



March 7, 2017

TO: Xan Stuart Johnson
President, Academic Senate

cc: A. Wildermuth
T. Ebner
C. Stokes

FR: Ed Barbanell 
Chair, Senate Advisory Committee on Academic Policy (SACAP)

RE: Proposal to add Essential Course Information to Policy 6-100.III.C.5

We have reviewed the proposed revision to Policy 6-100.III.C.5. We understand that this request for more transparency and earlier promulgation of critical course information was initiated by the student government. It seems like a reasonable request, and the Senate Advisory Committee on Academic Policy (SACAP) supports the proposed revision.

Given the fact that there are several mechanisms – class schedule, Canvas, syllabi, et cetera – for accomplishing this, we would recommend that, concomitant with the policy change itself, a set of implementation guidelines, or best practices, be developed and widely distributed to faculty, so that there is consistency and reliability in how this information is presented. Since the class schedule is the purview of the Registrar's Office, and Teaching and Learning Technologies (TLT) manages Canvas, those offices should be involved in the development of these guidelines.

Memorandum

To: Academic Senate Executive Committee

From: the ASUU Vice President of University Relations on behalf of the ASUU and the student body

Re: Proposed revision of Policy 6-100 to timely provide essential course information to students

Date: DRAFT 2017-03-06

Over the last two years, students have expressed a desire to receive increased course information at registration if possible. Since working with SCAFFR, SACAP, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Wildermuth and Dr. Flores we have reached a compromise that we hope will be beneficial to faculty and students. On behalf of the Associated Students of the University of Utah and the students it represents, the 2016-2017 ASUU Officers recommend that a Policy addition be made to ensure that students are provided essential information about courses in a timely way to assist them in making well-informed decisions about choosing and adding/dropping courses.

Specific revisions: We recommend the following revisions be made to the existing University Policy which governs requirements of undergraduate-level for-credit courses. (See the entire existing Policy at <http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php>).

Policy 6-100: Instruction and Evaluation, Revision 25. Effective Date: July 1, 2017

I. Purpose and Scope

This Policy governs University courses, including how courses shall be offered and approved, what units within the University may offer courses, who may teach University courses, when final examinations are conducted, what the standards are for course credit (i.e., credit hours), [[when essential course information is made available to students,]] how courses are assessed and feedback is provided to instructors, what attendance requirements are, and how instructors may accommodate students' scheduling conflicts and accommodate students' objections to the substantive content of particular courses. These policies bear upon the responsibilities of individual instructors, students, course-offering units and the University administration. This Policy applies to all course-offering units. *[Note i]*.

II. Definitions . . .

III. Policy . . .

C. Standards for Undergraduate Credit-Bearing Courses *[Note ii]*

~~5. Course descriptions should clearly state the learning outcomes and activities essential to credit being awarded.~~ **Essential course information shall be made available to enable students to make informed decisions in choosing among courses and setting schedules. It shall be made available at least one week before the first day of class in any semester or session in which the course is offered, if an instructor has been assigned to the course three or more weeks before that first day, and otherwise as early as is practical. The essential course information may be made available as part of the course syllabus or separately, and should include (a) the goals and objectives of the course, (b) the course expectations, including the**

activities essential for earning credit and those on which grading is based, and (c) a preliminary schedule for the major examinations and assignments.

Rationale for revision:

This addition to the Policy is intended to provide basic course information to students to enable them to make well-informed decisions as they choose among courses and course sections, and plan their personal school, work, and travel schedules for a semester in light of the date-specific course activities such as exams. It sets a requirement of providing that information in a timely fashion. It is formulated to balance those information needs of students with the resource constraints that affect the capabilities of departments and instructors to provide information far in advance, and it recognizes the value of retaining some instructor flexibility to adapt some activities and scheduling of activities after classes begin.

