

FINAL REPORT
of the
JOINT TASK FORCE
ON
CURRICULUM, CREDITS AND COSTS

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I. Introduction

The Joint Task Force on Curriculum, Credits and Costs (JTFCCC) was created by a resolution of the Rules Committee on 4 January 2011, with endorsement by the Senate on 3 February 2011. The Task Force met for the first time on 16 February 2011. It divided into two subcommittees, one focused on maximum credit loads and the other on fee differentials by college or degree program. Work then continued throughout the semester.

The charge to the JTFCCC reads as follows:

The Joint Task Force on Curriculum, Credits and Costs shall:

1. Study practices regarding undergraduate education at peer institutions with respect to:
 - a. maximum credit load;
 - b. mechanisms for approving exceptions to the maximum credit load;
 - c. mechanisms for assuring fairness for students in gaining access to seats in courses, which are a limited resource;
 - d. extra charges for credit overload;
 - e. differential tuition;
 - f. such other matters relating to curriculum, credits, and costs as may be deemed appropriate and relevant.
2. Make policy recommendations regarding undergraduate education to the Faculty Senate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst with respect to:
 - a. maximum credit load;
 - b. mechanisms for approving exceptions to the maximum credit load;
 - c. mechanisms for assuring fairness for students in gaining access to seats in courses, which are a limited resource;
 - d. extra charges for credit overload;
 - e. differential tuition;
 - f. implications of the new 4-credit norm in the General Education curriculum;
 - g. such other matters relating to curriculum, credits, and costs as may be deemed appropriate and relevant.

The Joint Task Force shall provide a progress report or a final report to the Faculty Senate by the final meeting of the Spring 2011 semester, at the latest.

The JTFCCC's observations and recommendations are divided into three categories, those pertaining to maximum credit loads (items a, b, and c in parts 1 and 2 of the charge, and item f in part 2 of the charge), those pertaining to extra charges for credit overload (item d in parts 1 and 2 of the charge), and those pertaining to differential fees (item e in parts 1 and 2 of the charge).

II. Maximum Credit Loads

II.A Findings

The JTFCCC collected data on maximum credit load and related policies at the University's standard list of peer institutions. The two main findings of this survey are:

1. At the peer institutions, the maximum number of credits that a student may take without special permission varies from 17 to 20, with 18 and 19 being most common.
2. At the peer institutions, procedures for granting exceptions to the maximum are often rather specific and formal, with standardized application forms required by advising offices.

Members of the JTFCCC made two further observations based on their experience as teachers and advisers:

1. A credit load of 19 would be too much for a student who is already struggling. Therefore, a lower maximum may be appropriate for students on academic probation or academic warning, or students who have grades of INC or IF.
2. The shift to 4-credit general education courses may be causing an unwelcome shift to higher credit loads, especially for freshmen. The 4-credit general education courses by design and of necessity require 4 credits worth of work. The typical freshman taking four 4-credit general education courses and a 1-credit Faculty First Year Seminar has a sufficiently challenging workload.

II.B Recommendations

1. **Overall credit limit**
Except as noted in 2, 3, and 4 below, students in any school, college, or program may register for no more than 19 credits without special permission.
2. **Credit limit for freshmen**
Freshmen may register for no more than 17 credits without special permission, except that Commonwealth Honors College students in their second semester may register for no more than 19 credits without special permission.
3. **Pre-existing exceptions**
Schools, colleges, and programs with pre-existing higher credit limits are exempt from the limits in 1 and 2. The following list is believed to be exhaustive: Biochemistry (20), Dance (20), Engineering (20), Music (21), and UWW (30).
4. **Credit limit for students with academic deficiencies**
A student on academic probation or academic warning may register for no more than 17 credits without special permission. [The Task Force considered extending this to students with grades of INC or IF, but decided that the difficulty of crafting a policy outweighed the likely benefit of adopting one.]
5. **Procedures for granting permission to exceed a credit limit**
The JTFCCC recommends that the Undergraduate Deans Council develop a standard application form and criteria for granting exceptions to credit limits.
6. **Support for PeopleSoft modifications**
Implementing these policies will require modifications in PeopleSoft. The JTFCCC recommends that the Registrar be provided with the resources necessary to program and maintain these modifications.

