

## **The Undergraduate Curriculum Renewal Initiative Background and Update for Ryerson Senate September 14, 2016**

This document provides some background on the Undergraduate Curriculum Renewal Initiative that has been undertaken by the University. It also outlines developments associated with the recent reactivation of the Curriculum Implementation Committee and gives details on suggested next steps so that Senate is kept up to date on this important initiative.

### **1. Undergraduate Curriculum Renewal Initiative: Background (2011-2013)**

The Undergraduate Curriculum Renewal Initiative was launched in 2011. Its rationale is summarized in the overview provided on the Provost's website.

Ryerson's tripartite curriculum model has provided the University with a clear and valuable framework. It is fundamental to the entire curriculum structure. However, the academic plan, *Shaping Our Future*, proposed that the model be opened up to meet the needs of students in an increasingly interdisciplinary working world.<sup>1</sup>

Based on public consultations in 2011, the envisioned new framework passed by Senate in June 2011 was seen as having four main goals: 1) to ensure that Ryerson's curriculum keeps on meeting evolving career and societal need, 2) to provide greater student choice, 3) to facilitate the creation of innovative options in programs, and 4) to create a more cohesive curriculum policy.

In 2011, a Curriculum Renewal Committee (CRC) was established.<sup>2</sup> It was tasked by Senate to examine possible avenues for putting these goals into effect, concentrating on three broad areas: policy/governance, access/advising issues and registrarial issues (i.e. technical aspects).

As outlined in its green paper of January 2012 and then in more detail in the white paper of June 2012, the CRC saw a significant transformation of Ryerson's tripartite curriculum as the best way to achieve these goals.

#### ***a. Core Course Category***

The only one of the curriculum's three main categories that was recommended to stay substantially the same was professional and professional electives, to be known as core courses in the recommended new nomenclature. In contrast, the other two categories – the professionally related group of courses and liberal studies – were envisioned as undergoing major changes.

#### ***b. Open Electives***

The CRC envisioned the professionally related group being transformed into open electives, which would be the part of the curriculum for students to 1) obtain a minor, 2) explore their own interests, and 3) add additional depth in the core subject.

#### ***c. Breadth Electives***

Meanwhile, the CRC recommended that liberal studies become breadth electives, with the assumption that these new electives would be drawn from virtually all schools and departments across the University rather than mainly from the Faculty of Arts, as had been the case with liberal studies. While the range of courses in this new breadth elective category would have widened, and there was some discussion of imposing a mandated breadth component in this new elective class, the general intent of this new class of courses was

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.ryerson.ca/provost/planning/planning\\_initiatives/curriculum\\_renewal.html](http://www.ryerson.ca/provost/planning/planning_initiatives/curriculum_renewal.html)

<sup>2</sup> The membership of this committee is outlined in Appendix 1 of the CRC's Green Paper at [http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/provost/planning/documents/CurriculumRenewalGreenPaper\\_27Jan2012.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/provost/planning/documents/CurriculumRenewalGreenPaper_27Jan2012.pdf)

seen as being essentially the same as that of liberal studies, that is 1) to expose students to varied and diverse ways of seeing the world, 2) to assist students in developing their capacity to understand and critically appraise the issues and context of a discipline outside their field of study, and 3) to expose students to varied types and methods of reasoning and analysis, and modes of communication.

#### ***d. Writing Courses***

Finally, a new class of writing courses was to be introduced. The rationale for this change was to dissociate the writing aspect of liberal studies courses from the other features of breadth electives. In other words, not all breadth electives would be classified as writing-intensive, while some courses in the open elective and core course categories would receive a writing course designation where appropriate.

### **1.1. The CRC's White Paper Policy Proposals**

These principles, as well as several more technical issues, led to a set of 19 final policy proposals in the CRC's white paper:

- 1) Develop an omnibus curriculum policy (a draft of this policy, Policy 2, was included in an appendix).
- 2) Provide new nomenclature for the main categories in the tripartite curriculum.
- 3) Allow breadth electives as open electives and require students to take at least two open electives from outside their core electives.
- 4) Adopt the concept of writing intensive courses.
- 5) Establish a Breadth Elective and Writing Committee.
- 6) Monitor open elective restrictions and exclusions.
- 7) Establish mandated breadth for breadth electives.
- 8) Develop a procedures document to accompany Policy 2.
- 9) Retain the course intentions system.
- 10) Improve course offerings and ensure access.
- 11) Devise new categories to structure the range of open electives and breadth electives.
- 12) Endorse the academic advising report of the University Committee on Student Success.
- 13) Appoint a special implementation task force.
- 14) Establish breadth elective and writing course criteria.
- 15) Establish a multi-year rollout of the new curriculum over several years.
- 16) Impose a moratorium on minor curriculum changes.
- 17) Retain banding for breadth electives.
- 18) Respect the status of accredited programs.
- 19) Institute a formal process for establishing the list of open electives.

