

**University Senate Academic Policy and Procedure Committee  
Report on Student Errors in Variable Credit Hours Courses (VCHC)**

October 25, 2018

The following document provides a report on Specific Charge 1: *“Make recommendations to avoid student errors when enrolling in variable credit hour courses. Report to SenEx by: November 27, 2018.”* It was prepared by AP&P Chair Karen Moeller with assistance from committee members Nancy Jo Kepple, Joo Ok Kim, Joe Walden, Martin Nedbal, Matt Deakyne, Sarah Jean Coughlan, Caleb Schafer (Graduate Student), Danial Lee (Student), Christopher Mason (Student), Jason O’Connor (ex-Officio), Tiffany Robinson (ex-Officio), Amber Roberts Graham (ex-Officio) and Karen Ledom (ex-Officio).

Members of the AP&P committee met with Sheri Phillips, Associate Director, Student Information Systems on September 27, 2018 (see minutes dated 9/27/18) to discuss Charge 1.

Variable credit hour courses (VCHC) commonly are courses used for research (e.g., undergraduate and graduate research), dissertations, independent studies, topic courses, internships, practicums, and field studies. These courses allow students, after consultation with a faculty member or advisor, to select the number of credit hours desired for enrollment. Credit hours are usually determined based on expected time commitment for the course, research, or internship. At times, students may underestimate or overestimate the time commitment when enrolling in a variable credit hour course. Moreover, some courses allow students to select zero credits in-order for the course to show up on their transcript.

During the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters, 11,425 total enrollments occurred in VCHC. Erroneous enrollments may be corrected through an “auto-approval” process if caught during the semester in which the student is enrolled in the course. Errors caught after the class has finished (i.e., in a later semester) require a FacEx petition to correct them. In 2017-2018, 34 petitions (both undergraduate and graduate students) were filed with FacEx to change errors; a 0.3 percent error rate using enrollment data from Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters (the overall error rate is less than 0.3 % as course enrollments spanned across many semesters). In evaluating solutions for these errors, the committee evaluated procedural methods for enrollment, along with evaluating the 34 petitions for course trends and reasons why students were requesting the change in hours.

Regarding the process for enrollment in VCHC, instructions can be found at the following KU website: <https://sis.ku.edu/variable-credit-hour-courses>. A procedural challenge during the enrollment process in VCHC is the drop-down option for selecting hours is defaulted to the lowest possible value and students must manually change the hours to their desired selection. In reviewing the reasons why students requested change of hours, 27 (79.4%) said they had originally neglected to change the default hours.

With the primary reason for students reporting error as a result of not changing the default hours (79.4%), the committee evaluated possible solutions for technology improvement. The University’s vendor for student enrollment is Oracle Peoplesoft. The committee assessed the feasibility of changing the drop-down box to an open text box for students to manually enter the number of hours. Although Peoplesoft does allow for modification of the system, these changes are reset when updates are applied. Changes to Peoplesoft would require many edits, which would often have to be reapplied when updates occur. With the overall low number of errors (0.3%), the committee felt this would

create increased workload for system modifications. Additionally, the committee had concerns for new errors to occur when students manually entered in the values (e.g. typos, 3.2 vs 3.0).

Additional technology options explored included an automated email to be sent to students after enrollment in VCHC with the number of hours selected and the addition of a notation into the class information within Peoplesoft (enroll and pay) stating to select the numbers of hours one wishes to enroll in. Automated emails are currently in process to alert students enrolling in online classes and Edward's classes. Sheri Philips felt this would be a viable option to add VCHC to the automatic email list. Regarding a notation to be added to the classes, this would not require system modifications and would be an additional alert to students when enrolling. Overall, the committee was in favor of these options.

Lastly, the committee evaluated trends in the 34 petitions for specific courses, semester of occurrence, and student's school. Due to the low number of overall petitions and vast number of course in the University catalog, minimal trends were found. Regarding courses, BAND courses (n=4) had the highest number of requests for changes in credit hours, followed by EECS courses (electrical engineering and computer science) with 3 requests. It was rare for a specific course to be listed more than once. Colleges with classes (not students' schools) with the most errors were the following: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences 34% (n=10), School of Music 20% (n=7) and the School of Engineering 18% (n=6).

The committee also evaluated whether the petitions concerned graduate or undergraduate courses. Courses numbered 500-699 are approved to count either as upper-level undergraduate courses or as graduate classes. Nearly all of the petitioned courses in this range (6) served as undergraduate research or internships for bachelor's degrees. All courses listed at the 700 level or above are classified as graduate-level courses: students petitioned 11 graduate courses. No class above 500 was petitioned more than once except for EECS 690 (special topics in electrical engineering and computer science).

Lastly, we looked at when the specific class occurred. Twenty (58.8%) of the petitions were for classes that occurred before Fall 2017 (e.g., Fall 2014, 2016, Summer 2017). The committee believes these requests may be due to the evaluation of graduation requirement and need for additional hours. These types of errors/requests cannot be fixed with procedure changes.

In summary, the most common trend for student errors was due to students not changing the default number of hours at the time they enrolled (79.4%). The committee recommends the following:

- Automated emails occur after enrolling in VCHC
- Notation in the class details of Peoplesoft (enroll and pay) to alert students to select the appropriate hours for the course