

Curriculum Implementation Committee

UPDATE TO SENATE

January 31, 2017

The purpose of this update is to apprise the AGPC of the work the Curriculum Implementation Committee (CIC) has undertaken since its reactivation in Spring 2016 and to give committee members an opportunity to provide feedback as the Committee continues its deliberations. Since its reactivation, the CIC has completed a concentrations policy and moved forward with three other items: (1) a draft of the principles and goals governing Ryerson's undergraduate curriculum structure, attached; (2) an assessment of the open elective pilot running since 2013; and (3) an examination of a variety of issues related to the pilot and its potential extension to all undergraduate programs.

The first part of this update summarizes the CIC's work so far, including a provisional recommendation the Committee is making at this juncture. The second part deals with its plan of further work to be submitted to Senate by the June 2017 Senate meeting.

1. Summary of Fall 2016 Work

1.1 Concentrations

The proposed concentrations policy passed at the November 2016 meeting of Senate. The policy provides an explicit definition of concentrations and sets constraints concerning courses that can be used to comprise a concentration. For example, professional required courses and courses counting towards a minor may not be included in a concentration, and restrictions such as grade variations on individual courses or a minimum CGPA requirement are not permitted.

1.2 Principles and Goals

The CIC has drafted a set of principles and goals, attached in Appendix A, that it envisions as underlying Ryerson's undergraduate curriculum structure. These principles and goals are not new. They are based on the ideas appearing in a range of documents, from the 1977 Ryerson University Act to Ryerson's current academic plan *Our Time to Lead*. The attempt of the document attached here is to synthesize and condense the ideas into a usable, up to date form.

1.3 Assessment of the Open Elective Pilot

Five undergraduate programs launched in Fall 2013 – Biomedical Sciences, Creative Industries, Financial Mathematics, Mathematics and its Applications, and Professional Communication – were approved by Senate in 2012 to be part of the open elective pilot. Students in these programs have had the professionally related elective component of their curriculum replaced by an open elective component. When the pilot began, a range of Ryerson courses were identified by schools and departments to serve in this new capacity. Students in the inaugural cohorts of the earliest of these programs are now reaching graduation. The time is therefore appropriate to assess how well open electives have served the functions that were initially envisioned for them when they were proposed by the Curriculum Renewal Committee (CRC) in 2012. In the words of the CRC's May 2012 White Paper:

Open electives provide choices related either to personal interest and exploration or to a student’s own particular career path. Thus, open electives are intended to be the main ‘choice category’ – the part of the curriculum in which students can choose to gain additional depth in their core discipline, to pursue a minor or to develop other interests.

The CIC has undertaken this assessment by compiling data on open elective offerings and by conducting a range of consultations. The results of these efforts are described below.

1.3.1 Compilation of Data on Open Electives

Since the first list of 696 open electives appeared in the Ryerson undergraduate calendar in 2013-14, the number has gradually risen as new courses have been added by schools and departments. In Fall 2016 there were 992 open electives in the Ryerson undergraduate calendar. A majority – 682 out of 992 – have some sort of requisite attached: either prerequisite, corequisite or antirequisite, leaving 310 without them.

Each term a subset of this 992 total are offered by schools and departments across the University. In the most recent academic year, for example, 412 were offered in Fall 2016 and 408 in Winter 2017. The distribution of these offerings by Faculty is shown in Figure 1. In a typical term, Arts offers somewhat over a third of the total and TRSM a fifth, with FOS and FCAD at slightly lower proportions, FCS at a tenth and FEAS at one percent.

**Figure 1
Open Elective Offerings by Faculty**

Faculty	Fall 2016		Winter 2017	
Faculty of Arts	160	(39%)	147	(36%)
TRSM	83	(20%)	81	(20%)
FCAD	61	(15%)	66	(16%)
FCS	35	(8%)	35	(9%)
FEAS	3	(1%)	2	(1%)
FOS	70	(17%)	77	(19%)
Total	412		408	

It is also useful to look at the distribution by Faculty of those open electives offered in a typical term without prerequisites, corequisites and antirequisites, as this list will be particularly important for many students. For this subset of open elective offerings, Arts’ proportion rises to close to half, with FCS, TRSM and FCAD at about a sixth each and FOS and FEAS each below a tenth. The data, available only for Fall 2016, are shown in Figure 2 below.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, while the total of 992 open electives appears large, a far smaller range of open electives are available in any term, especially when counting just courses without prerequisites, corequisites or antirequisites. Second, these data do not fully capture the constraints that students face when trying to enrol in courses where a limited number of seats are available to those from outside the course’s program. Third, Arts dominates the distribution, especially in the case of courses without requisites. It would be useful to find

ways to increase the diversity of the open electives list by raising the proportions offered by other Faculties.