### **1.2 The Curriculum Implementation Committee's Green Paper Proposals**

Based on proposal 13 of the CRC's white paper, a Curriculum Implementation Committee (CIC) was established by Senate.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2013 the CIC released its green paper. Billed as a discussion document, it included a range of interim proposals. The paper included a range of analysis as well. The first element in this analysis dealt with the likely results of mandated breadth using a hypothetical set of breadth categories and an estimate of the number of breadth elective courses taken by the average undergraduate student.

The hypothetical requirement chosen for this analysis was that students had to take six breadth elective courses in at least three of the following categories: 1) humanities, 2) social sciences, 3) science and

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<sup>3</sup> The membership of this committee is outlined in Appendix 1 of the CRC's Green Paper at [http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/provost/planning/documents/CIC\\_Green\\_Paper\\_Final\\_May7\\_Senate.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/provost/planning/documents/CIC_Green_Paper_Final_May7_Senate.pdf)

engineering, 4) business, 5) communication and design and 6) community service, with students being disallowed from taking courses in the category deemed closest to their own subject area. For the sake of convenience, it was presumed that students had uniform preferences in selecting from among the five categories open to them. Based on 2012-13 enrollments in each Faculty, it was then a straightforward matter to estimate the potential distribution of breadth elective seats across the six Faculties. The conclusion of this analysis was that, on an annual basis, 20,000 seats might shift from Arts courses to those delivered by the other five Faculties. The green paper referred to these enrollment challenges as “extraordinary”, and stated that an enrollment shift of this magnitude “could have a disruptive impact on the University.” It noted that this disruption might take two forms. “First, it could significantly reduce undergraduate teaching in Arts departments, especially those with large numbers of liberal studies courses. Second, it could create a major new set of teaching demands for departments and schools in the rest of the University.”

The green paper then made five specific interim proposals:

- 1) For the purposes of mandated breadth students should take six breadth electives (four in engineering) from categories unassociated with their own major subject. In order to create the resources to support this requirement, the committee advised a gradual transition that would begin with accepting current liberal electives as breadth electives and would finish after an unspecified number of years with a breadth requirement that reflected all subject areas taught at Ryerson. The way the committee suggested this be done was to start with the liberal studies list of courses, divided into three categories – humanities, social sciences and other – with all students needing to take their breadth electives from a selection in two categories. This list of categories would gradually expand to include separate categories in science and engineering, business, communication and design and community service, in addition to the first two, humanities and social sciences.
- 2) Special ‘flagship’ elective courses should be introduced in each of the six categories outlined in the first proposal. These courses were envisioned as meeting the breadth elective definition outlined in the CRC’s white paper and would allow students to meet either mandated breadth or open elective requirements.
- 3) The Breadth Elective and Writing Committee should ensure that all breadth elective courses were consistent with the definition of such courses.
- 4) In the short run, breadth electives should continue to be offered in the current bands system, but that a gradual transition to a non-banded system be implemented.
- 5) Writing courses should be divided into lower- and upper-level categories, extending the same minimum word ranges as presently exist for lower- and upper-level liberal studies courses. This was so that the writing requirements already built into Ryerson’s curriculum would be maintained in the new curriculum model.

The green paper also outlined principles for establishing a pool of open elective courses for a pilot project involving new programs. Using these principles an initial estimate of the number of open elective courses was made. The details were based on a survey of all schools and departments in the university, with gaps being filled through the use of existing professionally related elective tables and also incorporating courses currently in minors. Based on this procedure, it was estimated that the open elective pool was in the range of 900 courses, with the actual pool likely somewhat smaller due to the impact of program-specific exclusions, course prerequisites, and the potential effect of a reduction in the number of liberal studies courses if these were gradually replaced by large capacity flagship breadth elective courses.

The green paper went on to look at scheduling issues, presenting the results of a projection conducted by University Scheduling at the CIC’s request. In this projection 100 students from given years of study in 15 programs from across the university were selected to gauge the extent to which their timetables allowed them to access liberal studies courses and courses offered in minors given the scheduling of their program core

courses. The results showed that two thirds of the 100 students could access between 60 and 100 percent of the liberal studies in their band, and over four fifths could access between 60 and 100 percent of the courses in available minors.

