

Academic Affairs Department Mergers and Curriculum Synergies Taskforce

Final Report

May 2, 2025

Charge and Data Collection

The committee was charged on February 11 with the following:

- inventory of existing courses across all programs to determine opportunities for combining similar courses into single offerings
- identify opportunities for course sharing, faculty collaboration, and resource optimization
- facilitate discussions with faculty, staff, students, and administration to gather input and feedback on proposed department mergers, curriculum adjustments, and potential impact on accreditation and compliance
- identify potential challenges and concerns from affected stakeholders and develop strategies to mitigate negative impact

This charge was to include recommendations about courses to be deactivated, created, or revised, recommendations about general education courses, and recommendations about any new interdisciplinary programs that would foster collaboration and student growth. Department mergers, though in the name of the taskforce, were to be a lower priority because several are already underway and because the SUNY Pilot Taskforce, which was announced after this one, would also be looking at the program level.

Overview of Data Collection

Information for this report was gathered through the following:

- The college catalog
- The spreadsheet created for the SUNY Pilot Taskforce
- Spreadsheets of current courses and surveys completed by department chairs (6 departments/programs did not respond)
- A survey distributed to the campus community through the Daily (25 responses)
- Two open forums (11 non-taskforce member attendees)
- Meetings with the Senate Academic Plan Committee and Student Welfare Committee

It was quite difficult to get some of the necessary information to complete this report. For example, to get a list of all current courses, the taskforce first reached out to the Registrar's Office, who replied that they do not have such a list. That led to emails to the person who coordinates the catalog and to a ticket submitted to Institutional Research on February 18. There was no reply to the email. Institutional Research sent a list on March 24, more than a month after this was requested, that did not include the information that we specified.

Thus, to get a list of all current courses in the catalog in a timely fashion, it was necessary to literally copy and paste the entire catalog from the website. However, this yielded interesting information. Notably, there are extensive errors throughout the course listings. Several chairs asked where our out-of-date course listings came from and were concerned when told that these lists are from the published catalog.

Chairs/program directors completed spreadsheets and surveys about courses in their departments. Specifically, they were asked about potential courses to merge across departments, skills they wish students could learn outside of their majors, and courses canceled due to low enrollment. For each course in the catalog, they identified if the catalog listing is generally correct, if they are able to offer the course frequently enough to meet student needs, if the course is required for any major, for program assessment or for outside accreditation, and if the course has capacity to increase in enrollment.

The survey to the campus community asked three open-ended questions:

1. Are there any courses that you believe would be suitable for merging with similar classes from other departments into unified offerings?
2. What opportunities do you see for course sharing and faculty collaboration that would meet the needs of our students?
3. We recognize that discussions about combining courses and/or merging departments bring both opportunities and challenges. What potential benefits do you see? What obstacles should we consider, and how can this taskforce help address them to ensure a successful outcome?

The open forums began with a brief discussion of our charge. The questions above were shared on a slide, but the discussion was open to all with no other specific guidance from the committee.

The Senate Academic Plan Committee has been discussing general education. So, we met with them to hear what they have learned and to avoid duplicating effort. We met with the Student Welfare Committee to hear the perspective of students on campus. There was no specific format for either of these meetings and the discussion was open.

Findings and Recommendations

Before we can consider the curricular changes signaled by the charge to this group, we must address concerns with our catalogs and with university curricular processes. These concerns limit the effectiveness of this or any other group considering curricular changes on this campus.

University Catalogs

The university catalogs are riddled with errors. Although some of this may be due to CourseLeaf, which will no longer be used on our campus, chairs expressed concern that some of these errors have been present for years and that they have struggled to make corrections to the catalog. It is exceptionally difficult to make recommendations about curriculum without an accurate list of what is available on campus. Several chairs noted that classes and entire programs that have been

officially deactivated for years are still in the catalog. Attached, please find an appendix of **approximately 400 courses** that have either been deactivated or are functionally inactive as identified by chairs and program directors.

The catalog must be corrected to reflect changes that have already been approved through official channels. Department chairs submit corrections to the files and send these to the deans, but these do not make it to the published catalog. In addition to establishing new procedures that will ensure that these changes are continually made, we believe that a one-time update is in order. Specifically,

- We recommend a one-time in-person process where department chairs meet individually with their associate dean and someone authorized to make changes to the upcoming catalog prior to the submission deadline for the 2025-2026 catalog. In these meetings, changes can be made on the spot, ensuring that the next catalog is accurate.

There are two related points:

In the catalog, there are prefixes that are not obviously tied to any singular department. It was a challenge for this group to identify who should be contacted about all of the prefixes on our campus. One can only imagine how difficult it would be for students with questions about these courses.