Figure 2
Open Elective Offerings without Requisites by Faculty

Faculty	Fall 2016
Faculty of Arts	77 (46%)
TRSM	24 (14%)
FCAD	23 (14%)
FCS	26 (16%)
FEAS	3 (2%)
FOS	13 (8%)
Total	166

These issues will become more significant if and when open electives are extended to all undergraduate programs. If this step is taken, ways will need to be found to increase the number and diversity of open electives offered while also enhancing student access in those courses that are offered. Generating specific proposals for accomplishing these goals will feature prominently in the Committee’s final report at the end of the academic year. In the meantime, more data will be collected in the months ahead, including the following:

- Data will be obtained from students in open elective pilot programs who apply to graduate as to which courses were taken as open electives, how many apply for a minor and which minor they select.
- The Chang School will identify those courses on the Open Electives Table that are also offered through the Chang School.

1.3.2 Consultations with Ryerson Stakeholders

During the Fall 2016 term, the CIC conducted the following consultations with Ryerson stakeholders who have had experience with the open elective pilot:

- two focus groups of students in the five pilot programs
- an online survey of students in the five pilot programs, and of students in three programs in the RTA School of Media that have adopted open electives (Media Production, Sports Media, and New Media)
- interviews with Chairs/Directors/staff of pilot programs
- meetings with relevant units in the Registrar’s Office, including Curriculum Management, University Scheduling, Student Records and Operations Support
- meetings with Chairs/Directors, Program Directors, and Deans of all Faculties
- a meeting with Chang School Program Directors

In summarizing the wealth of feedback the Committee received, it is useful to look first at the comments made by faculty and staff and then the comments made by students.

Summary of Feedback from Faculty and Staff

Overall, faculty and staff were supportive of making open electives a permanent part of their programs. However, several concerns were raised. One concern was that students who have

participated in the open elective pilot could take all lower level courses to fulfill their open elective requirements. In addition, the lack of classification between lower and upper level elective courses has meant that early-year students have sometimes enrolled in senior open elective courses that do not have prerequisites, without realizing their level of difficulty. For both these reasons, as well as the fact that Ryerson course numbers do not reflect the difficulty of the course, it was suggested that the open elective table be divided into upper and lower level courses. Students would then be required to take a minimum number of upper level courses to meet their overall open elective requirements.

Concerns were raised about student access. It was noted that scheduling constraints and seat availability have been issues for students choosing open electives from outside their program. In addition, physical space issues and faculty workload constraints limit the extent to which schools/departments can increase the number of seats in and sections of current open electives. Mention was also made of the limitations that prerequisites for open elective courses may impose. One possible solution may be to offer more open electives online, which would be particularly useful for students in part-time programs and programs with off-campus practice components.

It was continually stressed that advising students on the selection of open electives is essential. There were questions about how this advisement can best be handled for open electives, especially when programs attempt to meet the advisement needs of students from across the university who are thinking of choosing open electives from among the program's courses.

Finally, attention was given to the process whereby courses are added to the open elective table. It was suggested that it would be useful if advance notice were given of open electives to be added to the table so that decisions could be made by programs about possible exclusions of their own students from courses deemed to be too close to core courses.

Summary of Feedback from Student Consultations

The Committee was particularly interested in feedback from students. Overall, most students who were consulted had a very positive view of open electives and noted a range of benefits associated with this new category of courses, including the flexibility and choice they offer as well as the chance to explore beyond their disciplines. Transfer students were also quite positive about open electives since many of the courses they completed in another program or at another university were credited as open electives. Here are some students' comments about open electives.

“[These courses] satisfied both my academic curiosity and ability to pursue interests beyond my major.”

“Open electives are a great way to broaden knowledge, fulfill a minor, or satisfy curiosity in subjects that I wouldn't have been able to take through my own program. I think every program at Ryerson University should be given the opportunity to choose an open elective—it helps shape us as well-rounded individuals!”

“I think open electives are a great opportunity to explore areas that interest you but don’t necessarily apply to your field of study. They’ve made my overall experience of University more positive.”

“Taking other subjects outside of your faculty is healthy, being able to cross-reference with different classes is good, different skill sets are gained and it becomes useful in applying this to other courses.”

“As a transfer student, a lot of the courses taken in the other university were credited as open electives so that was very helpful.”

Students concurred that they should have the option of selecting core electives as open electives as well as from outside the core of their program. As one student commented: “Having both options is fair; taking open electives outside of your department only is not really what you paid for versus being able to take open electives from both in and outside the faculty.”

