

To: Academic Affairs Committee and Faculty Senate

From: Daniel J. Bernardo, Provost and Executive Vice President
Mary Wack, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Erica Austin, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Student Success Initiatives
Eric Godfrey, Executive Director, Enrollment
Terese King, Executive Director, University Advising

Date: March 8, 2019

Subject: Revision to Rules 53 and 56 on certification

Rules 53 and 56 dealing with certification were developed in a long-gone era when limited access to majors was granted only through a lengthy petition to central advising authorities (EPPM 1996). Now that departments can limit certification on their own authority, over half the majors have some form of competitive certification that limits access to their degrees. In Pullman, 2063 students with 60+ credits are uncertified, or about half of a typical entering class of 4000. For a land-grant university with a mission of access, this is problematic. It is also outside the mainstream of practice among our peer institutions. And from the perspective of student success, uncertified students are more likely to leave the institution without completing a degree.

A further current and future institutional challenge is to attract and retain students even as applicant pools shrink and competition from other universities and for-profit providers increases dramatically. To succeed, we need to reduce barriers to degree entry and to graduation while maintaining and indeed increasing our academic standards. Competitors such as Oregon State and University of Washington have moved in this direction already (<https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/osu-college-engineering-changes-its-curriculum-model-drive-student-success>).

We believe a fresh approach to students' entry and exit from the major will help both students and WSU while still respecting departments' academic standards and need to plan instructional resources carefully. The proposed revisions to Rules 53 and 56, strongly supported by the deans and the Provost's Office, change the language and approach to student entry into the major so that students who declare a major become part of that major until or unless they fail to meet departmental milestones for continued progress toward the degree. Such milestones for continuous progression might include a cumulative or semester GPA, grades in certain gateway courses, completion of certain courses, or other indicators of success in the major. (And please note: tracking of "milestones" in the sense discussed here will need to become an automatic and not a manual process.)

Expected benefits include:

- Increased attractiveness to prospective students who are otherwise reluctant to commit to WSU because of uncertainties about access to majors; this includes transfer students who seek assurance they can begin a degree path at WSU right away.
 - Retention benefit from reduced enrollment “melt” after Alive—students do not return after seeing restricted access to majors
- Increased retention and success of enrolled students
 - Sends message that we assume success up front, building confidence and self-efficacy
 - Students who will be unsuccessful in meeting departmental standards will know that earlier along their pathways than at 60 credits, saving them time, money and anxiety; the lane-change to another major will be signaled in good time.
 - Currently there are 3200 students system-wide who have 60 or more credits but are not certified into a major. These students are spending money and not making progress toward a degree. This is an ethical challenge.
- Increased ability to reallocate instructional resources to serve more students in bottleneck or upper-division courses
 - A reduction of course repeats is expected as students transition out of unsuitable majors earlier; departments can reallocate instructional resources to serve additional students in bottlenecks
 - A reduction of withdrawals is expected, with savings to students and to departments. Recent WSU research suggests withdrawals spike as students approach 60 credits; the spike includes students with 3.0+ GPAs, suggesting that stress over certification is a factor.
- Criteria for continued progress to the degree will be more transparent and students will know where they stand, semester by semester.
- Increased equity and inclusiveness in our degrees: first generation and minority students are over-represented in the population who are 60+ credits and uncertified on all campuses except Vancouver. The largest gap is in Pullman.
- More student engagement in classes, as they will be part of a major and its community from the start.

Timing and logistics:

The Fall 2020 entering class will be the first cohort under the new rules. If passed now, the rule change would allow for advertising during the Fall 2019 recruiting cycle while allowing AY 19-20 for working out the implementation process. This includes aligning other parts of the WSU Catalog with the new rules, and allowing departments to consider whether their current certification criteria support student success over four years and to shift to more appropriate continuous progression criteria if needed.

A preliminary workgroup is looking into issues of implementation, and a larger group will be formed in the summer to follow up initial findings. Given the long lead time before the effective date, any needed revisions to the policy that emerge in the next six months can be enacted next year.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.