

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
REPORT ON MAJOR ADMISSIONS AND DISQUALIFICATION
POLICIES

To the Academic Senate Santa Cruz Division:

The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has received an increasing number of proposals to restrict the access of students to majors, including both major admissions policies and major disqualification policies. Major admissions policies establish the conditions that must be met before a student is allowed to declare a specific major. Examples of such conditions include performance in one or more foundational courses; a portfolio review; or other academic criteria approved by CEP. Major disqualification policies are conceptually similar to major admissions policies, but are applied after a student has been admitted to a major.

Academic advising has long been the primary mechanism for directing students to majors compatible with their interests and abilities. Although major admissions policies remain relatively rare outside the School of Engineering, the number of major disqualification policies has increased significantly during the past decade¹. With the approval of our committee, disqualification policies have been adopted for all SOE majors, the majority of Social Sciences and Physical and Biological Sciences majors, and two Humanities majors. The situation at UCSC is markedly different from other UC campuses, where major admissions policies are common but major disqualification policies are rare.

CEP has grown increasingly concerned about the prevalence of major disqualification policies in the absence of data concerning their impact on retention, graduation rates or diversity. These concerns prompted us to consider whether the continued use of major disqualification policies is appropriate.

The relationship between major disqualification policies and graduation requirements

Guidelines for major disqualification policies were drafted by CEP in 1997 and amended in 2008. Departments may adopt policies (with CEP approval) that permit the disqualification of students based on their performance in a pre-determined list of courses that are essential for success in the major. CEP has approved policies that permit the disqualification of students who receive grades of NP, D, F or W twice in a single course or in two courses from a pre-determined list.

CEP's guidelines stress that the disqualification of a student from a major "should happen early in the student's major career rather than later" to ensure "that the student has time to find a more suitable major and succeed at it". Accordingly, CEP will only approve major disqualification policies that are based on performance in lower-division major requirements or (in rare cases) upper-division requirements that must be taken early in a student's career.

¹ A complete list of undergraduate programs with major admissions or disqualification policies may be found at the end of this report.

The following overview of campus graduation requirements illustrates the challenges faced by students who are disqualified from a major during their junior or senior year. To receive an undergraduate degree, a student must complete at least 180 credits of coursework, including both major requirements and campus general education (GE) requirements². A major must require at least 45 credits of coursework, including 40 credits associated with upper-division courses. Major requirements range from roughly 50 credits to 200 credits depending on the discipline. Differences in lower-division major requirements account for much of this variability.

It is difficult for a typical student to satisfy the requirements of any major in less than two years; most majors in the Physical and Biological Sciences and the School of Engineering take much longer to complete. Students are therefore encouraged to choose a major as early as possible and major declaration deadlines are strictly enforced³. Upper-division students may change their major, but only with the permission of the new department.

When a student is disqualified from their major after their sophomore year, they must identify a program that can be completed in less than two years and is willing to accept them. For many students, these challenges will prove insurmountable.

Concerns about existing major disqualification policies.

CEP's approval of major disqualification policies was based on the reasonable assumption that lower-division major requirements must be taken during the freshman or sophomore year. The committee also assumed that these courses provide the foundation required for the successful completion of upper-division major requirements.

CEP recently began to utilize computer-generated curriculum maps to better understand and evaluate the organization and requirements of undergraduate programs. These maps revealed significant problems with many of the major disqualification policies approved by our committee. We are particularly concerned about programs that can disqualify majors based on their performance in courses:

- that are not required for the major
- that are not pre-requisites for any upper-division major requirement or elective
- that can be taken during the junior or senior year, including the quarter immediately prior to graduation.

Thus, many of the major disqualification policies approved by our committee can lead to the inappropriate disqualification of students in their junior or senior year.

Relationship between major disqualification policies and other Senate regulations.

² <http://senate.ucsc.edu/senatemanual/ManualAug10/scrAug10.pdf> Chapter 10.

³ Students who enter as freshman must declare a major before they complete 90 units of coursework; junior transfer students must declare a major no later than their second quarter of residency.

