

Curricular Guidelines for Minors at HSU

Integrated Curriculum Committee, 2/22/11

Introduction: The Academic Master Planning (AMP) subcommittee of the ICC is working to establish curricular guidelines for minor programs of study. These guidelines include a program definition (language for the catalog), program standards, and factors to consider. When proposing new minors, faculty should document how their program meets the standards, or provide a rationale for an exception. The AMP is considering ways to expedite the documentation process. Initially, most of these standards will apply only to new minors, with a gradual phase-in process for existing minors.

Background

This impetus for these guidelines is a mix of issues:

- The ICC has received various curricular proposals related to minors and needs consistent standards to use in making recommendations about those proposals. In addition, the ICC Constitution charges the committee with developing criteria for approval and continuation of all academic programs. Because of the need to respond to proposals for new minors, the ICC began its criteria-development work with minors.
- Unlike most of our sister CSU campuses, HSU presently has virtually no standards for minors, resulting in extreme variability in minors in terms of number of units, coherence, and faculty understanding as to the purpose of minors.
- Many of HSU's minors average only one or two graduates per year; some average even fewer than that. Lack of student interest suggests that the curriculum for those minors needs to be reconsidered; either the area of study is one that students do not find meaningful or the curriculum presents impediments to students. Departments need to examine minors on a regular basis in order to ensure that the curriculum is serving students needs and interests.
- Minor curricula need to be kept up-to-date. Whenever changes are made to courses included in minors, student handbooks, minor contracts, catalog copy, DARS reports, and various other pieces of documentation must be revised. In many cases, faculty have failed to submit the appropriate curriculum change forms, resulting in out-of-date information in the catalog and at the registrar's office *and* the need for time-consuming course substitutions on the students' Minor contract.
- Students frequently plan to earn minors, but then drop them as they near graduation. This can contribute to their accumulation of excess units

- ***Program Definition***

Minors provide a coherent exploration of a field of study different from a student's Major. Minors consist of 15 to 30 units of coursework, *including* all prerequisites for the courses. A minimum of six of those units must be in Upper Division courses. In addition, a minimum of six units of the minor must be applied exclusively to the student's minor requirements and may not be used to meet any other programs requirements, with the exception of General Education requirements.¹

Rationale: Earning a Minor implies that the student has completed a certain disciplinary or interdisciplinary study with its own curricular integrity. The 15 to 30 unit range is based on CSU policy, examination of policies at other CSU schools, examinations of the current number of units required for existing HSU minors (some require more than 30, some require fewer than 15), and the ICC's firm conviction that hidden requirements do not serve our students well. Thus we have kept 30 units as the upper limit on units so that minors that require a significant number of background courses (math courses as preparation for physics, for example) can include all the needed prerequisite courses in the minor.

Program Standards

I. VISION AND BENEFIT

Minor programs of study support the Mission and Vision of Humboldt State University and provide learning opportunities that enrich the student's education.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

1. The minor supports the University Vision.
2. The benefits of the minor program to students are articulated. Where relevant, the proposal identifies specific majors that are most likely to complement the minor.

Rationale: A minor program should contribute to HSU's educational identity as well as student needs and interests in order to justify the direct and indirect costs associated with minors.

¹ Some majors include the completion of a minor as a requirement for the major. In these instances, all the minor units are actually also part of the major, and thus the requirement for eight unique minor units does not apply.

II. COHERENT CURRICULUM

Minor programs have an intentional structure that provides students with opportunities to study one or more aspects of an area of study in sufficient depth to develop noteworthy knowledge and understanding.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

1. The minor program has a stated curricular focus, a set of related student learning outcomes, and an explanation of how the curriculum supports those learning outcomes.
2. The set of courses required in the minor program is justified with respect to the development of student learning; each course in the minor is mapped to learning outcomes that are articulated with the program student learning outcomes.
3. The minor consists of 15 to 30 units of coursework, including the prerequisites for any courses. Proposals for new minors will specifically identify prerequisites for any courses included in the minor, and will include a pathway demonstrating how a student can complete the minor and pre-requisites in no more than 30 units.
4. All new minor proposals will include sample course pathways showing how the minor program fits with majors that are likely to be complementary with the minor (for example, Biology and Zoology). The pathways will show how many courses and pre-requisites overlap from the major to the minor in order to illustrate how many additional units a typical student might take to complete the minor.
5. Courses required for the minor are available for students in the minor: they are offered frequently enough that students can complete the minor in a reasonable amount of time *and* have sufficient capacity that students will have the opportunity to enroll.

