

## Minutes of the May 15 2023 Meeting of the Undergraduate Council of the University Senate

Minutes prepared by Hanna Nekvasil, Chair

In virtual attendance: Hanna Nekvasil, chair, Kevin McDonnell, Deborah Serling, Madeline Turan, Diane Bello, Christine Pitocco, Jennifer Dellaposta, Debbie Zelizer, Donna Capanzano, Kara Desanna

- Approval of Minutes of April 24
- Review of the GEAC alignment of the SBC SLO's with the new Gen Ed requirements of SUNY
- Discussion of Scott Sutherland's request to increase the number of grad credits that undergrads can take and count towards their degree.

### Actions:

- Minutes approved
- Hanna reported that the UGC comments on Braden Hosch's draft policy on Microcredentialing was forwarded to him for review.
- The UGC reviewed all of the changes proposed by the GEAC to the SLOs for alignment of the SUNY Knowledge and Skills areas with the SBC and approved them with full consensus.
- Discussion took place regarding the request by Scott Sutherland to raise or remove the current limit of 6 graduate credits that can count towards an undergraduate degree.

**Memo from Scott Sutherland:** "The university has (and has had) a policy of limiting undergraduates to only having 6 graduate credits count towards the 120 required credits for graduation.

It took some digging to find out why this policy is in place, and everyone I talked to had no idea what academic purpose it served. Shelly Germana eventually found out that

- the policy was in place before Diane Bello's arrival (ie, at least since the early 1990s).
- There is no broad SUNY or NYSED policy on credit caps, but there are possible implications with financial aid, and could be implications for licensure-qualifying programs. (The financial aid piece of this could be resolved by having students discuss with financial aid before registering).
- For the most part, other SUNY schools either have no limits or do not count more than 12 graduate credits toward an undergraduate degree. (12 credits would still be double what we do now).

In mathematics, this is particularly troublesome for many of our best undergraduate majors, some of whom show up at Stony Brook with all of the usual Freshman and Sophomore material completed, and often some of the 300-level courses as well. These students are often ready in their Junior (or even Sophomore) years to take 500-level graduate courses in mathematics, but this rule prevents them from taking more than two of them. The math department is very careful to limit enrollment in these courses to students who are actually prepared -- we don't let undergraduates enroll in these courses without approval from both the undergraduate program director and the graduate program director. While we can petition to have this rule overridden (by Shelley Germana), she has been reluctant to allow more than 1 or sometimes 2 additional graduate courses. We often end up working around this limitation by having students enroll in independent studies to cover exactly the

same material taught in the 500-level graduate courses. This doesn't really do anyone a favor, but it does allow them to earn enough credits to graduate while still doing appropriate material.

As an example, I am teaching MAT536 this semester, and out of 19 enrolled students, 7 are undergraduates. Among the 6 best students in the class, 4 are undergraduates. Two of the undergraduates are sophomores.

This rule makes it hard for our most qualified students to get into a good PhD program in Mathematics, since they are competing with students from other schools that do not have such restrictions.

In addition, I tried to create a combined BS/MA in Mathematics program, but since only 6 graduate credits could count towards the undergraduate portion of the degree, this was effectively unworkable. I requested the CAS curriculum committee to allow us to have undergraduate courses that were coscheduled with the graduate courses (eg, MAT536 with a new course MAT436), but they said unless we modified the instruction for undergraduates, they would not approve it. This defeats the purpose of such courses. The response of the ASCC was that this was an administrative issue, not a curricular one.

I would hope that Stony Brook would consider removing this limitation entirely (perhaps with a caveat that undergraduates can only enroll in graduate courses with explicit approval by the graduate and undergraduate program directors), or at the very least raise the limit significantly.

The UGC discussion broke this down to different levels for consideration

Graduate courses could be taken by undergrads

1. with graduate course numbers as electives not counting towards undergraduate degree
  - Generalized qualifications (e.g., U status, credit number completed, GPA)?
  - Specific qualifications (department based)?
  - Procedure description, availability and access?
  - Priority with regard to other enrollees such as grad students.
  - How would grades be folded into GPA?
  - Any need for credit limit?
  - monitoring that sufficient undergrad credits towards a degree are also taken to meet financial aid requirements.

The main problem is when students come in with a strong background such that the undergrad level of a course does not provide the appropriate education- they may have a hard time meeting the last bullet.

2. with graduate course numbers substituting for required undergraduate level courses in the major or substituting for upper-division credit requirements.
  - a mechanism must be developed by which grad courses would substitute for the undergrad version in a major and be used for undergrad requirements, GPA calculations, etc.

