Memo

To: Senate Council
From: A&S Educational Policy Committee
Re: Streamlining the course proposal review
Date: April 28, 2016

As a committee we recognize the importance of faculty oversight and review of proposals for new courses, and for significant course changes. However, it has been our experience that the **New Course Review Process** is often unnecessarily delayed by attention to relatively minor points of disagreement (or error) in the sample syllabus. Too often communication focuses on minor edits to the syllabus, rather than attending to a wider view of the value of the course, and its role in the department, college, and/or UK Core curriculum. Furthermore, this micromanaging of the syllabi is redundant across all approval committees. As a result, attention to typos and references to attendance policies result in extended delays in new course approvals. Faculty have become so cynical about these delays that they may defer or refuse to consider changes to the curriculum since the course approval process is so onerous.

In addition, we know from experience that the syllabus reviewed by university committees during the approval process is rarely the syllabus that is actually shared with students on the first day of class – and even less frequently after the course has been taught for several iterations, or by different faculty members. (We refer to this as the ACTUAL syllabus). We cannot pretend that the *approved* syllabus is the syllabus shared with the student, nor do we see any simple way to police this issue over time at the University level.

We propose that an effective course review process should focus on those aspects of a course that remain unchanged from iteration to iteration of the course. All other elements of the syllabus (as listed in the Senate Checklist) should be required for the actual syllabus handed to each student on the first day of class, but need not be part of the **Course Review Process**. With this recommendation we hope to speed up the course review process significantly at all levels.

When a course proposal is put into eCats (or CurricuLog), we propose that ALL AND ONLY those parts of the course that are stable and unchanging should be included in the form. A draft syllabus may be attached for reference, but details in the draft syllabus should not be part of the actual review process. The review process should not involve semester-specific information that is going to continually change, such as reading lists, attendance policies, assignments, etc.

Fundamentally, committees are being asked to approve a course, not a syllabus. It should not be necessary to review every detail of a syllabus in order to approve the course.

Having said this, we also see a clear necessity for the *actual* syllabus to conform to senate rules and regulations. We concur that Senate Syllabus Guidelines should be followed when the syllabus is created for distribution to students in the class. However, discussion of the actual syllabus provided to students should not be the purview of committees outside the department.

For new course approval, the following items should be required elements on the New Course Form:

General Course Information:
> Course prefix and number (Cross-listing if necessary)
> Full title of the course
> Number of credit hours
> Course prerequisites
> If UK Core (additional information will be necessary)
> If GCCR (additional information will be necessary)
> If Distance Learning (additional information will be necessary)

Course Description
> Bulletin description: must apply to every instance of this course
> Overview of the course: provides more detailed description than the paragraph used for the bulletin
> Rationale: explains why the course is needed for the curriculum
> Outline of possible content: (if not covered by Overview)
> Student Learning Outcomes: must apply to every instance of this course

A reasoned and thoughtful decision about whether or not to approve a new course (or significant change) can be made on the basis of the above information alone.

As a committee, we feel that the **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)** should play a more important role in demonstrating the goals of the course for the purposes of course review. For all new courses, we propose that the Student Learning Outcomes must apply to every instance or iteration of this course, and must be included in every *actual* course syllabus. Along with the Course Description, we argue that the Student Learning Outcomes – more than the course readings or course assignments – should be a permanent part of the course: they represent what one might call a defining feature of the course, no matter who teaches the course over time. SLOs should be specific enough to give the reviewer a sense of the content and disciplinary goals of the course, and should be appropriate to the course level (i.e. "hundred level").

If the new/changed course is proposed to satisfy UK Core or GCCR requirements, the SLOs included here MUST include the UK Core or GCCR SLOs for this Core area; additional Student Learning Outcomes specific to the course may be added. This will serve as a reminder to the department and faculty that the course plays a role in the UK Core/GCCR curriculum, and every instance of the course must address the UK Core/GCCR Student Learning Outcomes.

Below we list items that are currently required, and provide reasons for their <u>removal</u> from the Course Review Process.

- Scheduled meeting day(s), time and place: This information is not pertinent to whether or not the course should be approved.
- Instructor Contact Information: while essential for the in-class syllabus, this should be unnecessary for the course proposal. Instructors for a class may change from semester to semester. Instructor contact information may change from semester to semester.
- Required materials: textbooks or reading lists may change and labs may be redesigned; this information need not be on the Course Proposal form.

- Summary description of the components that contribute to the determination of course grade: as instructors may change, so will the components in the course. Different pedagogical approaches may require different sorts of course work and/or course assignments. This will be at the discretion of the instructor from semester to semester.
- Final exam information: this information will be unknown at the time of the proposal.
- Numerical grading scale: a grading scale should not be necessary at this level. Any numerical grading scale may change from professor to professor, according to the total set of assignments and course expectations.
- Relative value of assignments: different professors may give a different number of exams, or readings, or homework and value each differently. It is not relevant to require this as part of a course proposal.
- Note that undergraduate students will be provided with a midterm evaluation: this information is for the students, not for those who are reviewing the course. Not necessary at this time.
- Policy on academic accommodations due to disability: again, this is for the students in the class. It is not necessary at this time and should not be included in the Course Proposal form.
- Course policies: again, as the professor changes, policies will change. These need to be on the course syllabus distributed to the students, but not on a syllabus for course approval.

Finally we would like to submit for your consideration an idea that has been proposed several times over the past several years: **there should be a website clearly stating all information that is standard across all courses**, and links to this website should be included on every syllabus. These items would not need to be printed in every syllabus. This website would include, among other possible items:
- A note that undergraduate students will be provided with a midterm evaluation by midterm date, based on criteria in the course syllabus.
- The policy on accommodations due to disability, and information on how to contact the DRC
- UK Senate policy on plagiarism, and definition of academic misconduct
- UK Senate policy on "the 20% rule", since this has recently been clarified and still remains confusing to both students and instructors
- Other information to be determined by Senate Council or subcommittee (we would recommend discussion of this issue among Academic Associate Deans' Advisory group, for example).

To recap, we do recommend that all of the material that currently appears on the University Senate Syllabi Guidelines should appear on the *actual* syllabus that is distributed to students in class. However, much of this information is not needed for the approval of a course.

In the interest of (a) streamlining the new/changed course approval process, (b) prioritizing the flexibility of programs and departments to offer a timely and innovative curriculum, and (c) wishing to be sensitive to the workload of busy faculty and committee members, we present this proposal.

*****

Note: We submit this proposal directly to the Senate Council for your review, as the process for the approval of new courses is defined by the Senate. Simultaneously we plan to share this memo widely across campus, for example, with the Ombud, the group of Academic Associate Deans, the Undergraduate Council, and the Graduate Council. We welcome any feedback, but hope for a thorough discussion of this proposal by the Senate Council. We look forward to hearing from the Council at your earliest convenience.