

# **Task Force on Academic Excellence and Engagement**

## Draft Report

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## **Task Force members**

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Curriculum Model, although a faculty teaching the lecture portion of the course receive 4 TCHs and 4 TCHs for teaching the lab students are charged tuition for just 4 SCHs. Thus only 50% of the 8 TCHs associated with each 'standard' lecture/lab are covered by tuition, resulting in 4.0 'phantom' TCHs per standard lecture/lab.

### **Recommendations:**

**Dimension 1.** The TF recommends that faculty compensation for teaching labs should be equivalent to that paid for teaching lectures (i.e. 1 TCH per hour of class meeting time per week). Faculty compensation for teaching labs should be equivalent to that paid for teaching lectures (i.e. 1 TCH per hour of class meeting time per week). The TF concludes that teaching science laboratories at Ramapo College unequivocally requires at least as much 'work' as teaching lectures. It is not ethical to reduce faculty compensation in order to help defray the cost of 'phantom credits' that are associated with students being charged no tuition (or reduced tuition) for the lab component of a lecture/lab course.

**Dimension 2.** The TF recommends that tuition for labs should be should be 0 – 1 Student Credit Hours (SCHs) per lab. This is the practice followed by many colleges and universities (the College of New Jersey charges 0 SCHs for labs and Stockton charges 1 SCH). It allows both curricular flexibility for science programs requiring a large number of lecture/labs (e.g.

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Charge E.

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2. The TF recommends that 100 and 200 level courses not be limited to a “twice and thrice a week’ format.

Currently, educational psychology indicates that when college students space their study sessions apart, they have better learning outcomes (Willingham 2002). However, we are not aware of any body of evidence connecting how often college classes meet with student learning.

Distributed practice (spaced repetition, spaced practice) pedagogies can be applied to classes meeting once, twice, or thrice each week.

3. The TF recommends that the following steps be taken prior to the implementation of the scheduling of classes for the ‘new permanent curricular structure’. In contrast to the constraints associated with the implementation of the Interim Curricular Model for 2015/2016, where there was a need to move quickly to comply with Middle States requirements, there is sufficient time for the process outlined below to occur.

- a. A survey of the faculty and/or convening group-2 (r) 3 (i) -2hBT 12 0 (he) 4 ( ET B(s) -1 ( a) 4 99

## **Charge G. The perception of low academic rigor and lack of flexibility within the curriculum**

This charge has the following dimensions:

1. lack of flexibility within the curriculum
2. perception of low academic rigor
  - GPA
  - student perception of rigor

**Challenge:** The assertion in this portion of the charge is that 1) students do not perceive the academic climate of the college to be challenging and 2) that the curriculum lacks sufficient flexibility to allow for students to take minors and double majors.

Rather than reducing lack of flexibility, the move to the CEP model resulted in increased flexibility in the curriculum as measured by the number of students who completed a minor.

### **Recommendations: Lack of flexibility within the curriculum**

1. To further enhance flexibility in the curriculum, the TF recommends the elimination (or, less preferably, a significant reduction) of restrictions on double counting in minors and majors.

This would greatly increase flexibility for students within the Ramapo curriculum. It would significantly increase flexibility within the curriculum and be accomplished without forcing majors and minors programs to reduce their course requirements. This recommendation is particularly important if the State mandates a 120-credit cap on graduation requirements.

### **Recommendation: Perception of low academic rigor – GPA**

1. The TF recommends that convening groups do a careful review of their grades, grade distributions, and the grading scales to be used.

Ramapo College has had a persistent average GPA of about 3.1. The highly stable relative variation in Ramapo's overall GPA, as well as the absence of any significant apparent trend, do not support the inference that Ramapo's courses systematically lack academic rigor.

### **Recommendation: Perception of low academic rigor – student perceptions**

1. The TF recommends the adoption of a full 4-credit hour course model as one approach to increasing student perception of academic rigor.



