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From: GRO Co-Chairs Eugenia Volkova and Elliot Wainwright, [gro@jhu.edu](mailto:gro@jhu.edu)  
Date: 10 October 2019  
Subject: Inquiry into Summer & Intersession Course Selection Policies

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Dear Assistant Dean Sean Recroft,

It has been brought to the attention of the GRO that graduate students are looking for clarification, unequivocal language, and transparency regarding changes in Summer & Intersession Course Selection Policies. In the past, summer and intersession courses were selected in the following way:

1. Firstly, a potential instructor would devise a course and submit it to their head of department
2. Secondly, the head of the department would accept, reject, or suggest amendments to the proposal.
3. Thirdly, the proposal would be forwarded to the department of summer and intersession programs, who would then post them on SIS.
4. Finally, the department of summer and intersession programs would set a minimum enrollment level. Courses that met this level would be offered. Those that fell below it would not.

As it is understood by the GRO, these policies have since changed and Summer & Intersession courses are now selected in a different, *unknown* way. It has been brought to our attention that instructors in the Philosophy Department, for example, have had the relevance of their courses queried and have had to provide written justification of the courses above and beyond the standard application materials. Elsewhere, a summer course with a proven track record of success in prior years was not approved for the 2019 Summer session, and without explanation to the instructor.

We polled graduate students on this subject and found that an overwhelming portion of them were unaware that teaching a course was an option for them. As teaching may provide invaluable experience for many as an aspect of their career development, we believe more needs to be done to raise awareness.

Among respondents who have successfully navigated the course proposal process in the past, about 30% indicated their courses ultimately failed to meet minimum enrollment requirements. With this appearing to be a common issue, it is critical that a teacher who has put in the time and effort to design a course understand how they may be compensated should the enrollment threshold not be reached.

Among those respondents who have successfully taught a course, half of them chose to do so more than once. That indicates there is strong motivation for many to continue teaching. Any changes to the rules or criteria surrounding course proposal and acceptance needs to be clear and explicit not just for those new to the process, but also to support the continued professional development of those who desire to gain more teaching experience and hone their skills.

The GRO has a number of grievances with the process of selection for Summer & Intersession Courses. One, this method seems obscure as there have been no formal notices of new criteria for course selection. Two, it appears that this method is not being applied consistently across courses and departments. Three, we are concerned that course content is being assessed by persons who do not have knowledge of recent work in specific disciplines.

We are concerned that the centralized control of course offerings undermines the democratic nature of how Summer & Intersession courses were previously selected. Moreover, the lack of clear guidelines regarding the new selection criteria means that instructors do not know the basis of courses gaining or losing approval. Teaching is a vital portion of professional development for all graduate students, especially those planning to continue to faculty positions in the future, and the reduced ability to adequately prepare to teach, and to teach, courses affects graduate students professionally and financially.

We ask that your office issue a formal statement detailing the evaluation criteria by which course proposals for Summer & Intersession Programs are currently approved so that instructors can better prepare their proposals. We also invite you to our General Council Meeting to discuss these changes. Our next two meetings will be on October 28<sup>th</sup> and November 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:00PM in the Great Hall in Levering Hall. Please let us know if you are willing and able to attend.

Best Regards,

The Graduate Representative Organization