II.C Implementation

Comments from an Impact Analysis Group consisting of representatives from the Registrar (John Lenzi, Holly Fitzpatrick), the Bursar (Tom Mathers, Erin Zuzula), and Financial Aid (Sue Peters, Jill Moulton):

All recommendations can be accomplished with reports that will be available to advisors and departments. None can be automated in SPIRE at this time except for number 3 in the draft which would be automated. For long range planning, there could be modifications in Oracle, but they would have to be appropriately funded and prioritized. In sum, departments should plan to manage this with reports.

III. Fees for Course Overloads

III.A Findings

The JTFCCC collected data on fees for credit overloads at the University’s standard list of peer institutions. At institutions that levy these fees, the per-credit charges for in-state (IS) and out-of-state (OOS) students are as follows:

Peer Institution	Overload Charge (IS)	Overload Charge (OOS)
Colorado Boulder	\$62/credit over 18	none
Delaware	\$356/credit over 17	\$927/credit over 17
Indiana Bloomington	\$254/credit over 17	\$837/credit over 17
Nebraska	\$198/credit	\$588/credit

At Delaware and Indiana, the number of credits that can be taken without incurring an overload charge (17 at both) is lower than the number of credits that can be taken without special permission (18 at Delaware, 19 at Indiana).

At Nebraska, there is a system of “à la carte” fees: students pay for every credit, starting with the first one.

UC Santa Barbara, which is on a quarter system, has a 200-unit rule that in effect prohibits accumulating overloads beyond a certain point:

Because resources are limited, however, we must place some restrictions on the length of time that a student may be enrolled, so that we can continue to admit new students. The short version of the resulting policy states that, “Students are expected to complete all degree requirements by the time they have undertaken 200 total units. ... If enrollment beyond this limit is desired, students may request approval by submitting a Proposed Schedule for Graduation... Students who enroll in courses beyond 200 units without approval will have their enrollment blocked for subsequent quarters.” [Quoted from <http://www.advising.ltsc.ucsb.edu/maxunits/>.]

200 units on a quarter system is equivalent to 133 credits on a semester system. Students admitted as freshmen who maintain continuous enrollment for 12 quarters are allowed to exceed the 200 unit limit, but an absence of even a single quarter will trigger it.

III.B General Principles

The members of the Task Force reached general agreement that the following principles should guide any decisions about imposing fees for course overloads:

- As the charge to this Task Force says, “seats in courses ... are a limited resource”. This is particularly true in a University that is operating at close to capacity and is reliant on enrollment growth for future revenue.
- The University’s implicit contract with each student is for a single degree. It is not unreasonable for students acquiring multiple degrees to incur additional costs.
- The Delaware and Indiana examples show that the credit level at which an overload fee is imposed may be different from the maximum number of credits that may be taken without special permission. One is a matter of enrollment management; the other is a matter of academic advising.
- It costs less to add a student to an existing class than it does to offer that class in the first place. For this reason, the per-credit overload fee should be less than the per-credit cost of the student’s first fifteen credits.
- Any overload fee should be covered by financial aid at the same rate as the basic tuition and fees.

- Students who are paying additional fees for programs that imply higher credit loads, such as the Commonwealth Honors College, should be allowed to count those fees as an offset against overload fees.
- For students in high-credit majors, the level at which an overload fee is imposed should be adjusted to reflect the demands of the major. In no case, however, should the level be adjusted to accommodate a second major, a minor, a certificate, or other addition to the normal degree program of the student’s primary major.