Finally, the green paper looked at the past record of the Student Choice Incentive Fund (SCIF) administered by the University Planning Office. To be designated for SCIF funding, courses had to be electives and had to satisfy the greater of the following two conditions: (a) 20% of their registrations had to be for non-Faculty students, and (b) 20 registered students had to be from outside the Faculty. Looking at the SCIF record in terms of number of courses approved, the green paper concluded that “given the size of the shifts required to ensure sufficient access – shifts partially, though not completely, captured by the shifts in enrollment implicit in the mandated breadth estimates – the CIC believes it is very unlikely that SCIF, as currently specified, will be enough.”

The green paper was presented to Senate in May 2013, and at the June 2013 meeting of Senate a motion to approve the pilot project envisioned by the CIC’s green paper was passed, with the following wording: “That Senate approve a pilot project whereby the professionally related electives tables in two new programs in 2013/14 (Professional Communication and Biomedical Sciences) are based on the prospective new open electives list in the proposed curriculum model.” A full list of courses submitted by programs for open electives was provided to Senate as an appendix to the June meeting’s agenda.

The 2013 green paper concluded by noting, “At this point we are not ready to make specific proposals that address these issues. Instead, we are interested in gaining ideas and direction from the consultation process that will follow the release of this green paper. The CIC looks forward to a robust discussion of these and other possible strategies during the community consultation process.”

## **2. Developments Since the CIC’s 2013 Green Paper**

In the months following June 2013, when the CIC was moving from its green paper recommendations to develop a white paper, the curriculum renewal initiative was put on hold. This decision was related to the development of the University’s new academic plan. However, the Vice Provost Academic continued discussions with various stakeholders and undertook to monitor the open electives pilot.

At the October 2014 Senate meeting, the Vice Provost Academic presented an update on the initiative. The curriculum model envisioned in his report highlighted the breadth elective category, and in particular the potential negative impact of introducing mandated breadth for the reasons outlined in the CIC’s green paper. This Senate presentation also gave an update on the open elective pilot project. By this time the pilot included three new programs besides Professional Communication and Biomedical Sciences: 1) Financial Mathematics, 2) Mathematics and its Applications and 3) Sport Media. Data collected from Professional Communication showed that about half of the students with access to the pilot’s table of courses chose open electives from Arts, with another quarter from FCAD and a final quarter from TRSM. Choices from the other Faculties were minimal.

Based on these results and related results, the Vice Provost Academic concluded the open elective model had the potential to provide students with a wider range of courses than did existing professionally related elective tables, while also providing program areas with scope for curriculum innovation. But he also pointed out that students require aid in selecting particular courses in this category and that a system needed to be developed to modify the static open elective list. The conclusions in the presentation concerning breadth electives were less positive. It was noted that mandated breadth as a concept has merit, but that if implemented immediately it would disrupt the operation of the curriculum. The open elective model, combined with either breadth electives or liberal studies, could provide scope for significant breadth.

During the ensuing months, the discussions that the Vice Provost Academic had with various constituencies were dominated by the significant challenges that the CIC green paper had revealed with the breadth elective element of the proposed new curriculum. In particular, the risks associated with the huge shift in seats from Arts to other parts of the University was the subject of considerable comment. During a time of budget austerity, was it wise to consider a new curriculum element that presented such significant logistical and financial risks as breadth electives did?

The Vice Provost Academic made another presentation to Senate at the April 2015 meeting, with the presentation forming the focus for structured discussions among Senators in the form of a Committee of the Whole. At this meeting the Vice Provost Academic suggested it might be better if breadth electives were not a feature of the proposed new curriculum model and that instead the liberal studies component should stay substantially the same in the proposed new model.

The proposed retention of the liberal studies model would mean that not only the class of breadth electives courses, but also the writing course component would no longer be part of the proposed new curriculum model. The liberal studies category of the curriculum would remain essentially as is, with writing as an essential feature of all courses in this category. Whereas the category would remain the same, changes in the governance structure of liberal studies could be considered. Also strategies could be developed to ensure that, in the years ahead, the range of liberal studies courses offers breadth across all faculties. Keeping liberal studies rather than replacing this element by breadth electives would greatly simplify implementation of the new curriculum model.