We extrapolate from our assessment of NSSE surveys that student perceptions of rigor may be related, in part, to the amount of time spent in the classroom, with longer class meetings being perceived as having more rigor.

The TF finds that, in comparison with the perceptions of first year students, significantly higher percentages of seniors perceive their courses to be more rigorous in terms of 'Level of Academic Challenge' (based on NSSE data from 2003 – 2012).

Based on the 2014 NSSE survey: Relative to students at peer institutions, the TF concludes from our assessment of NSSE surveys that first-year students at Ramapo College, on average, perceive that their courses are more rigorous, along a number of dimensions. Seniors report being assigned rigorous coursework, but such assignments do not appear to contribute to their assessment of overall rigor, which is lower than peer schools.

2. With respect to increasing the perception of rigor among Ramapo College students, the TF recommends the use of both focus groups and time-series analysis of NSSE data to isolate where

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**Charge B. Transfer credit issues related to our practice of accepting 3-credit courses as equivalent to 4-credit courses**

Challenge: Ramapo is part of the Statewide Transfer Agreement Policy. In our current interpretation of it, Ramapo students that transfer credits from institutions with 3-credit courses may be used to fulfill courses in their degree requirements as if the 3 credit course was equivalent to our 4 credit course.

Method: In keeping with our provisions, we research Ramapo's transfer credit policy and ensure that it aligns with the Statewide Transfer Agreement Policy. We will also ensure that our students are aware of the policy and that our advisors are providing accurate information.

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**C. The revenue (or lack of revenue) issue created by the current work-load given to science faculty who teach labs**

Methods:

There are two dimensions to this charge:

1. teaching credit hours (TCHs) for faculty teaching labs
2. student credit hours (SCHs) assigned to labs

**Dimension 1.** We studied Article XII (Faculty Responsibilities) of the State Master Contract which covers teaching load. We then researched the practices of The College of New Jersey, Stockton State College and the other State Colleges and Universities. A description of the teaching responsibilities associated with teaching a science course at Ramapo College was developed.

**Dimension 2.** The number of standard lecture/labs required per science major in TAS was determined. Models were developed to test the impacts of charging tuition for taking a lab. The assessed impacts included the increased number of credits required to fulfill the requirements of one science major requiring 10 lecture/labs (Biology, selected as an example) and the resulting changes in curricular flexibility (i.e. ability for science students to take a minor with no overlap with their major and still graduate within 128 credits) resulting from charging tuition for labs.

**Dimension 1: Teaching credit hours (TCHs) for faculty teaching labs**

Faculty teaching load is covered under Article XII (Faculty Responsibilities) of the State Master Contract. In Article XII, teaching credit hours are defined as follows:

1. When the number of regularly scheduled average weekly class hours equals the number of student credit hours, teaching credit hours shall equal student credit hours.
- 2.

(emphasis added)

A State college may choose to award more than two-thirds of a teaching credit hour for each hour of lab, but not less than that amount. Ramapo College has a long tradition of paying more than 2/3 TCHs per hour of lab. Under the Interim Model, faculty are paid 1 TCH for each hour of lab time. Aside from Ramapo College, all of the other NJ State colleges and universities follow the 2/3 TCH per lab hour model set by the Master Contract. The current national practice for lecture/labs is that faculty compensation is typically less than 1 TCH for each hour of weekly lab meeting time.

## Lecture/lab models at Ramapo College

### Standard lec/lab model

lecture component (meeting for 3 or 4 SCHs)

total of 8 TCHs required

### Integrated lec/lab model

lecture & lab combined (meeting 4 SCHs)

total of 4 TCHs required

Note: this model only covers 50% of the material taught in the standard lecture/lab model

Teaching a science laboratory at Ramapo College requires the following:

1. Each lab meeting needs to be well planned and tested;
2. Each lab meeting must be set up (prepped) and taken down;
3. Labs often have a lecture component;
4. Each lab requires a fully engaged teaching process;
5. Faculty instruct students on how to write lab reports
6. Faculty grade and provide feedback on lab reports;
- 7.

