

TITLE 5 SECTION 55003: POLICIES FOR PREREQUISITES, COREQUISITES AND ADVISORIES ON RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

FIRST READING (PUBLIC HEARING)

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Issue

The proposed changes to title 5 calling for content review for the application of prerequisites went to the Board of Governors in May 2010 where some questions were expressed by members about the effects on students. The Prerequisite Task Force was convened by the Academic Senate to develop responses to those concerns and provided additional information at the July and September, 2010, Board of Governors meetings. In addition, meetings were held with various constituent groups around the state gathering input to strengthen the proposed changes, focusing on the need to increase student success while protecting student access.

This is the first reading of significantly revised language in title 5 section 55003.

Background

For several years, conviction and evidence have been growing that current requirements for establishing prerequisites in California community colleges have sacrificed student success in order to increase student access. Current regulation prohibits colleges from establishing prerequisites unless significant numbers of students prove unsuccessful in courses; therefore, faculty can justify prerequisites only when students fail, which is *not* the outcome faculty strive to provide for their students. Although faculty have continued to try to maintain a high level of academic quality and rigor, increased numbers of skill-deficient students enrolling in classes will undoubtedly result in unintentional decline in academic rigor on many campuses. Observers from both inside and outside of the California Community College system have called attention to this problem,¹ and in spring 2009 the Academic Senate called for changes to the title 5 regulation in this area. In early 2010, the Academic Senate convened a Prerequisite Task Force with representatives from the Academic Senate, the Chief Instructional Officers, the Chief Student Service Officers, and the Chancellor's Office to guide reform in this area.

¹ See Nancy Shulock, *Rules of the Game* (2007) and Elizabeth L. Hill, Legislative Analyst's Office, *Back to Basics: Improving College Readiness of Community College Students* (2008)

The Prerequisite Task Force has concluded, and the Academic Senate agrees, that changes to title 5 should be *permissive* and that colleges that are satisfied with the current regulations be permitted to continue to use them. For most colleges, however, the proposed title 5 revision will mean that California community college curriculum committees may rely on *content review*—the process used by higher education faculty throughout the United States—to establish prerequisites that provide skills in reading, written expression or mathematics for courses other than another course in communication or computation. The Prerequisite Task Force also reiterated that the title 5 regulations continue to require colleges to monitor and address any disproportionate impacts that may result from these regulation changes. The Academic Senate has provided training for faculty on effective practices for content review and, in November 2010, adopted the paper “Student Success: The Case for Establishing Prerequisites Through Content Review” that describes the reasons that content review is sufficient as a process or methodology to establish prerequisites. Attachment 5 contains the abstract of this paper.

The primary goal of this regulation change is to increase *student success* throughout the California community colleges. Developing mechanisms to ensure that students have the skills necessary to succeed in college level instruction is vital to educational success for hundreds of thousands of California community college students.

It is also vital to the economic well being of the California Community College system that more students be able to pass college courses the *first* time they enroll, so that limited capacity can be made available to students enrolling and succeeding on their first attempt rather than to students who need to take classes two and three times before they can earn a passing grade.

In this final version of changes to title 5, section 55003 subdivision (i) has been added to require community colleges to report new prerequisites established during the year as part of the annual MIS data collection cycle for districts. This data can then be used to report student progress in course offerings, student demographics and assess potential disproportionate impacts.

The proposed regulation was presented to Consultation Council for review at its meeting on December 16, 2010. Although there was overall support of the proposed regulations, there were comments voiced from some members for clarifications or an expressed need for more discussion within their organization. In response to these comments, language was added to proposed subdivision (c)(2) requiring a district plan assuring that courses are reasonably available to students when prerequisites or corequisites are established using only content review. The intent is that students who have not met a prerequisite will be able to enroll in appropriate courses while completing the prerequisite course and, if a new prerequisite or corequisite is established, course sections will be reasonably available for students to complete the new requirements. Subdivision (l)(2) was clarified to require that districts will be required to monitor the impact on student equity and, when disproportionate impact is indicated, consult with the Chancellor (or designee) to develop steps the district will take to correct the disproportionate impact.

Conclusion

The proposed regulations are presented to the Board for a first reading. The Board should hold a public hearing and consider any testimony which is offered. It is anticipated that the regulations will be presented to the Board for final action at its March meeting.

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