

May 20, 2020

Subcommittee on Courses & Continuing, Part-Time, & Summer Session Education (SCOC)  
Council on Educational Policy (CEP):

Re: Guidelines for waiving prerequisites for students affected by COVID-19 course cancellations

As a result of an unexpected transition to remote teaching at the beginning of the spring 2020 quarter, some laboratory, studio and field courses had to be cancelled or postponed. Some of these courses serve as prerequisites for other courses, creating a situation in which students' progress to degree may be considerably delayed.

By way of a specific example, Chemistry 51LB laboratory course, with a normal enrollment of about 200 students in summer has been cancelled in the summer of 2020 because this course is not convertible into a remote format. These students were expected to take Chem 51LB in the summer and then start Chem 51C Organic Chemistry lecture in the fall 2020 quarter. However, since Chem 51LB is a prerequisite for Chem 51C, they will have to wait until after Chem 51LB can be offered again in winter 2021. This will make these students delayed by almost a year.

SCOC and CEP recognize that prerequisites exist for various reasons. In most cases, they help make sure that students have necessary background knowledge to be successful in a course. But in some cases, such as in the example described above, they are simply there for logistical reasons to better control enrollments in courses and manage the flow of a large number of students through the limited instructional space. In situations when a logistics-based prerequisite course cannot be offered for reasons beyond our control, we strongly recommend that prerequisite should be waived to allow students to proceed. The determination on whether the prerequisite course is logistical or pedagogical should be left to the individual programs. We note that SCOC and CEP rarely question prerequisite choices by the programs (we always trust the programs to make the right choices for the prerequisite courses).

The suggested procedure during the academic year 2020-21 quarters affected by COVID-19 would be for the program's Student Affairs Manager (or equivalent) to provide to the Registrar the current prerequisite and suggest a temporary modification that would help avoid student progress delays. A clear justification should be provided that confirms that the bottleneck course in question is a logistical prerequisite, and students are academically prepared to start the next course.

We stress that this is a temporary measure. We expect the flow of course requirements to come back to normal after the 2020-21 academic year.

Sergey Nizkorodov, SCOC Chair  
Tony Smith, CEP Chair