III.C Revenue Considerations

Whether an overload fee can bring in significant additional revenue is highly dependent on the credit level at which it comes into force. This can be demonstrated with a snapshot of the Fall 2010 enrollment data:

Credit Level	Number of Credits Taken Above this Level
18	2730
19	1240
20	608
21	275

If the overload threshold were set at 18 credits and the overload fee were \$100/credit, then the maximum amount of additional revenue for that semester would be \$273,000. This maximum is reduced to \$124,000 if the threshold is set at 19, which is the same as the recommended level for registration without special permission. These figures are probably around double the amount of revenue that would actually be received because of financial aid, offsets for students in Commonwealth Honors College, exemptions for students in high-credit majors, and the likely eventuality that some students will elect not to take an overload if they have to pay extra for it.

III.C Implementational Issues

Comments from an Impact Analysis Group consisting of representatives from the Registrar (John Lenzi, Holly Fitzpatrick), the Bursar (Tom Mathers, Erin Zuzula), and Financial Aid (Sue Peters, Jill Moulton). Most important points underlined:

1. Overload fee processing would be directly impacted by our rolling enrollment period through the end of add/drop. In sum, ALL bills and ALL revenue projections will be estimates until approximately four weeks into a regular term. This would be the two weeks after the end of add/drop when departments, registrar and academic deans are doing reconciliation and clean up. Late withdrawals and appeals, which can occur months after a term is over, will require a new policy and calendar regarding refunds based on these add/drop changes.
2. Bills would only be estimates until the 4th week of a term and there would have to be a reconciliation process before a final bill could be produced. This will add overhead processed in A & F.
3. A new academic/administrative policy and calendar will have to be created for the adding, dropping, withdrawal and cancelling of courses. There also will need to be policies concerning retroactive withdrawals and cancellations which can occur months later and this exception group is significant.
4. A Financial Aid reconciliation process will have to be developed.
5. From a parents and students’ perspective seeing an “overcharge” line item on a bill will be problematic. We discussed alternatives of how to include the over load charge in the curriculum fee, but no solution seemed viable.
6. It will be important to not have a differential overload charge based on residency. This would be too complicated to implement.

7. The Registrar expressed concerns about the impact on time to degree and the communication plan that would target the students who do dual degrees, multiple majors, minors, certificates, etc which all have higher credit requirements.
8. Exception processing would present the same challenges as the differential fee. The complexity of the exception process relating to differential fees is obvious and will require new coding for the bill.

III.D Recommendation

The JTFCCC recommends that the University consider adopting an overload fee if the implementational issues in III.C can be resolved and if the general principles in III.B are followed. The JTFCCC's discussions included mention of a charge of \$150 per credit over 18 or 19. The charge of \$150 is somewhat less than half the per-credit cost of the student's first 15 credits. The threshold of 18 allows the student to take a normal 15-credit load and one additional 3-credit course each semester with incurring additional charges. It was observed, however, that having an 18-credit threshold for the overload fee and a 19-credit limit for loads taken without special permission is likely to be confusing and may seem misleading to many students and their parents.

IV. Differential Fees

IV.A Findings

JTFCCC member Todd Diacon submitted the following summary of:

Nelson, Glen R. *Differential Tuition by Undergraduate Major: Its Use, Amount, and Impact at Public Research Universities* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska Lincoln, 2008)

1. Of the 162 Carnegie Research extensive and intensive public universities (there are 165 such schools, but three do not have undergraduate students): 74 (46%) charge differential tuition by program or major
2. Of the 51 Land Grant universities in this public research university population, 29 (57%) charge differential tuition
3. Of the 34 public AAU members, 18 (53%) had differential tuition by major or program
4. Which programs are most likely to charge differential tuition? Business (51 universities), Engineering (48 universities), Architecture (22 universities), and "science" (17 universities)
5. How much differential tuition is charged? Per credit range of \$2-\$194. "The average differential was 10.8% of resident undergraduate tuition" (p.134)
6. Impact on enrollment? "Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated there was no impact to...enrollment by program or major" (p.136). One program reported an *increase* in enrollment because new revenue allowed that department to increase staffing to address unmet demand
7. No university had conducted a study to determine the impact of differential tuition on enrollments in majors by socioeconomic standing. Seven universities reported anecdotal evidence to assert there was no decline in major enrollments by low SES. Only two universities reported allocating additional financial aid to neutralize differential tuition for low SES
8. In 2006-2007, implementing differential tuition increased tuition revenue by an average of 2% (dollar increases in tuition revenue ranged from \$30,000 to \$25,000,000)
9. How were differential tuition revenues distributed? More than half of the universities returned 100% to the college or department with the differential tuition. Some 13% of universities kept 20% centrally, and returned 80% to the program. Some schools earmarked these funds for specific purposes (technology purchases, teaching expenditures)

