University Senate
CHARGE

Date:	September 28, 2011
To:	Francis Alt Chair, Educational Affairs Committee
From:	Eric Kasischke Chair, University Senate
Subject:	Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection
Senate Document #:	11-12-11
Deadline:	March 30, 2012

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Educational Affairs Committee review the attached, "Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection," and make recommendations on whether the current procedures and timeline for posting syllabi are appropriate.

The University's teaching policies and guidelines for instructors stipulate the elements that must be included in a course syllabus and that the deadline to distribute a course syllabus is the first day of class. However, instructors are not required to provide their syllabus to students in advance of the course. The SEC requests that the Educational Affairs Committee review the proposal and advise on whether the current policies and guidelines should be revised to include earlier posting of course syllabi, possibly prior to the course registration process.

Specifically, we ask that you:

1. Consult with the proposer to discuss his specific concerns about the current process.

2. Review the current University teaching policies and guidelines for instructors.

3. Review similar policies and guidelines at our peer institutions.

4. Consult with the University's Office of Faculty Affairs to review current practices and discuss the advantages and disadvantages to possible changes.

5. If appropriate, recommend how current policies and guidelines can be changed to serve both students and instructors.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than March 30, 2012. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.

Name:	Kaiyi Xie
Date:	September 16, 2011
Title of Proposal:	Proposal to clarify and improve student class selection
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Campus Address:	0209J Stamp Student Union
Unit/Department/College:	ENGR, CMNS
Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):	Ex-oficio undergraduate
Description of issue/concern/policy in question:	Students are currently unable to view class syllabi before classes begin and/or professors distributes them. Indeed, they have little to no opportunity to view the syllabi of the class of previous professors/sections. This raises many potential problems for students, which include but are not limited to: - Choosing classes that are of an inappropriate difficulty level - Unable to tailor a course plan that fits personal/professional interests and/or career goals - Fulfilling gen-ed requirements with classes that do not end up meeting students' interests/goals In fact, there is NO mandate on professors to distribute a clear syllabus in the *Policies and Procedures*. Only in III-5.10 (A), "Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances" is it *suggested* that professors include a policy on missing assignments during religious holidays in their syllabi. In addition, advising is NOT mandated of all students (under *UMCP Policies and Procedures* III-2.50 (A)). Only certain departments mandate that students undergo semesterly advising to remove registration blocks prior to class registration. While it is clear that students with doubts about class choices can consult advisors/professors, doing so may not solve this problem for the following reasons: - Advisors from one academic college often do not know the details of classes in other academic colleges - There is no clear way to track past syllabi from past semesters for classes, especially by those taught by new professors, to

	keep subject material consistent and pertinent- if there are such methods within different departments, such materials should be made fully available to students • It would be easier for students to compare classes if the syllabi were available instead of speaking to professors individually • Consulting professors will sometimes not lead to a clear and reasonable solution, and oftentimes, professors are too busy to be able to answer very specific questions from students regarding a course's subject-material Undoubtedly, there is difficulty on the part of the student in asking "the right question" regarding the class to professors or advisors. Most of the time, all the information a student knows about the class is the name, section, and a brief description of the subject covered on Testudo.
Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:	Policy requiring professors to include information in syllabi (including but not limited to a comprehensive list of major topics covered within the class, rough grading breakdown, whether +/- grading is used, etc.), with a **hard deadline** set for professors to have preliminary syllabi ready for students to be able to review, preferably at the time that class registration beings. Since the web infrastructure of Testudo is quite old, if there is a way to post such syllabi to Testudo (or perhaps uploading to the department's website then including a link to the syllabus on the class description on Testudo), that would be preferable. However, if there is not, then the syllabi should be made available to students upon demand, if the student contacts the professor/academic unit responsible for the class. Exceptions would be if a professor for a class section is not determined yet- however, an old syllabus could be made available for that class.
Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:	As aforementioned, uploading onto Testudo/some other UMD website would be preferable. If not possible, then making it clear to students that they have the right to ask for a preliminary syllabus from the professor or academic unit would be very utile for students.
Additional Information:	None

Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to senate-admin@umd.edu
or University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall,
College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!