

Princeton USG Senate
Meeting 10
April 10th, 2022
8:00 pm EST



Introduction

1. Question and Answer Session (5 minutes)
2. President's Report (Mayu Takeuchi, 5 minutes)

New Business

1. Black & LGBTQ Student Experience Committee Update (Tennille Haynes, 15 minutes)
2. Update on Minors (Dean Peeples, 10 minutes)
3. CCA: Update and Budget Approval (Isabella Shutt, 5 minutes)
4. Communications Update (Sarah Sharma, 5 minutes)

USG President's Report, April 10
Mayu Takeuchi

PAST WEEK HIGHLIGHTS

Community Dining Program meeting

- With administrators from the Office of University Services, team led by Chris Lentz
- Currently piloting the technologies (swiping technologies) and other logistics necessary to make it possible for meal plans to cover meals in town
- The University will be running further pilots over the summer to ensure smooth and successful implementation

Fossil Fuel Dissociation Discussion

- Fourth discussion convening student representatives and representatives of the Faculty Panel and Administrative Committee on Fossil Fuel Dissociation
- In what cases will the University deem it okay to continue constructive engagement (maintain a relationship with company X in order to change behavior from within), rather than dissociating and cutting ties? This is a question currently on the table. If the answer is “all,” then nothing will change. We are continuing to advocate to ensure high standards and accountability.
- The Faculty Panel will next meet on April 14 to discuss forward-looking components of the Board's charge. The drafting of the final report will take place the week of April 18

Elections ongoing

- Given that there is a formal opposition group for Referendum 3 (this cycle is the first time in USG history that there is a formal opposition group), the USG offered the referendum sponsor and the opposition group sponsor an opportunity to participate in a debate, moderated by a University administrator. It would have taken place on Friday April 8 (the Friday before surge at art of voting), but the USG did not proceed because the referendum sponsor declined the invitation.
- The USG Senate issued a statement addressing and providing resources to support students through the intense emotions emerging from dialogues surrounding Referendum 3
- Coordinated an ORL Processing Space, a CPS Listening Circle, and USG Office Hours with the Chief Election Manager regarding the referendum; informed residential college staff of these resources and dialogues

Other:

- Working towards finalizing The USG Survey for Apr 18 launch. Thanks Ned and Carlisle for taking lead here!

- Active work towards Lawnparties: amazing work from Madi and the Social Committee here! Look out for opportunities to sign up and support
- Active work also towards Porchfest: great work from Isabella and the CCA Committee!
- Check-in with Historian Caitlin regarding progress on organizing USG archives
- Finalizing details of Mental Health Luncheon for April 15: to discuss and improve campus climate to support mental health and wellbeing

WEEK AHEAD HIGHLIGHTS

Apr 11 (M) Spring Election voting begins at noon! Ballots will be available via email from Election Runner, and election information is available at usg.princeton.edu

Apr 12 (T) Mental Health Resources meeting: VP Calhoun, Dr. Chin, USG Executive Committee + Mental Health Resources Task Force

Apr 14 (H) Monthly DEI meeting with VP Minter and AP Maxam, advocating for quarterly updates on University DEI initiatives for accountability

Apr 15 (F) Meeting with VP Calhoun



Minors Proposal

Approved by the Faculty Committee on the Course of Study, 04.05.2022

The Purpose and Philosophy of a Minors Program

The Princeton curriculum challenges students to think, read, and reason across a range of disciplinary perspectives and to engage deeply with the methods and approaches of one major field of concentration. The breadth of this liberal arts curriculum is ensured through the University's requirements for general education, and the independent work requirement ensures that students encounter depth in their major field of study.

Within this structure, however, students often express their desire for additional opportunities to engage in focused study and coursework outside or alongside of their major field of concentration. Some of these initiatives are currently facilitated through the University's existing certificate programs, many of which connect areas of inquiry that transcend any single departmental home. Other certificate programs do function, in practice, as "minors," to the extent that they represent an abridged body of coursework within one (or primarily one) academic department.

The existing certificate programs also illustrate the uneven landscape in which these programs have developed over many preceding decades. Some certificate programs predate established departments (Neuroscience, African American Studies) and others already function, in practice, as minors (East Asian Studies, Applications of Computing). Because our current approach to certificate programs requires that any new programs demonstrate interdisciplinary appeal and focus, departments cannot currently propose a new certificate program in their field alone.

A formal minors program would expand the current goals of the certificate programs while allowing departments to propose a body of stand-alone coursework. Minors would provide a broader, more holistic structure through which both departments and programs could help students acquire multi- and interdisciplinary experiences, gaining exposure and fluency in a different body of work or methodological field than that of their concentration. Through this program, which would also incorporate existing certificate programs that are interdisciplinary in nature, students would gain additional avenues for building cross disciplinary connections and joining new forms of intellectual community throughout their studies.

Conversations situated within the University's most recent strategic planning framework have consistently queried how Princeton's curriculum might better assist students who want to focus their studies on multiple areas – a goal that students themselves also frequently articulate. Double majors are not feasible because of Princeton's rigorous independent work requirements. But a minors program could provide a meaningful, externally legible way for students to develop a coherent secondary program of study in a field outside of their concentration. Humanities departments, in particular, could benefit from offering students the opportunity to transcript a sustained body of coursework in a field of study in addition to their major.

Establishing a formal minors program and inviting existing certificate programs to align with this slightly revised model would also bring more coherence to this landscape, in which current certificates vary widely in terms of focus and requirements. As noted below, this proposal assumes that minors would, for a period of time, coexist with existing certificate programs. But over a transitional period of several years, we envision a period of review and realignment through which the existing certificate programs would be brought into a framework using this new nomenclature.

