Weber State University: Course Repeat Options

Students are given the opportunity to repeat courses. At Weber State University (WSU) the repeat policy has become a point of debate. The debate is not whether the policy is valuable or not, rather the debate is on how generous the policy should be.

The problem

Our current WSU policy states that we will accept the last WSU grade. The policy is carefully worded to ensure the integrity of the transcript. As an institution we have the responsibility to report what a student accomplished at WSU, this includes course work, grades, credit, and WSU GPA. Equivalent course work that students transfer from an accredited institution is always excluded in lieu of the WSU credit, regardless of the grade or when it was transferred.

There are two points of argument regarding the repeat of courses. On the one hand, adjustments can be made to the repeat policy that will greatly benefit students who transfer courses, but sacrifices the integrity of the transcript. The other maintains the integrity of the transcript but at the expense of students who transfer an equivalent course in from another accredited institution.

Before siding on one side or the other both points should be carefully considered. I will try to fully outline each option for your consideration.

To begin the discussion I will focus on the WSU academic record. Some arguments have focused on improving the GPA for admissions into selective programs. We should not be making decisions that affect the academic transcript based on admissions criteria. Furthermore, admissions criteria change constantly. Admitting programs can just as easily change their admissions standards to accommodate students who may be affected by repeat policies.

The office of the registrar exists to serve the needs of students, to respond to requests of the faculty and administration of data, and to safeguard the integrity of the institution’s records and degrees (AACRAO, 2011). However, there are times when the needs of faculty and students conflict with the safeguarding of the records and degrees. It is the responsibility of the registrar to inform faculty and staff when policy may affect the academic record. Nevertheless, office of the registrar will follow policy and procedures approved by the institution.

Repeat Policy Options

There are three options that have been presented: A) Keep the current policy, but expose the exceptions, B) accept the highest grade regardless of where it comes from, and C) accept the last class regardless of where it comes from. Each option has pros and cons. Nonetheless, whichever option is selected will have a positive effect and a negative effect either on the transcript or for the student or both.

*Keep the current policy.*  This policy was debated several years ago and was clarified during the tenure of Mark Simpson as the University Registrar. This policy was crafted to ensure the integrity of the academic transcript. WSU has the responsibility to only report work that was completed at WSU on the official transcript. Some items, such as transfer work, are only informational to indicate how much transfer work was accepted not necessarily what was accepted.

The policy clearly states that we will accept the last WSU grade. This translates into an ongoing issue that affects a few students who transfer work into WSU. Because we will only accept the last WSU grade the WSU course work will always supersede any equivalent transfer work. Therefore, if a student took MATH 1010 from WSU and failed and then transferred to another regionally accredited institution and took an equivalent MATH 1010 course and passed, then transferred the course back to WSU, according to the policy, we would exclude the transferred math course, which has the passing grade, thus leaving the student with the failed class. The student would have to repeat MATH 1010 at WSU to exclude the failed course.

This is the least student friendly option. Students are often frustrated when they are informed that their transfer course has been excluded. However, it is the only option that maintains the full integrity of the academic transcript. Therefore it is suggested to expose the exceptions that already exist to help students how fall into this situation. The exceptions are waiving requirements in CatTracks in lieu of the passed transfer course and overriding perquisites.

*Accept the highest grade.* This option would allow students to repeat a course and regardless of when it was taken we would exclude the lowest grade. This option is the most student friendly. Nevertheless, this option has the greatest impact on the integrity of the transcript. The integrity of the transcript is affected when we allow a transfer course to exclude a WSU course, which will affect the WSU GPA. When we allow a transfer course to supersede a WSU course we are not reporting exactly everything the student completed at WSU, because WSU courses are excluded by equivalent transfer courses.

There is another issue that will affect a few students who are in majors that have course expiration necessities. If a major states that they will only accept courses taken within the last ten years to meet major requirements and a student has a course that is outside of that ten year limit the student will have to repeat the course. This becomes problematic when a student has completed a course that is older than ten years and has received a passing grade, for example a B+, and is required to repeat the course. If the student repeats the class and receives less than a B+, according to the policy, we would accept the course with the highest grade. The course with the highest grade would be the course that is older than ten years and the student will have to repeat the course again until he/she achieves a grade higher than the original grade.

*Accept the last class regardless of where it was taken.* This option is a compromise between the two first two options. It is not the most student friendly option but it has smaller effect on the integrity of the transcript. This policy would allow a student who failed a course at WSU go to another institution and pass the equivalent course and transfer back to WSU to exclude the WSU failing grade. This option will still affect the integrity of the transcript but the population of effected transcripts will be significantly smaller than the other option. This option also maintains some urgency in the class when a student repeats the course. Because we will accept the last class regardless of where it came from or regardless of the grade received. The student still needs to pass the class. On the other hand, in the situation where we accept the high grade, there is no urgency when a student repeats because the penalty is no worse than the first time the student took the class. This can be viewed as a positive and a negative.