Still, students expressed a range of concerns about the process of choosing and enrolling in their open electives. Most used the undergraduate calendar to choose possible courses from the open electives table and found the calendar helpful in this regard. But many wanted more information than provided by the calendar’s course descriptions. Many found the process of selecting open electives more difficult than expected. Often they found the courses they were interested in were not being offered in the relevant semester, were offered at times that did not fit their schedule or were already full. And sometimes the courses they were most interested in taking were not on the open elective table at all. Several students found they were dropped from a course but were not notified. If they were informed only at the start of classes, the selection of open elective courses they could then choose from was limited and they ended up choosing a course that did not interest them. Several also highlighted the fact that courses without prerequisites might nonetheless be intended for upper year students. First-year students who registered in these courses were informed only at the first class that the course was intended for senior year students, by which time it was hard to find another open elective that suited them. Some said there were too many choices in the table. In the words of one student, “If there was a list of recommended PR courses to take for a certain program, it would really help.”

About half of the students who were surveyed did not seek any academic advising when selecting open electives. Those who did seek advice did so mainly from staff and faculty in their own programs. Opinion was split as to the value of advising provided by schools and departments, with some students suggesting they wanted more advising than they received. There seemed to be little awareness of course directives or minors, with many students finding out too late about minors to earn one. Some students noted the fact that it was possible to do all introductory courses to satisfy the open elective requirement, which may have positive ramifications for their CGPA.

Finally, students had a range of recommendations for improving the open elective category:

- Add more courses, both in number and in range and diversity.
- Provide clearer and more detailed course descriptions.
- Provide students in particular programs with a list of suggested courses.

- Expand the number of online open electives offered.
- Improve the quality of academic advising and the awareness of advising resources, especially for first-year students so they know how to plan for curricular pathways such as minors.
- Make RAMSS simpler and more user-friendly.
- Inform students before the course intentions period which open electives are offered in each semester and year and when they will be offered next. Not knowing beforehand when open electives will be offered makes planning difficult.
- Do not publicize courses that are not offered or will never be offered.
- Provide more open electives slots in programs' curricula to ensure students can earn a minor and take the prerequisite courses.

1.3.3 Recommendation

Based on its deliberations so far and the feedback it has received, the CIC is in a position to recommend that the university move towards adopting the open elective component across all undergraduate programs. The Committee notes that overall the response to the open elective pilot from students, faculty and staff has been favourable. More generally, across the university there seems to be a widespread view that this component more adequately reflects the goals of flexibility and choice as noted in the goals and principles outlined in Appendix A than the professionally related category currently incorporated in most undergraduate programs.

2. Agenda for Winter 2017 Deliberations

2.1 Outstanding Tasks

1. Continue assessing the open elective pilot through an analysis of the statistics that will become available for the first time as students in the inaugural year of the earliest programs apply for graduation.
2. In conjunction with the University Planning Office, work on possible systemic solutions (e.g. financial incentives) to improve access to open electives and to increase the number and diversity of open elective courses.
3. Continue work on an omnibus curriculum policy to be presented to Senate by its June 2017 meeting. This ongoing task involves:
 - Identifying and reviewing all policies that are being replaced by omnibus curriculum policy.
 - Adding a section that provides definitions of curricular terms
 - Completing a consolidation of all existing Liberal Studies policies, along with a new governance structure.
4. Provide recommendations on a range of issue relating to open electives and their possible extension to all programs. The topics the Committee will be discussing in this regard include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Developing a potential implementation plan for programs moving from professionally related electives to open electives.
- Exploring the advantages and disadvantages of an OE table versus an open university-electives system where students can select any course for which they have the prerequisite, except for courses excluded by schools/departments as open electives.
- Specifying the extent to which students can use liberal studies courses to fulfill their open elective requirements.
- Exploring ways of increasing access to open electives by asking schools and departments to add courses not currently on the open electives table, especially courses that are part of minors and those that serve as prerequisites for courses that already appear on the table.
- Outlining a possible classification of open electives as lower level or upper level and the potential imposition of a minimum number courses that students must take at the upper level to complete their open elective requirements.
- Considering the impact of the GPA adjustment form to limit the extent to which students can replace upper level with lower level courses to raise their CGPA.
- Exploring the possibility of informing students which term and/or year open elective courses are likely to be offered, and whether it is possible to provide students with more detailed course frameworks to give them more information about course learning outcomes and topics of discussion.
- Looking at ways to improve academic advising through possible use of new resources as well as additional training to ensure that academic advisors, both faculty and staff, are knowledgeable not just about their own program's curriculum but about minors, open electives and the way students select them.
- Suggesting a method for overseeing the addition of courses as open electives in a way that makes it possible for programs to assess whether program-specific exclusions need to be added to the undergraduate calendar.
- Analyzing whether it is possible for schools and departments to establish meaningful prerequisites for all courses on the open electives list and considering removing courses that are never or rarely offered.