- We recommend that each prefix in the catalog includes contact information for that course prefix, perhaps at the top of the listing. This list should be updated as needed, so this may be accomplished through a link in the catalog to a page on the website.

In addition, the categories listed in the catalog and the listings in Banner do not match each other. With the department mergers on this campus, this mismatch has increased. The outcome of this is that students may not easily be able to find the classes that they need. For example, the Communication Department has requested that both SPC and COM courses appear in searches for Communication classes on Banner. Right now, these courses have separate links.

- We recommend that Banner and the catalog be updated to reflect current department and program names.

Curricular Processes

The policy governing course deactivation is as follows:

DOPS IV:03:00 (dated July 1979)

1. Courses listed in the undergraduate catalog shall not be offered less frequently than once in each two successive academic years. Those courses listed as graduate courses shall be offered at least once every three academic years.
2. The Office of Academic Affairs shall maintain a record of those courses actually offered (excluding independent studies, project, and thesis) and delete from the next catalog those

courses not meeting the above criteria. These courses shall be maintained in an inactive file, subject to reactivation at the request of the appropriate department.

This has not been followed in many years. It needs to be updated into a policy that meets the needs of the campus. We recommend the following:

- The Senate Curriculum Committee should be asked to develop such an updated DOPS policy on course deactivation.
- Resurrecting deactivated courses is a challenge, which helps to explain why departments are reluctant to take this step. In the past, there was a distinction between inactive courses that are not in the catalog and deactivated ones. This distinction no longer exists and there does not appear to be a process to have courses be inactive. Therefore, we recommend the creation of a process to inactivate courses (rather than deactivate) so that departments can easily resurrect them when needed. For example, there could be a dummy department that is not printed in the catalog to house inactive courses. If they are not moved back to their department of origin within a period of time, then they could be deactivated.

A further issue when considering curriculum issues is that many courses have not been revised recently, so course proposals may not reflect current content. One reason for this is that it is simply easy to lose track of when a course was last revised. Some departments keep lists of this, but others do not. Therefore, we recommend that:

- There should be a central database of current courses that is easily accessible to the campus. This database should include the course description and date of the last course revision.

It is difficult to make curricular decisions without accurate data. We have observed the need for such data through this process. Tableau is not accessible to all and the data are not always accurate. Some data are simply hard to come by because that information is not part of Tableau. For example, the APC group studying Gen Ed noted that there are different definitions of underenrolled courses across campus, with some using less than 50% of the cap and some using fewer than 10 students per course, making it very difficult to identify what classes are underenrolled in what classes are not.

Similarly, course proposals are difficult to access. Some are posted in Digital Commons, but not all, and those that are there are organized by year, not by course name. Because of this, it can be difficult for faculty proposing new courses to be able to search to make sure that similar courses are not offered in other departments.

- We simply need better data on our campus, located in one centralized location, to which all faculty and staff have access. Further, one person or office should be designated as responsible for this important task.

There seem to be abandoned or unmonitored courses in our catalog. For example, the BSC courses are in the catalog and under the purview of Academic Affairs, but it is not clear if these

courses are still active. Similarly, there are many prefixes that seem to fall under the Global Engagement umbrella (CEL, ELS, GST, INE, and NSE). These courses are created at the request of faculty for specific needs. However, Global Engagement is not responsible for these courses, aside from ELS 099. We also note that there are a lot of prefixes for these courses.

- We recommend that the Global Engagement office be authorized to reduce the number of prefixes and monitor the courses under that office's purview.
- We further recommend that prefixes with just a few courses be eliminated. Some of these appear to be catalog errors (for example, SLA has been eliminated in favor of SLP, but one SLA course remains). But others simply have few courses in them, which increases the likelihood that they will be unmonitored (such as AMT at the undergraduate level).

Curriculum

Curricular Changes to Date

There have been many changes to our curriculum in the past two years. Changes made last year are in their first year in effect. Changes made this year will take effect next year. In reviewing the notices published in the Daily Bulletin through the beginning of April, from 2023-2025:

- 16 bachelor, master, minor, and certificate programs have been deactivated or are in the process of being deactivated
- 20 bachelor, master, doctoral, certificate, minor, and accelerated pathway programs have been proposed or approved
- 37 bachelor, master, and combined programs have been revised or program revisions have been submitted (note that this number does not include minors or undergraduate certificates)

We recognize the importance of making changes to ensure the health of the university. However, our colleagues across campus have been making changes to do just this. We expect that these changes will have an impact on our campus, but we cannot yet quantify this as these changes are only recently implemented or still in the pipeline.