- similarly, where grad courses could satisfy the university upper-division requirements.
  - are there priority concerns?
  - any reason for a credit limit?
3. with undergraduate course numbers, such as independent study.
- This does not allow graduate schools to see what material was actually covered.

The UGC consensus was

- that students with appropriate backgrounds, as determined by the department offering the graduate course, be allowed to take graduate courses that count as upper-level credits towards the undergraduate degree.
- that there was no obvious rationale for limiting the number of credits.
- that Diane Bello would work with the financial aid office to determine a procedure whereby grad course credits could count as upper-level credits towards the degree and count towards financial aid credit minimum requirements.

Other university policies:

## Undergraduates Taking Graduate Courses

With permission from appropriate academic advisers, highly qualified undergraduates may take graduate level courses for credit toward the bachelor's degree. Contact an adviser if this is something you would like to do. If you later do not use the graduate course toward your undergraduate degree, you may be able, with permission, to transfer the credit toward a Master's degree. In this case, there may be financial implications. No course may be used for both an undergraduate and a graduate degree.

### SUNY Albany

**Graduate Courses for Undergraduate Credit:** A senior with a superior academic record may register for a 500-level course for undergraduate credit with the approval of the major department chair and the course instructor. In exceptional circumstances, seniors may be authorized to register for 600-level graduate courses provided they have completed most of the upper division undergraduate and other courses essential to their major and require a graduate course to strengthen it. To qualify for such enrollment the senior must have a superior record, particularly in his or her major field. To register for a 600-level course, students must have the approval of their adviser and obtain the written consent of their department chair and the instructor offering the course. The department chair should arrange for copies of these consents to be distributed to the persons involved and to be filed in the student's official folder.

### SUNY Buffalo

**Standard Option:** Undergraduate students who have completed more than 106 credits by the end of the previous semester at Buffalo State can register for graduate-level courses if they have maintained a minimum 2.5 cumulative GPA. A request to enroll in a graduate course is made by contacting the academic department offering the course. Permission must be granted by the instructor and department chair. The total enrollment of undergraduate and graduate courses should not exceed 15 hours per semester. **Graduate courses taken in the Standard Option manner will not apply toward an undergraduate degree.** The graduate courses may be applied toward an advanced degree if they are acceptable to the graduate program and department. The six-year time limitation on the completion of the master's degree program applies to the earned graduate credits. Generally, a maximum of 6 graduate credit hours may be taken as a senior unless enrolled in a 4+1 Undergraduate to Graduate Pathways (Option 2) or Combined Undergraduate/Graduate Pathway (Option 3).

In fact, no grad course at Buffalo in any program can count towards undergraduate degree requirements.

Yale

Do graduate courses count towards undergrad GPA?

If you take graduate class in an undergrad degree, it counts in your undergrad GPA. If you take undergraduate classes under a graduate program/degree, it counts in your graduate GPA. The prevalent theme is the degree/program you are listed under on your transcript. That defines your record. Jan 16, 2008

Harvard

### Undergraduate and Graduate Credit Courses

In courses available for both undergraduate and graduate credit at the Extension School, you should enroll for undergraduate credit. However, if a course is only available for graduate credit, it can count toward your degree. All

UT Austin

Undergraduates may enroll in graduate courses for undergraduate credit, assuming they meet certain conditions.

1. The undergraduate student must be eligible to take upper-division courses and must fulfill the prerequisite for the course (except graduate standing).
2. The student must have a university grade point average of at least 3.00.
3. The student must receive the consent of the course instructor and the graduate advisor for the department in which the course is offered. Some colleges and schools may also require the approval of the dean's office. Individual departments may impose additional requirements, or bar undergraduates from enrolling in graduate courses altogether.
4. An undergraduate student may not enroll in a graduate course that has fewer than five graduate students enrolled.
5. A graduate course taken by an undergraduate is counted toward the student's bachelor's degree in the same way that upper-division courses are counted, unless the course is reserved for graduate credit. Courses reserved for graduate credit may not also be used to fulfill the requirements of an undergraduate degree.

