



Proposal to Establish a University Policy on Repeating Undergraduate Courses

PRESENTED BY Thomas Cohen, Chair

REVIEW DATES SEC – April 8, 2019 | SENATE – April 24, 2019

VOTING METHOD In a single vote

RELEVANT POLICY/DOCUMENT [Undergraduate Catalog Repeat Course Guidelines](#)

NECESSARY APPROVALS Senate, President

ISSUE

In September 2018, the Office of Undergraduate Studies submitted a proposal to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) to formalize the existing repeated course practice for undergraduate courses into official policy. Students face inconsistent requirements across colleges/schools for repeating courses under current practice. The goals of the proposed policy were clarity, consistency, the promotion of student success, and maintaining the integrity of the student transcript. The SEC voted to charge the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee with reviewing the proposal and current provisions in the Undergraduate Catalog; reviewing similar policies and practices at Big 10 and peer institutions; consulting with various stakeholders; and recommending whether the University should establish a formal policy on repeating undergraduate courses.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The APAS Committee recommends that the proposed University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy immediately following this report be approved.

The APAS Committee recommends that the University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy become effective the first day of classes of Fall 2020.

The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of the Registrar should develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to explain the new policy and its provisions and to address common questions.

The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of the Registrar should develop a comprehensive communication and messaging strategy to ensure that the campus community is aware of the new policy and changes to current practice.

The University should revise the Undergraduate Catalog, University webpages, and relevant informational resources to align with the provisions in the new policy.

The University should conduct a review of the implementation of the new policy and the appropriateness of the 18-credit repeat limit in Fall 2025 to assess efficacy and make any necessary adjustments.

COMMITTEE WORK

The APAS committee reviewed the process that went into the proposal's development and how course repeats are currently processed. It established a subcommittee, comprised of committee members and representatives from the Office of the Registrar, to revise the policy based on suggestions made by the full committee. The subcommittee discussed the content and structure of the proposed policy and worked to align it with current practice. The new policy would make several changes to current practice, including expanding the definition of "repeat course" and imposing two main limits on course repeats: students may not repeat more than 18 credits, and students may only repeat any course one time. The committee voted unanimously to approve the new University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy and several administrative recommendations at its meeting on March 29, 2019.

ALTERNATIVES

The Senate could choose not to approve the proposed policy and recommendations, leaving the existing repeated course practice in effect without the authority of official policy.

RISKS

There are no associated risks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.



Proposal to Establish a University Policy on Repeating Undergraduate Courses

2018-2019 Committee

Thomas Cohen (Chair)
Deanna Barath (Graduate Student)
Progyan Basu (Faculty)
Lauren Brown (Undergraduate Student)
William Cohen (Ex-Officio Provost's Rep)
Linda Coleman (Faculty)
Adrian Cornelius (Ex-Officio University Registrar)
Jeffrey Franke (Ex-Officio Graduate School Rep)
Lee Friedman (Faculty)
Shannon Gundy (Ex-Officio Rep for Director of Undergraduate Admissions)
Agisilaos Iliadis (Faculty)
Lisa Kiely (Ex-Officio Undergraduate Studies Rep)

Byung-Eun Kim (Faculty)
Roberto Korzeniewicz (Faculty)
Marilee Lindemann (Faculty)
Celina McDonald (Faculty)
Benjamin Parrish (Undergraduate Student)
Julian Savelski (Exempt Staff)
Michael Sparrow (Exempt Staff)
David Straney (Faculty)
Elizabeth Warner (Faculty)

Date of Submission

March 2019

BACKGROUND

In September 2018, the Office of Undergraduate Studies submitted a proposal to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) to formalize the existing repeated course practice for undergraduate courses into official policy. The goals of the proposed policy were clarity, consistency, the promotion of student success, and maintaining the integrity of the student transcript. The SEC reviewed the proposal at its meeting on September 21, 2018. The SEC voted to charge the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee with reviewing the proposal and current provisions in the Undergraduate Catalog; reviewing similar policies and practices at Big 10 and peer institutions; consulting with various stakeholders, and recommending whether the University should establish a formal policy on repeating undergraduate courses (Appendix 2).

CURRENT PRACTICE

The University does not have an official policy dictating how repeated courses are treated in an undergraduate student's record, nor what, if any, limits are imposed on the repetition of courses. The current practice is described in the Undergraduate Catalog, but without the backing of official policy there have been significant variations in the application of the practice across colleges/schools. Under current practice, students may take multiple iterations of cross-listed courses without the additional courses being considered repeats. In addition, transferred credits for courses initially taken at the University are also not considered repeats under current practice, which can allow students to manipulate their GPA by repeating courses at another institution. The University also currently supports a repeat process informally known as "freshman forgiveness" that allows students to repeat courses initially taken upon their arrival at the University and to replace their original grade with the better of the two.

