Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Response to Charge S-0807A
January 2012

S-0807A - Add/Drop Period: As follow-up to the Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee's March 2011 [Response to Charge S-0807, Add/Drop Period](), consider and make a final recommendation on what changes, if any, to the Add/Drop Period should be made permanent.

Background

The Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee (ASRAC) first responded to charge S-0807 in January 2010, recommending that:

- the current add/drop period be lengthened by one day; i.e., to an eight-day period to drop and a nine-day period to add, on a trial basis for the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters.

- ASRAC be charged with evaluating the results of the changes near the end of the spring 2011 semester and making a recommendation as to whether further changes should be made.

- the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Newark and Camden Chancellors, and the Deans of the various schools and colleges increase their efforts to convince faculty members to make syllabi available online for all courses during the preregistration period or at least well before the beginning of the semester.

The above recommendations were adopted by the Senate, and subsequently accepted by President McCormick. Both the add period and the drop period were extended, on a trial basis, for the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters, and Rutgers' administration increased efforts to have faculty members make syllabi available online in a timely manner.

In March 2011, ASRAC reported that it did not have sufficient information to evaluate the results of the trial extension of the add and drop periods before the end of the spring 2011 semester, and therefore recommended that the trial be continued for the 2011-2012 academic year. This extension was approved by the Senate and the President, and ASRAC was charged with performing a thorough evaluation of the trial extension of the add/drop period before the end of the fall 2011 semester.

Discussion and Recommendations

Members of ASRAC consulted widely with faculty, students, and members of the decanal staff in their respective units concerning possible changes to the add/drop period, and discussed their findings at ASRAC meetings on September 16, October 14, and December 9, 2011. From these discussions, it became clear that there is no consensus among members of the Rutgers community concerning the optimal lengths for the add and drop periods. Opinions fall roughly into the following groups:

- Many students would like to see a substantial lengthening of both the add and drop periods. Students particularly object to getting a W on their transcript if they withdraw from a course in the second week of classes.
- Most faculty and academic staff have no strong objections to the one-day extensions of both the add and drop periods to accommodate the needs of students registered for courses that meet once a week late on the last day of the first week of classes (e.g., on Monday afternoon or evening

when the semester started on the previous Tuesday). However, faculty are overwhelmingly opposed to further lengthening the add period on the grounds that having students join a course much after the beginning of the second week of classes puts those students at a serious disadvantage and can be seriously detrimental to the conduct of the course.

- A vocal minority of the faculty strongly believes that the add/drop period should be shortened substantially. Some go so far as to argue that students should need special permission to add a course after the first class meeting.

Despite the lack of consensus in the Rutgers community, ASRAC has reached consensus on this issue; namely, to recommend that the eight-day drop period and nine-day add period be made permanent, and to find a way to alert students to the dangers of adding a course late in the add/drop period. This leads to our two formal recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The trial add/drop period shall be made permanent; i.e., henceforth, students will have eight calendar days to drop a course, and nine calendar days to add a course each semester.

Recommendation 2: A cautionary note shall be added to the online Schedule of Classes and the Webreg website to the effect that students who add a course late in the add/drop period run a large risk of doing poorly in the course if they have neither been attending the class nor spoken with the instructor about the wisdom of adding the course.

Committee members also discussed ways of helping concerned faculty members minimize the number of students adding a course "too late" from a pedagogical point of view by requiring that students get special permission to add the course after a certain date within the add/drop period. ASRAC Co-chair Martha Cotter met with Chris Morrett, the new Director, and Cathy Castagnola, the Associate Director, of Scheduling and Space Management, together with Greg Jackson, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, to discuss what can and cannot be done. At the meeting, Senator Cotter was told the following:

- It is not possible, given our antiquated computer systems and concomitant reliance on staff labor, for a faculty member or department to be able to require that students get special permission to add certain courses after the first class meeting, first two class meetings, etc.

- What could be done, by building it into the registration program, would be to require that any student adding a course (any course) after the first so many days of the semester must get special permission to do so.

The latter option was rejected by ASRAC members on the grounds that it would cause much more inconvenience for students and much more work for already overburdened departmental staff than it would be worth.

The issue of giving faculty more power to determine who can add their courses should be revisited when Rutgers acquires a modern student-database software system. In the meantime, we would like to suggest some ways that faculty can discourage students from adding inappropriate courses at the last minute.

1. A faculty member concerned with students adding late can place a very prominent warning about adding the course after the first class meeting (or first several meetings) on the course's online syllabus.

2. Departments can add a note at the beginning of the departmental listings in the Schedule of Classes strongly advising students thinking about adding a course during the add/drop period to attend the class from the first meeting or, if that is not possible, to speak with the instructor before classes begin.

3. Faculty members concerned with students without the proper background or level of academic maturity adding an upper-level course without formal prerequisites can restrict enrollment to, for example, juniors and seniors, or to students with certain majors, or to students having completed a lower-level course in the given discipline, etc. Students not meeting such requirements would have to get special permission to add the course.

Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee
    Cotter, Martha, GS-NB (F), Co-chair – *Executive Committee Liaison*
    Schantz, Daniel, Newark **Staff, Co-chair**
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    Arowolo, Adenike, CCAS (S)
    Avakame, Edem, SCJ (F)
    Bhuyan, Sanjib, SEBS (F)
    Boikess, Robert, SAS-NB (F)
    Grabosky, Jason, GS-NB (F)
    Greenberg, Douglas, SAS-NB, Dean (A) - Administrative Liaison
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    Haibach, Michael, GS-NB (S)
    Katz, Harriet, Law-C (F)
    Levinson, Nathan, Camden Staff
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    Naus, Joseph, SAS-NB (F)
    Patel, Dhruti, Engineering (S)
    Pottick, Kathleen, SSW Acting Dean (A)
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    Sills, Morgan, SAS-NB (S)
    Szatrowski, Ted, At-Large N (F)
    Van de Walle, Gretchen, Acting Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, NCAS (A)
    Vodak, Mark, SEBS (F)
    Wang, Yuchung, GS-C (F)
    Winkler, Matthew, NB Staff