Report on Academic Review Board Activities  
Academic Year 2018-9

A) The Academic Review Board (ARB) is charged with evaluating appropriateness of previously unlisted courses to fulfill Tufts’ requirement for World Civilization, or part of Tufts’ requirement for Culture or for Distribution. The role of ARB is to implement policy, not to make it.

ARB strives to respond to petitions within five working days.

-For Distribution credit, 92 petitions were reviewed; of these, 11 were denied
-For Culture credit, 81 petitions were reviewed; of these, 6 were denied.
-For World Civ, 52 petitions were reviewed; of these, 5 were denied. In addition, the Chair of the World Civ subcommittee (David Proctor) met with 12 students to review courses before petitioning them; in each case the student decided it was better not to petition since there was little chance the courses in question would be approved.

81 (88% of) Distribution credit petitions were approved.
75 (92% of) Culture credit petitions were approved.
47 (90% of) World Civ. credit petitions were approved.

In addition, 97 courses approved by A&S faculty were evaluated for Distribution and/or Culture attributes. ARB makes decisions about Distribution attributes based on the primary focus of the course, and the course learning objectives. A Distribution attribute is assigned if more than 50% of the course focuses on principles and approaches associated with that distribution area. A course normally does not receive two Distribution attributes.

The most problematic Distribution credit petitions from students were those requesting Humanities credit. An increasing number of students are unaware of what makes up a humanities course. Humanities courses rely on close reading and critical analyses of literature (novels, short stories, poetry, memoirs, biographies, philosophy, religion) that communicates how humans think and experience, for more than 50% of the course matter.

B) Course attributes (Culture, World Civ, Distribution areas) are listed in course descriptions on SIS. In addition, students can monitor progress toward their Bachelors degree on “Degree Audit” (or ‘Advisement Report’ for faculty advisors) accessible online through SIS. The online SIS listings and the ARB are the only accurate and updated sources of information on course attributes.

Faculty are not authorized to declare course attributes. Only ARB can do that. Students depending on faculty assessments of course attributes risk being misinformed. Well-meaning or overly optimistic faculty may suggest that a course
‘seems that it would be a humanities’ after which the student will naively (possibly erroneously) assume that the course does qualify as a humanities, only to discover weeks before trying to graduate that the course never qualified as a humanities. To avoid similar crises, students must be urged (during their advising session) to examine their Degree Audit (on SIS) by their penultimate semester. This gives them one last semester in which to dispel any deficits that may appear.

C) Membership in ARB was 8 in 2018-9. Optimum number is ten. ARB subcommittee chairs counter membership shortages by discussing problematic petitions with ARB colleagues, and with outside experts at Tufts (often Chairs of Departments related to the field mentioned in petition).

The ARB has evolved to conduct its work online, with at most only one year-end face-to-face meeting of the committee itself. ARB duties do not intrude on faculty schedules; petitions can be evaluated at any hour accessible by computer. (responses may require office scanners to generate pdf’s usable to Dowling Hall). Past members have enjoyed the work and expressed regret that their terms could not be renewed indefinitely. The work is interesting to faculty who can be decisive, but only those who serve on ARB seem to realize this.

There should be 10 active voting members on ARB:

1 Chair
3 Distribution Subcommittee members
3 Culture Subcommittee members
3 World Civilization Subcommittee members

We hope full memberships in ARB will be filled by Committee on Committees assignments for AY 2019-20.

Respectfully submitted by
Prof. George Ellmore, Chair
Academic Review Board
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