Respectfully submitted,



Chair, Curriculum Implementation Committee

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APPENDIX A
Ryerson University
Undergraduate Program Curriculum Structure

DRAFT

Policy Goals

The overarching goals of Ryerson’s undergraduate programs and their curriculum structure are built into its legislated objects, its mission and aims, and its Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLEs). The curriculum policy of the University will reflect those overarching goals, while taking account of how this framework has been evolving in keeping with broader trends in post-secondary education and Canadian society.

Ryerson’s Objectives

The “objects” of the University are outlined in Article 3 of *The Ryerson Act* (1977):

- 1) the advancement of learning, and the intellectual, social, moral, cultural, spiritual, and physical development of the University's students and employees, and the betterment of society;
- 2) the advancement of applied knowledge and research in response to existing and emerging societal needs and in support of the cultural, economic, social, and technological development of Ontario; and
- 3) the provision of programs of study that provide a balance between theory and application and that prepare students for careers in professional and quasi-professional fields.

Ryerson’s Mission

Ryerson is known for its mission to provide career-relevant education and must ensure sufficient rigour and depth to serve this mission. The “Mission and Aims” of the University are formally set out in Senate Policy #103, which has also been approved by the Board of Governors.

The special mission of Ryerson University is the advancement of applied knowledge and research to address societal need, and the provision of programs of study that provide a balance between theory and application and that prepare students for careers in professional and quasi-professional fields. As a leading centre for applied education, Ryerson is recognized for the excellence of its teaching, the relevance of its curriculum, the success of its students in achieving their academic and career objectives, the quality of its scholarship, research and creative activity and its commitment to accessibility, lifelong learning, and involvement in the broader community.

Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLEs)

The Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLEs), established by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) and endorsed by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), are part of Ryerson’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) and establish a framework for defining the attributes of a Ryerson graduate both generally and on an individual program basis.

Based on these overarching goals, the following are the basic principles that underlie Ryerson's curriculum policy.

Basic Principles

Alignment with UDLEs

The curriculum should ensure that students meet the educational objectives laid out in the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (Appendix A).

Breadth and Depth of Knowledge

Ryerson's goal is to produce graduates who are well rounded, both intellectually and in other ways, with a breadth as well as a depth of knowledge, learning to think critically and communicate clearly, both orally and in writing, while gaining transferable skills and the ability to work effectively with others to solve complex problems and contribute to the betterment of the community.¹

Program Quality and Currency

The university is committed to strengthening and nurturing existing programs, ensuring above all else, that they remain high quality and current. Program revisions should respond to external developments in professions, scholarly fields, and society at large, as well as taking account of interdisciplinary links with other subjects and relevant international perspectives.

Provision of Multiple Curricular Opportunities

While it is recognized that there are sometimes constraints on curriculum (such as external accreditation requirements), students should be provided with, and encouraged and supported to take advantage of, multiple curricular opportunities in order to meet their own educational goals.

Inclusion of Diverse Perspectives

Ryerson will continue to make post-secondary education more inclusive. The curriculum in each program should take account of diverse perspectives, especially those of groups whose perspectives have historically been unrecognized in Canadian society, not only to ensure the inclusion of all students in the educational process but as a means to enrich the curriculum.

Dealing with Emerging Trends

Ryerson students should be encouraged to play an active role in their learning to give them the skills required to deal with emerging trends as they build careers, enter various professions or launch their own ventures.²

¹ As noted Policy 103, Ryerson aims to "provide its students an educational experience of high quality, fostering in them knowledge and skills, critical enquiry, ethical standards, creativity, commitment to lifelong learning, a capacity to make an early and sustained contribution to their chosen field and to be effective problem solvers."

² As noted in Policy 103, "Ryerson's programs should reflect excellence and commitment to teaching that encourages students to play an active part in their learning; a curriculum of core courses and electives which offers the breadth and depth required to appreciate society's broader issues and problems, and the understanding and knowledge necessary for professional leadership; academic programs which combine theory and practice, directly connected to their professional fields, that anticipate and respond to emerging trends and future societal need; interdisciplinary studies and international perspectives; and activities and support systems that enhance success and well-being of the whole student."