At the same time, the experience of new programs with the pilot open electives table continued to be largely positive. The implications, from an inter-faculty perspective, of moving from the present roster of professionally related courses to an open elective system was assessed using 2014-2015 data from the pilot project with students in selected new programs following the new open elective model. Table I shows total annual enrolments in courses in each of the five non-FEAS faculties, based on 2014-2015 numbers.

To calculate the cells in this table it is assumed that in the average non-FEAS program there are five open elective courses. Based on the pilot project data it appears that students are likely to take about two of the five courses in their own faculty, two in Arts, a half course in TRSM, a quarter course in Science and a quarter course in FCAD. It is also assumed that students take these courses at a uniform rate throughout their program (i.e. at an average of 1.25 courses a year). We can see how this breaks down by looking at the total undergraduate enrolment outside of FEAS, broken down by faculty (in the first column of Table 1), and then by calculating how enrolments would be distributed based on our assumptions as students in each faculty choose open elective courses (each of the rows in Table 1):

**Table 1**

	Non-FEAS Undergrad Enrolment	Enrolment times 1.25	Arts	Science	TRSM	FCAD	FCS	Totals
Arts	3377	4221	3377	211	422	211	0	4221
Science	1898	2373	949	1068	237	119	0	2373
TRSM	9006	11258	4503	563	5629	563	0	11258
FCAD	4242	5302	2121	265	530	2386	0	5302
FCS	4979	6224	2489	311	622	311	2489	6224
<b>Total non-FEAS</b>	<b>23502</b>	<b>29377</b>	<b>13439</b>	<b>2418</b>	<b>7441</b>	<b>3590</b>	<b>2489</b>	<b>29377</b>

While calculating exact estimates for current professionally related enrolments in each faculty is not a straightforward task, an initial glance suggests that it is likely that the estimated open elective enrollments for

each faculty with the new curriculum model are not all that different from current enrollments, which would significantly ease the transition to the new model.

## 2.1 Curricular Changes

Although formal work on the curriculum renewal initiative temporarily ceased in 2013, Ryerson's curriculum continued to evolve since that time in the direction of the goals of the proposed curriculum model, allowing students greater choice in courses and curricular pathways. Here are highlights of recent curricular changes.

- The Minors Policy was revised in June 2015, allowing students more flexibility in accessing a greater range of minors.
- Three humanities double major programs were approved by Senate in November 2015.
- Concentrations have been approved in seven programs.<sup>4</sup>
- As of Fall 2016, students in 13 programs can now select their professionally-related courses from the Open Elective table.<sup>5</sup>
- The number of courses on the Open Elective table increased from 696 in 2013 to 922 in 2016.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 61 liberal studies courses are on the Open Elective table.
- Currently, 73% of the 1045 courses that are included in 54 Minor program curricula are on the Open Elective table (and 176 are Liberal Studies).
- The Fall 2016-2017 online calendar has added a search tool to allow students to search for and choose courses on the Open Elective table by Faculty, discipline, subject area, and course.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Recent Developments: Reactivation of the Curriculum Implementation Committee

Ryerson's new Academic Plan, *Our Time to Lead*, calls for continuation "...of the ongoing evolution of Ryerson's high-quality curriculum, so that programming and its delivery remain innovative and responsive to students. Courses will be made more accessible, students will be given more choice and transferability will be enhanced." To achieve these goals, at its April 2016 meeting Senate approved the reactivation of the Curriculum Implementation Committee (CIC) to resume work on the development of the new curriculum model.<sup>8</sup> The CIC's fourfold mandate is to: (1) continue refining the key principles comprising the general goals of the new curricular structure, ensuring that they reflect the principles and values as outlined in the University's new academic plan; (2) further elaborate, and revise where necessary, the draft omnibus curriculum policy (*Policy 2: Undergraduate*

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<sup>4</sup> Concentrations have been approved in: Computer Science; Nutrition and Food; Graphic Communications Management; Business Management (Human Resources); Language and Intercultural Relations; Media Production; and New Media.

<sup>5</sup> The following programs include the Open Elective table in their curriculum: Biomedical Sciences; Computer Science; Creative Industries; Disabilities Studies; Financial Mathematics; Graphic Communications Management; Journalism; Mathematics and its Applications; Media Production; New Media; Nutrition and Food; Professional Communication; and Sport Media.