The establishment of a formal minors program also provides an opportunity to clarify our messaging to students about the purpose and goals of a liberal arts education. In our listening sessions with both faculty and students, we repeatedly heard about the perceived pressure that students feel to pursue several certificates. Likewise, faculty registered their concern for the manner in which the compulsive early pursuit of overlapping certificates can discourage students from open exploration of the curriculum, potentially depriving them of deeper engagement in a smaller set of more deliberate intellectual projects. Despite the assumption that most students pursue multiple certificates, our data tell a different story about the projects that students ultimately complete by Commencement. In general, only about 60% of undergraduates in recent cohorts earned any certificate at all, and the majority of them only earned one. A notably small number of students earn three or more certificates – generally, 5% or less of the student body.

This proposal aims not to constrain student choice of intellectual pursuits but to open more opportunities for secondary and interdisciplinary studies that complement the student's central area of focus. Our conversations with certificate program directors underlined faculty's pride in this curriculum's ability to transcend and even unsettle dominant strains of knowledge and methodology, as their interdisciplinarity cross-cuts in academically robust and innovative ways. At the same time, those conversations admitted that many departments, too, boast interdisciplinary ways of knowing within their discipline. The "interdisciplinary" tag on certificates memorializes a distinction from departments that's sometimes true, but that also sometimes masks the multi-disciplinarity within disciplines. Shifting to a nomenclature of "minors" should be a capacious way to include both strands of knowledge building.

Likewise, the language of “certificates” is most often used externally to acknowledge the acquisition of a credential. For this reason, the Graduate School, for instance, will not shift its “certificate programs” into new territory, regardless of the move to minors in the undergraduate academic program. Certificate programs are well-established in graduate education for the very reason that they signal expertise in a field of knowledge outside the PhD discipline.

For undergraduates, however, a “minor” means a secondary field of study through which a student follows a coherent, thoughtful path through coursework and study determined by expert faculty. In this way, the move to minors doesn’t at all diminish the import of programs currently known as “certificates”; on the contrary, it elevates the work by aligning it within a taxonomy familiar within the lexicon of higher education in the U.S.

This proposal also invites students into a more formal, generative advising process as they plan and execute their overlapping curricular goals. Requiring students who wish to pursue more than two minors to discuss their plans with their residential college dean would help students to clarify their intentions and craft a meaningful path of study with the benefit of our well-developed advising network. Requiring a dean’s approval to pursue three or more minors would not represent a purely bureaucratic hurdle but, instead, an invitation to careful thought and reflection at key touchpoints in a student’s academic career. Likewise, establishing a declaration date for each minor program would also ensure that students pursue these programs within a structure of the academic community.

Finally, the establishment of a formal minors program also suggests that we revisit the language of “concentration.” Princeton’s distinct nomenclature of concentrations and certificates is not always externally legible. A shift to a consistent language of majors and minors would be welcomed by students, and would ultimately simplify the taxonomy of Princeton’s undergraduate curriculum. Therefore, we propose that the establishment of the formal minors program should precipitate a change in University nomenclature, such that beginning in AY 23-24 “Concentrations” will be called “Major Fields of Concentration,” or simply “Majors.”

Guiding Principles for a Minors Program

- Any academic department or program with curricular authority from the Academic Planning Group may propose a minor.
- No department will be required to propose or approve a minor.

- The Committee on the Course of Study will set the minimum requirements for a minor and approve their establishment or revision for each department or program.
- The minor will be reflected on a student's transcript.
- A student may not earn a minor in their major field of concentration.
- A minor will not be required of a student for graduation; likewise, participation in a minor program will not alter in any way students' requirements for the degree in their department of concentration. Failure to complete an intended/declared minor would not prevent a student from graduating.
- Departments and programs will determine the form and extent of advising appropriate for students in their minor program.
- An undergraduate student may earn up to two minors. Students may petition their residential college dean for permission to pursue three or more minors (or, in the transitional period, a combination of minors and/or certificates).
- Departments and programs will set the date by which students should declare a minor. This date will normally be no earlier than the spring of the sophomore year and no later than the spring of the junior year.

A proposal for a minor should require the following components:

- A minor will typically require a minimum of 5 courses. The final composition of the program of study for a minor, including restrictions on double-counting courses with the student's major field of concentration, will be proposed by the department or program as befits their curricular goals.
- Departments will decide which courses in the department or program would be mandatory for the minor and which requirements could be taken as electives. Normally, a minor course of study will require a specific and coherent body of coursework rather than any group of courses in a department or program.
- A minor need not require independent work, but departments or programs may elect to require some form of independent work or methodological coursework as a component of the minor. For instance, independent work for a minor might include a chapter of a senior thesis, and methodological coursework might include a department's junior methods seminar or another course that involves substantial engagement with the field's research methods and/or academic writing.

Relationship between Minors and Certificates

The establishment of formal minors will create a new structure and nomenclature for organizing our current certificate programs. Although the establishment of a minors program will permit departments to offer minors, department status will not be a condition for offering a minor.

If approved, the establishment of a minors program would initiate a transitional period during which both minors and certificate programs would co-exist. Current certificates would initiate the process of becoming minors at their leisure, leading to a review of the proposed conversion through the COCS.

A period of several years will be necessary to reconstitute most current certificate programs into formal minors in ways that are consistent with the guidelines established for minors across the University.

Timeline for Implementation

If approved in AY22 by the faculty, the AY23 academic year would be a transitional/implementation year. During this time, departments may begin to propose formal minor programs, although there would be no deadline by which a department would need to propose a minor. Current certificate programs may propose to be converted to a formal minor through at least AY 27.

Students may begin earning minors in the 2023-2024 academic year. Students in the Classes of 2027, 2026, and 2025 would be eligible to elect a minor, e.g., entering first-years, rising sophomores, and rising juniors.