Rationale: The learning outcomes of the minor need to be explicit to the students and faculty. In addition, the minor courses should to be available to students if the minor is to be offered.

III. DEPARTMENTAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Minor programs have identified faculty expertise and Departmental commitment. Minor programs are administered by an academic department (home) in one of the three colleges. This administrative home ensures consistent student advising and periodic review of the program's viability.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

1. The home department chair of the minor program acts as or designates an advisor in the program.
2. In addition, the minor program must demonstrate that sufficient faculty resources are available to support the curriculum, *especially* if any courses unique to the minor are included in the minor curriculum. Minors that require courses that are not included in another major will need to provide exceptionally strong evidence of student demand for the minor.
3. The home department commits to monitoring viability of the minor by tracking information such as the availability of needed courses and the number of graduates from the program.
4. Review of the minor program is planned for. This review may be within the related major program review, or for interdisciplinary minors, the home department may schedule a separate review.

Rationale: A viable program reflects the training and interests of more than one faculty member. Minors should not need to be eliminated because one faculty member has left the University. Knowing who is responsible for oversight of a program is essential so that the necessary work is consistently completed.

IV. VIABILITY

There are positive indications for current and/or potential demand from students for the minor.

1. All minors are expected to average 2 graduates per year.. All new minor proposals will provide evidence that the new minor can be expected to meet this standard. Possible evidence might include 1) robust non-major enrollment in courses that will be included in the new minor, 2) strong graduation rates from similar minors at comparable institutions and/or 3) evidence that significant numbers of HSU students complete a substantial portion of the minor either through GE courses or because they dropped the corresponding major.

Rationale: While no one can guarantee extensive student interest in a minor before the program is actually offered, evidence that the minor is likely to attract students is important in order to justify the faculty and registrar's office time required to implement a new program. The requirement to graduate at least an average of 2 students per year. is based on analysis of our existing minors and the belief that minors smaller than that standard probably need some curricular revision. Maintaining this very minimal standard will help ensure that the University avoids investing resources in minors that appeal to very few students, while still maintaining a sufficient diversity of options to support student interests and needs.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

1. Upon approval by the Provost, the ICC will apply these guidelines to all new minors under consideration.
2. As of Fall of 2015, as part of program review, departments will be expected to demonstrate that their minors are meeting a standard of graduating an average of at least 2 students per year. These graduation rates will be monitored annually as part of the Program Review, Evaluation, and Planning process. Programs that fail to meet these standards may either eliminate the minor or revise it and apply for recertification.
3. Immediately upon approval by the Provost, any minor that has graduated 5 or fewer students in the past 5 years² will either revise the curriculum and apply for recertification based upon these new standards or will move to eliminate the minor.

Rationale: As a result of Prioritization several programs were encouraged to examine minors with low graduation rates. In the majority of cases, the programs opted to eliminate minors for which there was minimal student interest. In other cases, programs took a hard look at the minors, and made revisions (approved by the ICC and Senate) that are expected to increase enrollment to the appropriate level.

Low graduation rates in a minor are a symptom of some type of problem with the minor; these guidelines seek to establish a University culture that examines the problems and responds with action to address them. Minors have low graduation rates for a variety of reasons; lack of student interest, courses that are not offered frequently enough for students to be able to complete the minor, extensive pre-requisites that prevent students from completing the minor, lack of room in the schedules of the students most likely to be interested in the minor (minors that fit well with programs such as Engineering that already require 120 units for the major and GE), etc. Revising a minor to address these problems has the potential to increase student enrollment in the minor.

One possible consequence of eliminating low-enrolled minors may be that students who wanted a minor will choose among the remaining minors, thus helping them to become more viable.

² Exceptions will be made for minors that were newly approved or substantially revised in Fall 2004 or later. These minors will be expected to meet the standard of an average of 2 graduates per year beginning in Fall 2015.