- We streamlined the document and discussed the draft. The comments and concerns are embedded.
- Hanna indicated that she would send this to Braden.
- Minutes of April 24 approved

*Draft modified 5/10/2023 by UGC.*

**Microcredentials** [DRAFT] <https://www.suny.edu/microcredentials/microlist/>

Stony Brook University abides by the definition of a microcredential established by the State University of New York:

SUNY microcredentials verify, validate, and attest that specific skills and/or competencies have been achieved. They are valid learning experiences with learning outcomes, assessments, and examples of student work. SUNY microcredentials are endorsed by the issuing institution, having been developed through established faculty governance processes and are designed to be meaningful and high quality. (<https://www.suny.edu/microcredentials/>)

SUNY's policy framework supports microcredentials that:

- provide opportunities for existing students to earn skills complementary to their major;
- provide professional development opportunities for current employees;
- provide pathways to (or back to) higher education for adult learners;
- support life-long learning;
- enhance support of business/industry, P-12 and community partners through creation of partner - or industry-specific microcredentials, and/or supplementing training programs with upskilling and professional development opportunities.
- motivate current students to persist\*;

\* A microcredential could be given to currently-enrolled matriculated students after the successful completion of a particularly challenging program milestone or to recognize completion of a certain set of electives that help prepare them for residencies, advanced study, or the workforce. The micro-credential gives students tangible evidence of accomplishment.

Like undergraduate minors, microcredentials are not recognized as formal awards by the NY State Dept. of Education (NYSED) and approval from NYSED is not required. SUNY policy, however, requires that approved microcredentials are reported to SUNY, and that microcredentials are recorded on the student's transcript.

SBU Microcredential guidelines:

- Microcredentials must include a minimum of 6 credits of academic coursework.  
**Concern: This seems too low for any competency?**
- Undergraduate microcredentials may not include more than 15 credits of academic coursework; graduate microcredentials may not include more than 11 credits of academic coursework.  
**Concerns:**
  - **Inequity between credit load for microcredentials, is this a problem?**
  - **Fifteen credits outside of a major may impede progress towards degree or access to TAP or access to research or internship opportunities.**
- Courses included in microcredentials may be a part of a larger minor, certificate or degree program.

**Concern:** What complications could arise from transfer requests?

- Microcredentials may include the same academic coursework as a **concentration**, consistent with the limits above, and this will be on the transcript even as the concentration is not.

**Comment:** A concentration is not the same as a specialization and does not show on a transcript. A microcredential is a good way to get recognition for the concentration.

- Students may receive a microcredential designation in addition to a specialization.

**Concern:** If the microcredential involves a subset of the required courses for the specialization, the impact on the transcript is overshadowed by the specialization which does show on the transcript (e.g., listing an Associate's Degree and Bachelor's degree in the same department adds nothing). The UGC recommends that microcredential be listed **ONLY** on the transcript if the students did **NOT** satisfy the Specialization requirements.

- Non-credit microcredentials must contain an equivalent amount of work to credit-bearing microcredentials.

**Concern:** But credits hours can vary from 6 to 15 for undergraduates. So equivalent to what work load and how is this demonstrated?

- Microcredential programs **must?** not be limited to matriculated students. Microcredential programs may incorporate admission requirements to ensure students who enrolled are capable of successful performance.

**Concerns:**

- Who vets the background of the non-matriculated students who wish to go for a microcredential?
- Course availability issues?
- Students matriculated in degree or certificate programs may not delay conferral of their degrees to complete a microcredential

**Concern:** Who is monitoring this?

- A microcredential may be conferred before or after completion of a formal degree or certificate.

**Comment:** This probably means that after a degree is conferred a student may return to the department for a **NEW** microcredential using new courses that they take. This needs to be made clearer.

- Student enrollment in and completion of microcredential programs must be recorded in the University's official student information system. A student may earn a maximum of five undergraduate and five graduate microcredentials.

**Concern:** Is this while enrolled as a matriculated student for an undergraduate or graduate degree? In this case 5 is too many. But if this is over a lifetime, why limit it?

Consistent with SUNY's microcredential definition and policy, Stony Brook University requires microcredentials to be developed **by one or more (if interdisciplinary) academic departments**. Proposals for academic microcredentials (credit and non-credit) must be approved through established faculty curriculum development processes at the College/School or equivalent level. Proposals for microcredentials wholly within one program must be reviewed by the appropriate joint governance body (e.g., **A&S Senate**). Proposals for microcredentials crossing programs or schools must be forwarded to the Undergraduate Council and/or Graduate Council of the University Senate for review and approval. Following approval by the Undergraduate Council and/or Graduate Council, the Provost must review and approve the proposals for new microcredentials. Following approval by the Provost, the Provost's Office will notify the Stony Brook University Registrar; the Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness; other relevant Stony Brook University offices; SUNY; and any other entity as required.