COMMITTEE WORK

The APAS Committee began its review in October 2019. A representative from the Office of Undergraduate Studies provided an overview of the proposal and the process that went into its development and representatives from the Office of the Registrar provided a presentation on how course repeats are currently processed. Over the course of the next several committee meetings, members reviewed the language of the proposed policy at length and made preliminary suggestions for potential revisions. The committee agreed to establish a subcommittee, comprised of committee members and representatives from the Office of the Registrar, to revise the proposed policy based on suggestions made by the full committee.

The subcommittee met six times to discuss the content and structure of the proposed policy and worked to align it with current practice. The subcommittee presented an updated policy draft to the full committee and considered feedback on several additional revisions to the policy.

The key considerations for the policy are presented below.

Limitations on Repeats

The committee discussed whether there should be limitations on repeats and whether 18 credits is an appropriate overall repeat limit. Members suggested that increasing the limit beyond 18 credits could encourage students to challenge themselves and take more difficult courses. The Office of the Registrar found that if the 18-credit limit was currently in place, very few students would be negatively affected by it. The committee agreed that the specific overall repeat limit should be reviewed in the future to assess its effects on student success and determine whether it should be adjusted.

Research shows that the sooner students are in majors in which they can be successful, the more likely it is that they will graduate in a reasonable amount of time. Placing limits on repeating courses helps students and advisors recognize when students may not be successful in a particular major. This can be more clear if students are unable to pass prerequisite courses without multiple repeats.

The proposed policy would impose two main limits on course repeats: students may not repeat more than 18 credits, and students may only repeat any course one time. The proposed policy expands the definition of repeated course to include cross-listed and transfer courses. In addition, the proposed policy would establish that the grades from all attempts at a course would be included in a student's cumulative GPA calculations, except for those that fall under the New Student Provision (see below), but also clarifies that students would only earn credit from one attempt at a course.

Definition of Repeats

The proposed policy would expand and clarify the current definition of "repeat course" to address inconsistent practices across campus. In particular, it would classify cross-listed and transfer courses as repeats if the initial attempt was taken at the University. The definition of "repeat course" would also include courses that maintain the same content but have changed course numbers, and courses that have similar content but do not have the same course number.

Expanding the definition of "repeat course" to include transfer courses would help to prevent the manipulation of GPAs. Students can currently use transfer courses to manipulate their

GPA because transfer credits are not counted towards GPA calculations at UMD. When students repeat courses off-campus, the low grade from the UMD course would be removed from a student's GPA without anything taking its place, and the student would still receive credit for the course. Processing a transfer course as a repeat credit limits students' ability to utilize this loophole.

New Student Provision

The New Student Provision codifies the current practice commonly referred to as "freshman forgiveness." The Provision would allow new incoming and transfer students to repeat courses taken during their initial term at the University and to replace the grade from the original attempt with the grade from the repeat course in the student's GPA calculation. In some cases, however, a student's GPA could benefit from the inclusion of both grades. For example, if a student receives a "B" on their initial attempt at a course during their first year, an "A" on their repeat of the course, and "C"s in many of the other courses in their college career. In such a case, the student could benefit from the inclusion of the "B" in their GPA calculation. In order to facilitate student success, the proposed policy allows students an opportunity to decline the New Student Provision, in which case both grades would be included in the calculation of their cumulative GPA.

Peer Research

Course repeat practices and policies vary widely at Big 10 and peer institutions. Half of the Big 10 institutions only allow courses to be repeated one time, and establish a limit on the total number of courses or credits a student may repeat. The large majority of institutions record all grades for repeated courses on the transcript, regardless of whether grades for all attempts are included in GPA calculations. However, practices vary widely on which attempts are included in GPA calculations. Because there are wide variations in practices across peer institutions, the committee agreed to focus on specific issues at this University.

After due consideration, the APAS Committee voted unanimously to approve the new University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy and several administrative recommendations at its meeting on March 29, 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The APAS Committee recommends that the proposed University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy immediately following this report be approved.

The APAS Committee recommends that the University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy become effective the first day of classes of Fall 2020.

The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of the Registrar should develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to explain the new policy and its provisions and to address common questions.