Statistics

Statistics is a course that has come up repeatedly in discussions across campus as a potential course to merge. However, most departments that host these courses are opposed to merging statistics because each department focuses on the techniques that are most widely used in their disciplines. Thus, from a disciplinary perspective, merging these courses does not make sense. We also examined enrollments and found the following:

Spring 2025

| Course | Enrollment | Faculty |
|---------|--|---------|
| BIO 300 | Not offered this semester; Allows MAT 311 as exception | |

| | | |
|---------|--|------------------------|
| CRJ 310 | 19/1 section | full-time |
| ECO 305 | 96/3 sections | full-time |
| GEG 390 | Not offered this semester; Allows MAT 311 as exception | |
| MAT 311 | 154/7 sections | 2 lecturer/3 full-time |
| PSC 204 | 20/ 1 section | full-time |
| PSY 350 | 53/2 sections | full-time |
| SOC 299 | 16/1 section | full-time |

Math's sections of MAT 311 are essentially full (cap of 24). Thus, to combine all statistics and require students to take MAT 311 would require 9 additional sections of MAT 311 per semester, the equivalent of 3 additional full-time faculty lines or 9 sections of adjunct instructors. Right now, there are 8 sections of statistics across other departments (because some departments, including PSY and ECO, have a larger cap than MAT 311), all taught by full-time tenure and tenure-track faculty.

Criminal Justice, Biology, Geosciences, and Economics all currently allow students to take MAT 311 to meet their departmental requirement through the use of exceptions. Psychology encourages MAT 311 to serve as a prerequisite to their PSY 350 course. Criminal Justice also allows PSY 350 to meet their departmental requirement through the use of exceptions.

- Our recommendation is to continue to allow departments to choose whether to allow other statistics courses as they see appropriate. This system appears to be working effectively with courses across departments generally filling and without undue reliance on adjunct instructors while still allowing departments to teach their own disciplinary techniques. If courses are underenrolled (below 10 graduate, 12 undergraduate), departments are encouraged to consider cross-listing or exceptions.

Research Methods

Similarly, research methods has been mentioned in conversations across campus as a potential course for merger. However, upon consideration of these courses, it is clear that the content differs substantially by discipline. Further, some departments choose to teach methods at a lower division level before statistics (e.g. PSC) and other departments choose to teach methods as an upper division level after statistics (e.g. PSY). Most of these courses are used as part of departments' programmatic assessment because departments view these courses as fundamental to preparing students for their fields. Attempting to merge research methods courses would result in weaker programs because students would lack disciplinary knowledge and would cause a serious deterioration in morale among affected faculty and departments.

- Therefore, we strongly recommend that these courses not be merged in any way. If a department chooses to allow other courses to meet their requirements, this should be purely a departmental decision.

Cross-Listing vs. Merging

Faculty report that systems that encourage collaboration are lacking across campus. Cross-listing/cross-registration has long been discouraged on our campus because of the difficulties that it creates in tracking FTEs, etc. However, in our discussions across campus, it is clear that cross-listing is the preferred method of addressing similar courses. One important reason for this is that NYSED and other accrediting bodies require certain prefixes for courses in some programs. For example, Environmental Health and Global Health would be great courses for HEW, but they cannot have prefixes like ANT. Similarly, Sexuality would be useful for HEW but cannot have prefixes like SOC or PSY. ANT and HEW have developed a solution for this issue through cross-listing of courses.

- How might we do this? Use faculty member for FTEs, not the prefix. So, if it is an ANT professor teaching a cross-listed course, FTE credit goes to ANT.

Promoting our Programs to Build Synergies and Support Students

Individual faculty and departments are open to developing interdisciplinary microcredentials, certificates and other programs, cross-listed courses, and simply working together to meet student needs. However, this needs to come about organically. We are often silo-ed and people aren't aware of what is going on in other departments. We need to have more conversations to find these collaborations. For example, UNC 100 and Campus House are collaborating after Hospitality learned of a need in the UNC 100 students, but this is not something that could be identified just by looking through the catalog or even responses from the department chairs to the spreadsheet that we sent out.

Further, we have many existing minors, microcredentials, and certificates that might be a good fit for students in other departments, but people may not know they exist.

