

*Mr. Dykema*

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON PREREQUISITES AND  
COURSE NUMBERS TO THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The heads of ten schools and departments replied to Dr. Dykema's request for information on their practices respecting prerequisites and course numbering. Guided by these replies, by opinions and information from other faculty members, and by our own experiences, the sub-committee members unanimously concur in the following conclusions, and we offer them for the Committee's consideration:

1. Current practices with respect to the fixing of course prerequisites, assignment of numbers to courses, and observance of prerequisite requirements at registration exhibit so many variations from any presumed normal procedure as to create a confused situation that borders on the chaotic. Some 200-level courses are open to Freshmen; some 100-level courses are commonly taken by Sophomores; some 300- and 400-level courses are without prerequisite and may be taken by any student. Furthermore, too many students are permitted to register in courses for which they do not have the required standing or have not taken prescribed prerequisites, or both.

2. The confused situation described above is undesirable. Efforts should be made to establish a system that is more uniform and more realistic, and one that will better serve to place students in courses from which they will receive maximum benefit.

3. The problems involved are complex. The sub-committee recognizes that each department and school has its own particular needs, and that in some instances rather special circumstances prevail. We are not concerned here with personal or departmental shortcomings, if such exist, and, indeed, we impute none to any one in pointing out the inadequacies of design and operation that characterize the present system.

4. Our long-range recommendations presuppose the adoption, in the near future, of the general "reorganization" plan now being prepared by the Curriculum Committee. This is discussed further in point 5, below. Until these long-range recommendations, or others adopted by the Academic Standards Committee, can be put into effect, we suggest the following as temporary expedients to improve our practices:

(a) Faculty members serving at registration are urged to be as conservative as possible under the circumstances in admitting students to courses for which stated requirements have not been met.

(b) The Administration is requested to assist all it

can in relieving the strain on our 100- and 200-level courses. Overloads in these courses appear to be a major reason for the extensive waiver of requirements at registration: it is often simply impossible to complete student schedules with proper courses.

5. The sub-committee's major proposals are based upon the supposition that the general reorganization plan now before the Curriculum Committee will be adopted in the near future. The salient features of this plan are a sharp demarcation between the Upper and Lower Divisions of the College, and a provision that the student shall complete all requirements in the Lower Division before he begins work in the Upper Division. We suggest that when this plan is put into effect, the following changes be made in our system of course-numbering and prerequisites:

(a) The distinction between "100" and "200" courses be abandoned, and all courses offered in the Lower Division be given a common designator. (Possibly the letter "L" might be used, but any other suitable designator would do as well.) Then, within the offerings for the Lower Division, special requirements, where needed, can be established by the listing of prerequisites. In effect, this would make standard practice the policy now followed, for example, for Communications 105, 106, 107, where 107 is designated a 100-level course, but is commonly taken in the Sophomore year after completion of 105 and 106.

(b) In similar fashion, all Upper Division courses will bear a common designator. (Exception: a special category may be set up, if desired, for seminars, reading courses, research courses, etc.)

(c) The present restriction--a partial loss of credit--on students in the Upper Division taking Lower Division courses should be removed.

6. We advocate the adoption of these proposals for these reasons:

(a) There appears to be little distinction between our 100-level and our 200-level courses, and the present numbering system is, in this respect, unrealistic. Although "100" courses are described as "designed" for Freshmen, and "200" courses as "designed" for Sophomores, large numbers of Freshmen take 200-level courses and large numbers of Sophomores take 100-level courses. In many cases there seems to be no valid reason why this should not be done. Furthermore, it is presumed, as we have noted, that Communications 107 will be taken by Sophomores though it bears a "100" number. The separation of Lower Division courses into two groups (100-level and 200-level) is

highly artificial and confusing. The logical plan is to place all Lower Division courses in a single category, and to take care of particular situations by the use of named prerequisites.

(b) A similar artificiality exists with respect to "300" and "400" courses; in many cases it is as suitable for Seniors as for Juniors to enroll in "300" courses, and many courses in the "400" group are suitable for Juniors. An additional confusion has grown up with respect to 400-level courses. For although "400" courses are described as "designed" for Seniors, the 400 designator is now widely used simply to indicate courses of a special nature. It appears realistic and logical to put all Upper Division courses in one category, to provide for orderly sequences by prerequisite listings, and, if desired, to set up a separate category for special courses.

(c) The existing penalty provision which discourages advanced students from taking Lower Division courses is unfortunate. It is perhaps justified at present as a deterrent to the practice of deferring required lower-level courses to the Junior or Senior year. When the definite demarcation between the two Divisions is established, this problem can be met in another way.

One of the chief problems faced in college education is this: courses necessary for the student's preparation in his specialty make such heavy demands on his time that his opportunities for gaining broader knowledge are dangerously minimized. This enforced minimization of "liberal" education, which will be severe enough at best, should be counteracted by every practicable means. When an opportunity arises for an advanced student to broaden his knowledge by work outside his field--and this work will usually be at the elementary level--he should receive every encouragement to take advantage of the opportunity. To impose a penalty on the advanced student for electing a lower-level course works in exactly the opposite direction, and this serves to defeat a fundamental aim of college education.

(d) The need for more courses--or rather, for more sections of courses--open to Lower Division students will probably continue. Any relief from the pressure created by the shortage of offerings at this level will materially assist in maintaining any set of registration rules which is adopted.

Respectfully submitted,  
Edward T. Reilly, Chmn.  
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