Guidelines for Courses that Involve Substantial Work Off-Campus

CEP Proposal of March 1, 1985

The Committee on Educational Programs (CEP), in response to Dean Voegeli's request of February 23, 1984, has completed its study of the question of credit for courses that involve substantial work off-campus. Our recommendations take the form of guidelines for the departments and the Curriculum Committee to use in developing and reviewing proposals for such courses. The problems we hope thereby to address include those mentioned by Dean Venable in his memo of February 22, 1984, to Dean Voegeli (attached). In addition there is the problem of "enormous pressure" from students and some pressure from off-campus agencies to create "internships," so that students' transcripts will reflect off-campus employment and other activities. While there may be a legitimate role for courses that involve substantial work off-campus, we believe that they should be carefully restricted, and certainly should not become a device in effect for turning the transcript into a résumé, or for reducing employers' labor costs. We therefore recommend that:

1. Departments may elect to give academic credit for certain courses that involve substantial practical work off-campus.

2. Such courses must combine the following two components, both under the close supervision of a regular Vanderbilt faculty member: (i) an off-campus component, and (ii) an on-campus component constituted by a significant program of research, writing and instruction that is clearly related both to the off-campus activity and to the academic discipline in which credit is awarded.

3. All such courses must be "pre-defined" (unlike Independent Studies and Directed Studies). That is, the Bulletin entry, as approved by the Curriculum Committee, should describe the specific content of the course, including the specific type of off-campus situation or organization in which the student would be placed. If more than one course is involved, they should form a logical group, designated "a," "b" and "c."

4. If the two components are combined in a single course, then it may not be taken non-credit or zero-hours credit, but only for credit (1-4 hours, maximum). It may be taken on a regular graded basis, provided (a) the course is taught and graded by a regular Vanderbilt faculty member, who (b) routinely accompanies and supervises the students in their off-campus activity.

If the two components are divided into two or more courses, then the off-campus component (course) must be taken Pass-Fail (unless it satisfies both (a) and (b)). If it is taken Pass-Fail, it may not be taken non-credit or zero hours credit, but only for credit (1-9 hours, maximum). In all cases, a regular faculty member must oversee, evaluate and grade the student's work in the off-campus component, with appropriate input from the off-campus organization. The on-campus component (course) may be
taken for variable credit, 1-6 hours, normally during the same term as the off-campus course. The on-campus course is to cover the reading, research and writing that is related both to the off-campus position and to the academic discipline in which credit is being awarded, thus emphasizing the relations between theory and practice in the discipline.

5. No student may offer a total of more than 12 hours of courses toward the degree that involve substantial work or study off-campus.

6. Departments are free to specify various prerequisites for such courses, and to restrict them to majors and/or to students with a certain GPA. But we see no need for a college-wide policy on the matter at this time.

Only affected courses that meet these guidelines may appear on the student's transcript.