- We encourage consideration of a faculty and staff open house, perhaps during the Academic Affairs Welcome Back session. Departments could have tables describing their programs, allowing everyone to learn more about what we all do.
- We recommend revitalizing the internship coordinator roundtable and internship advisory board. These existed prior to the SUNY Approved Applied Learning grant, but these were eliminated with other programs when that grant ended. Discussion of best practices in internships, regulations guiding internships, etc. is necessary for quality internship experiences, particularly given Chancellor King's recent statements about encouraging all students to have internship experiences.
- Related to this, we also recommend identifying additional support for service-learning courses. Civic and Community Engagement has lost much of its staff, but their function in helping faculty develop high quality service-learning courses and developing and

maintaining community partnerships is vital. This is not work that can be easily done within departments or by individual faculty as faculty may not have the necessary community connections.

- We require better and robust marketing of our novel and well-respected programs. Promotion of new, novel, and highly-regarded programs will benefit both existing and prospective students.
 - We recommend building systems to get to know our learners. If we understand where our students come from and who our audience is, we will be better able to market our programs to appropriate groups.
 - Further, our alumni are an overlooked resource for marketing and recruitment.
- We encourage the development of community partnerships to enhance our course offerings. Such partnerships might include identifying courses that should be offered on our campus or identifying populations that might benefit from specific courses or programs. In some situations, this might also involve teaching classes off-campus so that potential students may access them more easily, as happened with Ferguson Electric.

General Education

We met with the Senate Academic Plan Committee to discuss our General Education program. We concur with their thoughts, and we share their concerns. However, we simply could not address these concerns in this short span of time.

- We recommend establishing a committee to work with the APC next year to specifically:
 - Review the General Education array of courses.
 - Evaluate whether there are enough prefixes available in each category of Gen Ed.
 - Examine how many General Education courses have prerequisites, limiting who can take them.
 - Consider the need for more upper division Gen Ed courses to assist students in reaching the required 45 upper division credits.
 - Evaluate and make recommendations about evening offerings. According to our meeting with the Student Welfare Committee, some of our students with day jobs must take Gen Ed classes at ECC if they wish to take courses in person.
 - Evaluate and make recommendations about online general education offerings. One SWC former student reported taking vacation time for in-person classes.
 - Reconsider the first-year experience and structure of general education to cover core skills.

Course Mergers/Cross-Listing

Colleagues across campus are aware of similar course offerings in other departments and extensive cross-listing currently exists. Departments routinely allow courses from other departments to fill elective requirements, and departments are open to students from other departments taking their courses. There appear to be some courses that are candidates for cross-listing. However, it does not appear that there is one large-scale change that we can recommend.

Instead, this work will require individual departments to meet with one another and see if cross-listing or merging is a possibility. Many of these suggestions came from one department; the other department may not even be thinking about this. Therefore, we recommend that the following departments be encouraged to sit down together to consider whether there are courses to bring together. Please note that all of the suggestions below were listed as possibilities by the chairs in the course spreadsheets.

- Hospitality and Business (HTR 370, 390, and 350)
- Hospitality and Computer Information Systems (HTR 350)
- Political Science and History
- Psychology and Business (PSY 367)
- Social Work and Child Advocacy Studies (SWK 345; SWK 346)

We anticipate that any cross-listing of courses will be just between pairs of courses. We encourage departments to look at their courses and reach out to other departments as appropriate. Similarly, we encourage the development of interdisciplinary programs, particularly in such areas as environmental science and environmental studies.

Concerns Raised by Faculty

Many faculty expressed concerns with this taskforce. People are worried that this process is rushed. People are also worried that our consideration of merging courses means that their courses will be taken away from them or, if another department starts to teach a course because there aren't enough faculty in one department, that course will be gone forever. People also questioned whether choices will be made that are in the best interest of finances or the best interests of students. Specifically, people were worried about the loss of disciplinary knowledge if courses are combined. In short, people are simply worried about this process, and this worry can impact morale. Any changes must be handled with care. Notes from the responses to the surveys and from the open forums are included in an appendix to this report.

- Given the level of concern raised about this process, we recommend that the administration provide consistent opportunities, such as in town halls, for faculty to meet, share concerns, and ask questions.

Conclusion

This taskforce was charged with examining the curriculum to identify opportunities to streamline offerings and enhance opportunities for students. After examining input from the campus and data from the college catalogs and course enrollments, we identified several areas for improvement. Notably, the college catalogs are full of errors, which limits their utility. It is challenging to get data, which hampers our ability to make informed decisions. Thus, our recommendations first address the catalogs and campus processes.

In terms of curriculum, we were impressed with the extent to which our colleagues have been developing, revising, and deactivating programs to meet student needs. Departments have been

identifying courses to share across programs and there are many cross-listed courses already in the catalog. Department chairs identified additional courses that may be appropriate to cross-list and we encourage this work to continue.