

**Revisions to the Proposed Transfer Credit Policy
Based upon Recommendations from the Faculty Senate EPC,
the April 9 and May 7 Faculty Senate Meetings, and
Email Correspondence with Faculty Senators**

New clauses

Equivalency standards:

- “A combination of external courses (typically, two) may provide equivalency to a single Cornell course.”
 - *Reason for addition:* This is currently the case for Engineering (and, perhaps, other) courses, and the TES software and database can accommodate such configurations.
- “Customarily, a syllabus should suffice to evaluate equivalency along the above dimensions [scope, content, and learning outcomes]. If a syllabus is insufficient, a student may be required to provide an annotated syllabus or course outline that furnishes more detail. In those unusual instances when it is not feasible to assess equivalency based on provided materials/information (i.e., the syllabus and, if requested, a supplemental syllabus and course outline), the course will be treated as a course without equivalency.”
 - *Reason for addition:* Syllabi may be too sparse to assess equivalency, so departments/majors should not be obliged to determine or grant equivalency when information is inadequate for this purpose.
- “If a department/major consistently applies a strict standard of giving only in-person exams in its courses, an external course could be held to an equivalent standard. If, however, a department is not consistent in its own application of a standard that all assessments must be held in person, then external courses could not be held to a different standard.”
 - *Reason for addition:* To address concerns that external courses with online exams are more susceptible to cheating than in-person exams and, thus, should not be accorded equivalency status.
- Existing text: “A student who has completed a course at another institution that is determined to be equivalent to a Cornell course may elect to retake the course at Cornell, but the student may only receive academic credit for one of the two courses.” New footnote for above text: “Unless students are permitted to take the course more than once at Cornell, in which case a student may receive equivalency credit for the external course and take the course at Cornell for credit.”
 - *Reason for addition:* At Cornell, there are some courses that students may take more than once because the content differs; equivalent external courses should be treated comparably.

- Existing text: “As a rule, courses completed seven or more years ago are not eligible for transfer credit.”
- New text added to above clause: “. . . but it will be up to the academic department/major that evaluates equivalency whether to grant transfer credit and assess the course as equivalent. If the course is deemed nonequivalent, it is up to the college/school or program whether to grant any type of transfer credit.”
 - *Reason for addition*: Rather than a blanket denial of credits, it should be up to individual departments/majors to determine if a course is too outdated to be deemed equivalent; in some disciplines, course content will remain the same or very similar over a long period of time.
- “If a department/major consistently applies a strict standard of giving only in-person exams in its courses, an external course could be held to an equivalent standard. If, however, a department is not consistent in its own application of a standard that all assessments must be held in person, then external courses could not be held to a different standard.”

Minimum transfer grades:

- Existing text: “The minimum grade for transfer is C (e.g., to fulfill distribution requirements).”
- New text: “A Cornell college/school or academic department/major may require a grade up to a B for an external course that a student applies towards a major, whether it be a specific course required for the major or a course that satisfies elective credits for the major, regardless of whether the same minimum grade requirement applies to an equivalent Cornell course.”
 - *Reason for addition*: Some majors want a more stringent standard for courses that apply towards the major versus courses that satisfy general distribution requirements. There was also a concern that with the low threshold of a C grade, currently matriculated Cornell students might seek to take difficult major requirements at institutions perceived to be easier.
- Existing text slightly revised to encompass new clause (above): “A Cornell college/school or academic department/major may not require a grade higher than either of the two minimum grades set forth above unless the Cornell course deemed equivalent is subject to the same higher-grade requirement.”
 - *Reason for revision*: To reflect new optional minimum grade of B for majors.

Deleted clauses

- Prohibiting junior-standing transfer students who have the maximum transfer credits from taking additional external transfer credits after matriculation to Cornell.
 - *Reason for removal*: The clause is unnecessarily restrictive. A student may need a course for graduation that is not offered at Cornell before the

student's intended graduation. A student must still abide by transfer credit limits and satisfy Cornell course credit requirements for graduation.

- Limiting transfer credits for Religious Studies courses based upon certain content.
 - *Reason for removal:* Religious Studies courses, like other courses, should be accepted or rejected for credit based upon equivalency; it is for the relevant department to determine whether the course is equivalent based on content and the other equivalency dimensions.
- Stating ROTC courses are non-transferable and, instead, noting that it is up to Cornell ROTC whether to grant credit for external ROTC courses.
 - *Reason for removal:* Cornell ROTC should make these credit determinations.

General responses to concerns expressed at the April 9 Faculty Senate meeting

Worries about granting credit for external courses and assessing equivalency using only syllabi

It is hoped that two new provisions, one permitting majors to require a grade of B, and the other permitting departments to reach beyond syllabi, will alleviate concerns about the inadequacies of external courses in providing proficiency and the inadequacies of syllabi for determining equivalency. Allowing majors to require a more exacting minimum grade of B speaks for itself. Allowing departments to deny equivalency if course information adequate to assess content, scope, and learning objectives is lacking minimizes the risk that a course is incorrectly assessed as equivalent. If sufficient course information is provided, departments will have the capacity to judge equivalency along crucial dimensions and at a B level of proficiency. For instance, if hands-on skills are essential to a Cornell course so that course learning objectives would not be achieved without this component, appropriately, an external course lacking this element, such as an online course, may be denied equivalency credits.

Such individualized determinations contrast with blanket restrictions against a type or types of courses, such as online courses and courses from community colleges, both of particular concern to Cornell faculty. Such wholesale rejection of equivalency credits is barred by Middle States, which explicitly prohibits discrimination based on institutional settings (e.g., community colleges) and modes of delivery (e.g., online instruction). And to assume that all online courses are inferior to all Cornell course is problematic. If it becomes evident that a course deemed equivalent does not adequately prepare students for a higher-level Cornell course, a new equivalency review may be expedited. And departments may require placement exams to ensure adequate course preparation, as long as all students, not just transfer students, are required to take the exams.

It is unrealistic to expect that all external courses are taught at the exacting level of Cornell courses. If we utilize this standard, we could only admit students from other elite institutions or

we would cause transfer students to fall behind in their progress to degree, one of the outcomes the proposed policy seeks to prevent. Our transfer credit policy and equivalency standard should assess whether the classes that transfer students took at their external institutions prepare them sufficiently for Cornell courses; many transfer students seek to come to Cornell precisely because they want a more challenging educational experience than their originating institution provided.

To the extent faculty are concerned about maintaining Cornell standards and reputation, transfer students are required to take 60 credits at Cornell (more for Engineering and Architecture) to earn a degree, so if they are unable to meet Cornell standards once they arrive, they will not succeed.

Concerns about academic integrity in online courses

Two faculty senators raised concerns about academic integrity problems in online courses and our inability to assess whether transfer students cheated in their online courses. As mentioned above, the unconditional denial of equivalency credits for courses simply because they are taught online is prohibited by Middle States. Moreover, sadly, these same concerns apply to all settings and modes of delivery, including in-person courses, whether taught at Cornell or elsewhere. The same concern also pertains to Canvas quizzes, which many Cornell faculty use, and other online testing platforms (e.g., Pearson Vue) used at Cornell. If a student is applying to transfer to Cornell from an online program that does not adequately prepare students for Cornell, it is unlikely that the student would be admitted in the first place.