The Office of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of the Registrar should develop a comprehensive communication and messaging strategy to ensure that the campus community is aware of the new policy and changes to current practice.

The University should revise the Undergraduate Catalog, University webpages, and relevant informational resources to align with the provisions in the new policy.

The University should conduct a review of the implementation of the new policy and the appropriateness of the 18-credit repeat limit in Fall 2025 to assess efficacy and make any necessary adjustments.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 — Peer Research

Appendix 2 — Charge from the Senate Executive Committee

Proposed New Policy from the APAS Committee

University of Maryland Undergraduate Student Course Repeat Policy

I. Purpose

Undergraduate students at the University of Maryland may repeat courses within the guidelines specified in this policy. The University acknowledges that students may not realize success in an initial attempt at a course for a variety of reasons. This policy aims to address those challenges while promoting timely progress towards completion of degree programs and the efficient use of instructional resources.

II. Policy

A. It is the policy of the University of Maryland that undergraduate students may repeat courses that were initially attempted at the University in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. A course that was previously attempted at the University can be repeated once.
2. A maximum of 18 attempted credits may be repeated.

B. Exceptions to Section II-A

1. A student may request an exception to this policy due to extenuating circumstances by appealing to the dean of the student's primary advising college and by providing the following:
 - a) A well-documented justification for granting such an exception;
 - b) The student's plan for successfully completing the course and degree; and
 - c) The student's planned course of action should the exception not facilitate the desired outcome.

III. Definitions

A. An **"Attempt"** of a course refers to a course taken at the University for which a student received a grading symbol or marking (A+ through F, XF, P, S, W, I, NG, or AU) identified in the University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts (III-6.20[A]). An "Attempt" also refers to a course taken at another institution subsequent to an Attempt taken at the University of Maryland. An "Attempt" does not refer to a course taken during a

semester in which a complete withdrawal (designated with a WW) was processed.

- B. An **“Initial Attempt”** of a course refers to the first time the course was attempted at the University of Maryland.
- C. **“Prior Learning Credit”** refers to academic credit awarded for knowledge and achievements gained through prior learning, or competency-based education experiences as described in the University of Maryland Policy and Procedures Concerning Credit for Prior Learning (III-1.41[A]).
- D. **“Repeated Course”** refers to a subsequent Attempt of a course initially attempted at the University of Maryland that has not been designated as repeatable for additional credit, as described in Section IV below.
- E. **“Transfer Credit”** refers to academic credit awarded for post-secondary courses generally completed at regionally accredited institutions of higher education.

IV. Types of Repeated Courses

- A. A course is considered a repeat if it is:
 - 1. the same course with the same course number;
 - 2. the same course offered under a new number (indicated in the Schedule of Classes as “Formerly”);
 - 3. the same course offered using a cross-listed number (indicated in the Schedule of Classes as “Also offered as” or “Credit only granted for”);
 - 4. a different course in which content and learning objectives overlap sufficiently with those of the original course, such that course credit should not be earned for both courses (indicated in the Schedule of Classes as “Credit only granted for”); or
 - 5. a transfer course that is determined to be equivalent to a University of Maryland course, and is taken after the Initial Attempt at the University.
- B. Some courses may not be available for a subsequent Attempt, or may have restrictions in place that do not allow a student to retake them.

V. Impact of Repeated Courses on Total Credits Earned and GPA Calculation

All University of Maryland grades and course Attempts will remain on the student's transcript.

- A. Total Credits Earned: students earn credit for only one Attempt of a course. The earned credit comes from the most recent Attempt of the course.
- B. GPA Calculation: students' cumulative GPA calculations will include all credits attempted in courses at the University of Maryland, except as described in section VI below.

VI. New Student Provision

- A. To assist in the transition to the University of Maryland, cumulative GPAs for undergraduate students will be calculated using only the most recent grade from Repeated Courses attempted at the University in accordance with the following conditions:
 - 1. When the Initial Attempt of the Repeated Course was taken within the student's first semester (Fall or Spring semester) at the University of Maryland; or
 - 2. When the Initial Attempt of the Repeated Course was taken prior to or within the term in which the student reaches their 24th credit hour attempted, including transfer credits earned after high school graduation.
- B. Students may decline the New Student Provision for any course(s) by notifying the dean of their primary advising college at any time prior to the graduation application deadline of the student's term of graduation. The decision to decline the New Student Provision is final and will result in all corresponding grades being included in the GPA calculation.
- C. The New Student Provision can only be exercised for Attempts and repeats of courses taken at the University of Maryland and does not apply to Transfer or Prior Learning Credit.