IV.B Recommendations

General Guidelines

A Dean of a school or college may submit a proposal for a differential fee increase to be added to the base tuition cost for a school, college, major, or program. The proposal should provide a rationale using the following criteria:

1. Cost of instruction variance from base tuition or fees.
2. Increase in quality for the student experience.
3. Market comparison to peer institutions or programs.
4. Benefit to university as a whole.
5. Higher expenditures for specific faculty, equipment, technology, etc.
6. Potential increase in student employment opportunities.
7. Impact on recruitment.
8. If the fee applies only when a student declares the major in a school or college, provide budget projection for ramp-up timeline to full implementation.
9. Fund raising plans for scholarships to offset the increase for needy students.

It is not necessary for every proposal to satisfy all of these criteria, but the criteria used must suffice to justify the proposed increase. Deans should also be attentive to the complexity that results when several programs in a school or college have fees at different levels.

If a differential fee increase is approved, revenues from it will go to the Provost's Office, which will distribute them to the relevant deans who will then distribute them within the school/college.

General Principles for Differential Fee Use

1. Document how new revenue matches with cost.
2. Document with descriptions and percentages on planned use of dollars for: financial aid, faculty hiring, equipment, technology, student services, other.

Communication Plan

1. Document buy-in process for specific groups: current students, future students, student trustees, alums, other UMass campuses, trustees, president's office, general public, legislature.
2. If fee is greater than 10% of in-state mandatory charges, develop document for presidential approval process.

Approval Process

Deans will present plan to Provost's office and Provost's office will review with Chancellor and Senior Management.

III.C Implementational Issues

The Engineering fee, which has been in place for decades, is the model for differential fees. However, the addition of the CHC fee has brought to light procedural questions and challenges that have become problematic. It is essential that these questions be addressed before we go forward with multiple differential fees for schools, colleges, majors etc.

1. With the addition of multiple fees, which began for students who are both Engineering and CHC, there are issues around who should be charged what when? The items that follow clarify this ambiguity where currently there is no definitive policy or procedure.
2. When can a differential fee be cancelled for a student? This is related to number 6 below.
3. Will differential fees be applicable to primary and secondary majors (and beyond, since we have students with more than two majors)?
4. Since they affect financial aid packages, how will the changes (i.e. changing majors, exceptions processing, etc) be coordinated with the financial aid process? For example, differential fees will impact financial aid budget projections, so is there a mechanism to make sure the budgets are estimates only?
5. A new academic/administrative policy will have to be developed to establish an "effective date" and this date will translate into a student restriction on changes to majors (e.g., financial aid census date) in order to have an accurate student bill and financial aid budget projections. It

would mean having a new academic policy establishing a calendar of deadlines on changes of

major that shows how the change of major will affect student charges. Note: It was reported by the Registrar that changes of major are extremely high at UMass compared to the other New England land grant universities, so the process of changing majors needs to be reviewed in any case.

6. For students and parents, this process and policy should be clearly communicated, documented and easily understood for their financial planning and understanding the UMass bill. In order to rationalize this even more, the group recommended that the university consider a three-tiered system of differential fees with set dollar values. For example Fee A – High, Fee-B Medium, and Fee-C Low. This system will be easy to communicate to parents and students and it will eliminate any chaotic dollar variance among schools, colleges and majors.
7. Policies and procedures on exception processing (employees, dependents, and special students?) need to be developed and will have some impact on revenue.

MOVED:
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That the Faculty Senate receive the Final Report of the Joint Task Force on Curriculum, Credits and Costs, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 11-065, and thank the Task Force for its excellent work.