Figure C1. SCHs generated by charging 1

When one factors in academic flexibility (Figure C2), it can be seen that assigning 0 and 1 SCHs complete per lab would provide a Biology student sufficient academic flexibility to

the per lab would force a Biology student to take 132 SCHs to graduate (exceeding graduation requirement).

‘four-year’ plans of science programs. Some science programs require students to take two lecture/labs a semester, and this may occur over several semesters, particularly in the first two or three years. Assigning 1 SCH per lab would not disrupt the ‘four-year’ plans of these science

ester (instead of the students could only take two lecture/labs and one 4-credit course a semester typical 4 courses) and stay within 18 credits. Thus many science students would only be taking three courses each semester for the first one, two, or even three years (assuming that they did not

more than four years to graduate); 3) take overloads; and/or 4) take courses in summer and winter sessions. Many prospective science students may choose to attend other academic institutions the tuition for labs was 2 or more SCHs.



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**Option 2: 'flat rate' 12 – 16 cr**

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Technical skills are taught as a means to an end, just as typing or word processing is taught as a part of the writing process, not as an end in and of itself;

Students' creative work is discussed in critique to give students insight into how to improve their practice, presentation, and critical anal

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**Charge G. The perception of low academic rigor and lack of flexibility within the curriculum.**

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- b. flexibility within the curriculum

**G. The perception of low academic rigor – GPA**

Method:

The committee sought to answer three main questions: 1) can we identify any systematic pattern

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more rigor) and effect sizes greater than 0.93 (which NSSE asserts is a meaningful result.)  
Associated benchmarks are noted where applicable.

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wholesale focus on “increased rigor.” In addition, programmatic assessment cycles could be utilized to determine whether syllabi list assignments that are in line with the descriptions for course levels (100, 200, etc...)

#### G. Lack of flexibility within the curriculum

Moving to the CEP model resulted in a notably significant rise in the percent of students taking one minor ( $p < 0.001$ ) and a slight, but significant ( $p = 0.002$ ) increase in the percent of students taking two minors (Figure G1). There was no significant change in the percent of graduates taking two majors. As this change was present at the end of the first year that CEP was implemented (Figure G1), it indicates that students who graduated with only one year of exposure to CEP were significantly influenced by the new curricular structure. The increase in students taking minors under the CEP model is largely due to the decrease in the number of courses required by minors that was associated with the adoption of the CEP model. Thus TF concludes that, rather than reducing lack of flexibility, the move to the CEP model resulted in increased flexibility in the curriculum.

Figure G1. The percent of total Ramapo graduates per year taking one minor, two minors, or two majors at Ramapo College (2004–2014). The shaded areas represent a period when graduates had taken at least two years of courses in the pre-CEP curricular structure.

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## I. Addendum

In the process of making our decision about 4 credit courses in the context of the current 128 credit requirement for graduation, the TF also explored the suitability of 4 credit courses for a 120 credit requirement for graduation. Our conclusion is that 4 credit courses would also be the preferred option for the latter. Our rationale is provided below.

The primary advantage of 3 credit courses and a 120 credit graduation requirement is that students would be taking a higher number of courses (40 3-credit courses vs 30 4-credit courses). But the many advantages of 4 credit courses when used in the context of a 120 credit graduation requirement far outweigh the greater multitude of courses associated with 3 credit courses. Some of the many advantages of 4 credits are listed below.

1. Many high impact teaching practices require the extra time allowed by 4 credit courses.
2. By taking four 4 credit courses each semester, students would only be two courses short of graduation by the end of their seventh semester. Thus a student could graduate by the end of their seventh semester if they had either transferred in two AP courses or had taken two courses in summer or winter sessions.
3. In light of the above, education students could do their student teaching in 5th grade.

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