Types of essential information: The existing one-line Policy said simply that *“course descriptions should clearly state the learning outcomes and activities essential to credit being awarded.”* The revision expands on that minimally, clarifying for departments and instructors what information is so valuable for the students for their decision-making that it is appropriately cast as essential: *(a) the goals and objectives of the course, (b) the course expectations, including the activities essential for earning credit and those on which grading is based, and (c) a preliminary schedule for the major examinations and assignments.”*

Timing: The existing Policy gave no guidance for departments and instructors as to when the course descriptions should be made available—and so no assurance of students receiving information when it would be useful for making decisions. Students whose concerns initiated this project requested as an ideal that the information be provided on the date that course registration opens, i.e., several months before the first class, to inform student choices at that early point of registration. That would have enabled students to do very early planning. Through our consultation with administrators and faculty we learned that such an early date is not possible for a great many courses. We learned that in some cases instructors might not be assigned to courses until a few weeks prior to the first class, that instructors often need the weeks immediately preceding the first class to finalize various aspects of the course design, and that even after the start date instructors might need flexibility to modify some aspects of a course to create the best possible educational experience for the particular students who end up taking the course in a particular semester.

With that helpful clarification of the circumstances, we have greatly revised and refined this proposal to what we believe is the best possible balance of what is needed and beneficial for students, and what is feasible for departments and instructors. This proposal sets an information availability deadline of *one week before the first class* for all courses for which the instructor has been assigned at least three weeks before the first class (i.e., providing a minimum of two weeks preparation, even for a newly assigned instructor). Based on what we’ve learned from consultations, this will work for the great majority of courses. And in the infrequent event of an instructor being assigned less than three weeks out, making the one-week deadline unrealistic, the Policy falls back to a principle of *“as early as is practical.”*

And on the particular issue of setting a schedule for the specific course activities that most seriously affect students planning of their own schedules--- exams and other such activities on which grades are most heavily dependent, we have incorporated acknowledgement of the importance of allowing an instructor to have some flexibility to make adjustments. What instructors will need to provide as of that one-week mark is a “*preliminary*” schedule of such activities. We expect that instructors will make their best efforts to keep the *final* schedule close to that preliminary version (to avoid undue disruption of plans students have made in reliance), while having the flexibility to subsequently make scheduling changes as needed, in consultation with the students, for the overarching goal of creating the best possible educational experience under the circumstances.

Consultation and support:

This proposal was developed over several months and through consultation of various representatives of the students, faculty, and University academic administration. The project was initiated by students bringing concerns to the attention of ASUU officers. ASUU Vice President Matthew Miller then took the lead in bringing the concerns of the students to the attention of Dr. Barbanell, Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Barbara Snyder, Dean of Students Lori McDonald, President of the University of Utah Dr. Pershing and former Academic Senate President Allyson Mower. The general idea, and in some instances the specific proposed policy content have been discussed with the Senate Advisory Committee on Academic Policy (Chair Ed Barbanell), the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Faculty Rights (Chair Shelley Minter, and the Senate Executive Committee (and Senate President Xan Johnson). We received valuable advice and technical assistance in drafting from Associate Vice President for Faculty Amy Wildermuth, and Senate Policy Liaison Bob Flores. The proposal has been refined greatly through the consultations. In its earliest stages there was discussion of framing the proposal as a revision of the Faculty Code, which would treat a failure to provide the information at the specified time as a punishable violation of the Code. And as noted above, an early version would have imposed a deadline so far in advance that it would make compliance impossible for many departments and instructors. This project itself has been a valuable learning experience for us as student members of the University community. With what we have learned along the way about academic administration and the workings of course scheduling and assignment of instructors, we were able to refine our initially overly broad and impractical proposal. Those we consulted with listened to us, and we listened to them. What we present now will place the essential course information requirement in the Policy on Instruction and Evaluation (rather than the Faculty Code) and as described above, will set a requirement that is realistic for departments and individual instructors, while greatly benefiting future students as they choose their courses and plan their own schedules. We propose that this revision take effect July 1, 2017. We believe we have come up with a ‘win-win’ solution and we hope the Academic Senate as a whole will agree.

This proposal comes from the ASUU Officers for 2016-2017: Jack Bender-President, Matthew Miller-Vice President of University Relations, ASUU Senate Chair-Rachel Peterson and ASUU Assembly Chair-Parker Archer representing ASUU and the student body at large.

For further information, please contact our project leader, ASUU VP Matthew Miller at mmiller@asuu.utah.edu