.1.1 Authority to Waive 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 a course prerequisite is waived only when appropriate and as authorized by the faculty body that is responsible for the course.

3.2.2.2.1.2 Superseding Senate Policies Regarding Waiver of Prerequisites

If 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) applies to the student's situation, then the procedures described in that rule shall supersede this one.

3.2.2.2.1.3 Establishment of Policies Regarding Waivers of Prerequisites

The faculty body that is responsible for a course or a group of courses shall establish policies regarding the granting of waivers of prerequisites for those courses. The policies shall address the following considerations:

1. How the student requests a waiver, such as a web form or email;
2. To whom the request should be directed;
3. The person or faculty group (the "authority") who makes the final decision on the waiver request; and,
4. The specific factors, if any, to be followed by the authority in deciding on the waiver request.

These policies shall be posted in a prominent place (e.g., a departmental Web site) that students who are not yet enrolled in the course can easily find and access. If no such policy is adopted and posted by the appropriate faculty body, then the prerequisites in the course description approved by the Senate shall apply.

3.2.2.2.1.4 Reporting a Decision

The authority shall inform the student of the authority's decision and a brief explanation of its rationale, with copy to the chair of the faculty body that is responsible for the course.

If the authority has decided to grant the request for a waiver, the authority shall convey that decision to the person designated by the aforementioned faculty body to communicate with the Registrar, and that person shall in turn convey the decision to the Registrar by a procedure specified by the Registrar.

The Registrar shall enroll the student in the course in question only if the faculty and staff involved in the decision follow the procedures specified by the Registrar.

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.