<sup>6</sup> This represents about 70% of the total number of undergraduate courses offered in Winter 2016. Of the 922 courses on the Open Elective table, approximately 40% do not have a prerequisite.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.ryerson.ca/calendar/2016-2017/open-elective-table.html>. In addition, as a pilot project, the Faculty of Community Services devised an open elective selection tool to help its own students choose open electives. The tool includes six themes, which are then divided into a range of categories and sub-categories. The six themes are: From the local to the global: Sociopolitical & cultural dimensions of society; Understanding and transforming communities: Theories, interventions & practices; Engaging with the physical, natural and material; Cultivating leadership: Professional, business and management skills development; Nourishing creativity: Art, media & communication knowledge and skills; Human experiences: Mind, body and soul.

<sup>8</sup> The Committee comprises the Interim Vice-Provost Academic, the Secretary of Senate, the Registrar, one faculty member from each Faculty, and one member from the Chang School.

*Curriculum Structure*); (3) make policy implementation recommendations; and (4) hold at least one round of public consultations.

#### 4. CIC Update and Next Steps

The Curriculum Implementation Committee has met five times since it was reactivated in April 2016. Its initial work has focussed on the development of a policy on concentrations. Given the popularity of this relatively new curricular element, and the continuing growth in interest among programs to develop concentrations, the CIC believes that a general policy is required to set uniform rules. The committee has drafted a proposed Concentrations Policy, which will be brought to Senate in Fall 2016 pending the recommendations of the Academic Standards Committee and the Academic Governance and Policy Committee.

The committee has also discussed how best to maintain the liberal studies component of the curriculum, while taking into consideration a change in this component's governance structure. The proposed retention of liberal studies, rather than moving forward with the proposed new categories of breadth electives and writing intensive courses, represents a departure from the direction imagined by the CRC's January 2012 green paper and June 2012 white paper, as well as the CIC's April 2013 green paper. However, as the foregoing analysis demonstrates, there has been a good deal of thinking and discussion about the ways in which the elements of Ryerson's curriculum structure can work together to deliver the broad goals associated with the University's curriculum. In particular, research has revealed a series of unacceptable consequences, university-wide, that would accompany changes of the variety that were originally proposed in the three documents mentioned above. Because Senate has been kept apprised of those changes in thinking around these course categories and has not indicated concern with this shift in emphasis, the current CIC has chosen to focus on the overall goals of the curriculum and the ways in which all of the elements of the curriculum can best meet those goals.

As part of its current deliberations, the CIC has therefore revised and elaborated the policy goals and principles of the draft omnibus curriculum policy. This reflects the belief by committee members that such a statement is an essential building block of any proposed new curriculum policy. This statement will be included in the committee's final recommendations and findings to Senate.

As it continues to work on its Senate recommendations the CIC is now focussing its work on evaluating the open elective pilot. This is a useful time to do so, given that the first new programs that were Senate-approved for the pilot are implementing the fourth year of their curriculum this Fall. This work involves the following:

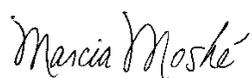
- Over the summer, interviews were conducted with key academic administrators and staff in the following Schools/Departments of the University that have considerable experience with the open elective pilot: Biomedical Sciences, Creative Industries, the First Year Common Science Office, Mathematics and its Applications, Financial Mathematics, and Professional Communication.
- Students in the open elective pilot programs will be surveyed through focus groups, in class, and an online survey in early Fall 2016.
- There will also be consultations with staff who are advising students on course selection, and with staff in the Registrar's Office including Curriculum Advising, Scheduling and Enrollment Services.

The ongoing work not just on the open elective pilot but more generally on the full range of the CIC's future recommendations will be associated with a broad range of consultations, overseen by the Interim VPA, with Chairs/Directors/Deans of each Faculty in Fall 2016 and Winter 2017.

The CIC's aim is to have a full set of final recommendations to present to Senate in Winter 2017. These recommendations will cover all of the main aspects of the curriculum renewal initiative, including proposals concerning open electives, liberal studies, and a new version of a proposed omnibus curriculum policy that will incorporate the statement of general policy goals and principles that the committee has been working on.

Curriculum deliberations are by their very nature complex and multifaceted. The extended period that has been devoted to the curriculum renewal initiative at the University will hopefully mean that the CIC can deliver a set of recommendations that incorporate the entire range of relevant issues, both conceptual and practical, that have been raised over the past five years. At the same time, the committee is also working to ensure that principles underlying our recommendations are fully in alignment with the University's Academic Plan. The ultimate goal is to deliver, with the Ryerson community's active participation, a revamped curricular template that will serve the needs of the University for many years to come.

Respectfully submitted,



Chair, Curriculum Implementation Committee

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