CEP understands the desire to prevent students who repeatedly fail upper-division courses from continuing in a major. Major disqualification policies are not required to achieve this goal due to the existence of the following Senate regulations:

SCR A9.1.8 prevents students from repeating a course more than once without the approval of their college⁴

SCR 12.1.2 subjects undergraduates to disqualification from the University if their GPA for the term is less than 1.5 or they are already on academic probation and their cumulative GPA is less than 2.0⁵

SR 634 sets a GPA of 2.0 in all attempted courses as a minimum graduation requirement⁶

Finally, it appears that many of our major disqualification policies are not in compliance with SR 900.0.2, which states that undergraduate students cannot be subjected to academic probation and disqualification policies more stringent than those described above without the approval of the Santa Cruz Division of the Academic Senate⁷.

Summary

CEP does not support the continued use of major disqualification policies as a mechanism for restricting the access of students to majors. Departments should anticipate the need to delete all references to major disqualification policies from program statements.

As an alternative, we encourage all undergraduate programs to articulate the foundational or “gateway” courses that are essential for success in their majors; students who encounter difficulties in these courses should be discouraged from entering the major. CEP will consider formal proposals to restrict admission to a major based on a student’s performance in gateway courses taken in the freshmen or sophomore year or other academic criteria. These proposals should be supported by evidence that the criteria used are a reliable predictor of a student’s future success in the program.

Updated guidelines for major admissions policies – together with examples of major admissions policies that were recently approved by our committee - will be posted on the CEP web page in the near future, <http://senate.ucsc.edu/cep/>. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

⁴ <http://senate.ucsc.edu/senatemanual/ManualAug10/scrAug10.pdf> Chapter 9.

⁵ <http://senate.ucsc.edu/senatemanual/ManualAug10/scrAug10.pdf> Chapter 12.

⁶ **634.** *Minimum Standards for Graduation. Except as provided in [Senate Regulation 782](#) for the grade of Passed/Not Passed, to receive a Bachelor's degree a student must obtain a grade-point average of at least 2.00 for all courses attempted in the University. (EC 3 Nov 69) (Rev 4 May 1995)*”

⁷ **900.C.2** *Undergraduate students in particular schools or colleges may be subject to more stringent norms with respect to academic probation or disqualification, but only on the basis of regulations adopted by a Division of the Senate and approved by the Assembly of the Senate.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Arts DQ Policy

Art	No
Film and Digital Media	No
History of Art and Visual Culture	No
Music	Yes
Theater Arts	No

Humanities DQ Policy

American Studies	No
Classical Studies	No
Feminist Studies	No
German Studies	No
History	No
Italian Studies	No
Jewish Studies	No
Language Studies	Yes
Linguistics	Yes
Literature	No
Philosophy	No

Physical & Biological Sciences DQ

Applied Physics	No
Biochemistry and Molecular Biology	Yes
Biology	Yes
Ecology and Evolution	Yes
Human Biology	Yes
Marine Biology	Yes
MCD Biology	Yes
Neuroscience	Yes
Plant Sciences	Yes
Chemistry	Yes
Earth Sciences	Yes
Earth Sciences/ Anthropology Combined Major	Yes
Mathematics	Yes
Physics	No
Physics (Astrophysics)	No
Physics Education	No

Social Sciences DQ Policy

Anthropology	No
Business Management Economics	Yes
Cognitive Science	No
Economics	Yes
Economics/ Mathematics Combined Major	Yes
Environmental Studies	Yes
Environmental Studies/ Biology Combined Major	Yes
Environmental Studies/ Earth Sciences Combined Major	Yes

Environmental Studies/ Economics Combined Major	Yes
Global Economics	Yes
Latin American and Latino Studies	No
Latin American and Latino Studies/ Global Economics Combined Major	Yes
Latin American and Latino Studies/ Literature Combined Major	No
Latin American and Latino Studies/ Sociology Combined Major	Yes
Legal Studies	No
Politics	No
Psychology	Yes
Sociology	Yes

**School of Engineering DQ
 Policy**

School of Engineering Disqualification Policy	Yes
BioEngineering	Yes
Bioinformatics	Yes
Computer Engineering	Yes
Computer Science	Yes
Computer Science: Game Design	Yes
Electrical Engineering	Yes
Information Systems Management	Yes