

adopted January 13, 1987

ACADEMIC SENATE  
OF  
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY  
San Luis Obispo, California

AS-234-87/CC

**Resolution on Free Electives**

- WHEREAS,** Students are required to take a broad spectrum of courses by the General Education & Breadth requirements; and
- WHEREAS,** The units for General Educations & Breadth requirements have been increased in recent years; and
- WHEREAS,** CAM section 411.1 requires 12 units of electives, 9 of which may not be restricted in any way by the student's curriculum ("free electives"); and
- WHEREAS,** Cal Poly's hands-on learning by doing philosophy may require many more design and project units than other schools; and
- WHEREAS,** This has made it difficult if not impossible for a number of disciplines to maintain their traditional quality of program or even minimum legal or accreditation requirements within the maximum number of units allowed in their four year degree curriculum ; and
- WHEREAS,** This has caused in recent years exemptions to be granted to the section 411.1 requirements on an *ad hoc* basis; and
- WHEREAS,** Some curricula have pre-chosen for their students most if not all of the General Education and Breadth courses where students are allowed a choice; and
- WHEREAS,** It is desirable for all students to have the freedom to take courses of their own choice in the attainment of a bachelor degree; therefore be it
- RESOLVED:** That the curriculum of each major should strive to follow the requirements of CAM section 411.1, and to include more than the minimum units of unrestricted electives, if possible . Exemptions to this requirement will be considered on an individual basis by major; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That petitions for exemptions should be submitted with the normal catalog proposals. Petitions must provide documentation as to why 9 units of unrestricted electives cannot be provided in the major. Items that will be examined in approving exemptions will include

- a) that the curriculum is up to the maximum number of units allowed by regulation for the Bachelor degree being offered by the curriculum
- b) that the major includes as much freedom as possible for the students to choose courses where such choices exist in established General Education and Breadth requirements
- c) the requirements of accrediting bodies
- d) any other material the submitting department believes will be helpful in understanding the reasons for needing an exemption;

and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That exemptions are part of the curriculum proposal and must be approved with the rest of a department's package of materials during the catalog revision cycle. Where an exemption is given, the curriculum should be reviewed with each catalog cycle to see if the conditions that required the exemptions still exist.

proposed October 21, 1986  
Curriculum Committee

## Background Information on Free Electives Issue

### Summary

The Curriculum Committee had a number of meetings on this issue last year and recommended two possible resolutions to full Academic Senate (the committee members were about evenly split between two extremes on this). The full senate passed by a 2-1 margin the resolution saying that a major need not have any free electives. This summer President Baker rejected that resolution, sending the issue back to us.

### History

During Winter quarter 1986 the Curriculum Committee received from Provost Fort (via the Senate Chair) a request to examine the existing policy on free electives. (These are officially called unrestricted electives in CAM section 411.1, but everybody calls them free electives.) According to CAM, each major must have at least nine elective units that are not restricted in any way (and three that may be restricted by the department). Prior to 1978, the minimum number of electives was still 12 but with only six that must be unrestricted. Since the increase in the number of GE&B units several years ago, several majors have received exemptions from this requirement because of existing levels of courses required for their major.

From discussions within the committee and from comments received from members of the university community, there seem to be at least four competing concerns that cause the problem:

1. The desire to give a student some choice in the direction of their education as embodied in the requirement for 9 unrestricted electives.
2. A desire to maintain the high quality hands-on education for which Cal Poly is noted. This is embodied in the number of units that are required as part of the major and courses supporting the major. In engineering this can be quantified because the accreditation requirements for engineering and technology majors are stated in terms of course units. In other areas the requirements may not be formally stated or are not quantified.
3. The desire to give the students a broadly based education as embodied in the number of GE&B units required. The level of GE&B was increased to about 79 units two catalog cycles ago.
4. A desire to give a student chance to complete a four-year degree in four years of work. This is embodied in a cap on the number of units allowed in a four-year degree. For a BS it is 198 units except in engineering where it is 210. For a BA it is 186.

A dilemma can arise when adding the units from 1, 2, and 3 together produces more than the unit limit specified by concern number 4.

Last year's committee discussed the issue and decided to draft several alternative resolutions to distribute to the campus community for comment.

One draft resolution said that concern number one above, the 9 free electives is what gives. The committee voted 4-4 to approve this resolution but due to the major split on the committee, it was still forwarded to the full Senate for consideration. This was the resolution that was eventually approved by a 2-1 vote by last year's Senate.

Another draft resolution said that concern number two is what gives, you will have nine free electives even if you have to give up some of the courses required by the major. The committee voted 5-3 in favor of this resolution and it was also forwarded to the full Senate but was not voted on by that body.

The other draft resolutions were attempts to define conditions under which concern number one may be ignored and an exemption from the CAM requirement can be granted. When these were circulated for comment, no one seemed to understand them so they were not forwarded to the Senate.

The committee did not want to touch the hot potato of GE&B and so proposed no resolution attacking concern number three. In recent years there have been some ad hoc attempts before the senate to solve the problem by modifying GE&B requirements. There has been an exemption from GE&B area D.4.b for some majors and there were some (rejected) attempts to add engineering courses to various GE&B categories.

The committee never considered trying to attack concern number four since 196 or 210 units are already high levels of units!

AS-234-87

Lloyd Lamouria, Chair  
Academic Senate

March 30, 1987

M Wilson (w/o att)  
G Irvin (w/o att)  
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gm

Warren J. Baker  
President

AS-234-87/CC

ACADEMIC SENATE RESOLUTION ON FREE ELECTIVES (AS-214-85/CC)

You forwarded to me on January 21 the action of the Academic Senate on a revised resolution relative to Free Electives. This revised resolution came about as a result of my request for reconsideration by the Curriculum Committee and the Academic Senate last August. The Vice President for Academic Affairs has had an opportunity to review the recommendation with the school deans as well as other members of the Academic Affairs staff. Based upon that review and my own consideration of the issue, I am hereby approving the resolution on Free Electives as revised by the Academic Senate (AS-214-85/CC).

The thrust of the resolution and its contents are effective immediately although the actual changes in CAM to reflect the revised policy will not occur until the 400 section of CAM is next revised.

note: see also

AS-214-86/CC