

TO: Department Chairs
FROM: Non-master schedule ad-hoc committee

RE: IVHS Policy Proposal

At the last department meeting the Keystone Non-Master Schedule Committee presented its proposed policy regarding IVHS classes at University High School. After some productive discussion the department chairs agreed to take this language to their respective departments for feedback.

Keystone meets this Monday and the Non Master Schedule Committee would like to move forward on this policy proposal, however, we also understand the importance of faculty feedback in this matter. We would appreciate it if the department chairs could facilitate feedback from their departments regarding this policy *before* Monday's meeting and share this information with the committee.

You can share ideas or responses to the policy with Brian Conant, Dirk Smid or Jim Allen in person or via email. We appreciate your timely and meaningful response to this policy proposal.

Copies of the policy and research have been attached for your convenience.

Non Master Schedule Policy Research Report and Data

Contents:

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1. IVHS Course Policy Proposal

Illinois Virtual High School courses are available to students as an enrichment opportunity, as a means of developing flexibility in their daily schedule and as a means of helping students use and develop technologically-based learning skills.

IVHS classes may be taken by sophomore, junior and senior students. These courses may be taken for credit or non-credit and may be taken Pass/Fail.

IVHS courses are offered only for elective courses which are not a part of the school's core curriculum, unless there is a special circumstance or conflict for the student. A sophomore student may not carry any more than one (1) IVHS course per semester and juniors and seniors may not carry any more than two (2) courses per semester. Students may not apply more than five (5) IVHS credits toward graduation requirements.

To initiate IVHS coursework the student must complete the entire course registration process, which includes indicating a desire to take the IVHS course on the instructor recommendation form. An instructor and the department chair in the discipline should evaluate the student's ability to work independently as well as the appropriateness of the class in their course of study before recommending the course.

2. Policy Rationale

University High School should support online coursework offered through the Illinois Virtual High School (IVHS). Research indicates that this coursework provides opportunity and flexibility for students while also being valid and rigorous. Most importantly, incorporating IVHS coursework into the U-High curriculum advances the mission of laboratory school by allowing U-High to be a Pioneer in this progressive and increasingly important field of curriculum.

Therefore, the policy presented by this ad hoc committee represents an open-ended approach to IVHS coursework. At the same time the proposed policy clearly and unequivocally values the core curriculum in place at U-High as well as the importance of face-to-face instructional time with U-High faculty.

IVHS should be seen as a means of giving students necessary flexibility in their schedules and enabling them to embrace a more diverse variety of academic challenges, and should never enable them to water-down their experience or avoid essential learning requirements provided for in the core curriculum. Research shows that students must have independent learning skills and time management skills in order to be successful in an online learning environment. This is especially important in cases where the IVHS course content may be difficult (such as AP courses). Here a faculty member's insight into the student's study skills and motivation may be the difference between success and failure.

The current language regarding Illinois Virtual High School from the University High School Student Handbook is inadequate as it provides limited justification for taking IVHS courses and indicates no limits or procedure for registration in these courses. The current language is as follows:

Distance Learning courses (Illinois Virtual High School and University of Missouri Independent Learning) are available based on the individual needs of the student. Permission to enroll in distance learning classes is required from the Counseling Center (74).

The non-master schedule ad hoc committee is suggesting the following amendment to this policy:

Illinois Virtual High School courses are available to students as an enrichment opportunity, as a means of developing flexibility in their daily schedule and as a means of helping students use and develop technologically-based learning skills.

IVHS classes may be taken by sophomore, junior and senior students. These courses may be taken for credit or non-credit and may be taken Pass/Fail.

IVHS courses are offered only for elective courses which are not a part of the school's core curriculum, unless there is a special circumstance or conflict for the student in which case the administration will intervene. A sophomore student may not carry any more than one (1) IVHS course per semester and juniors and seniors may not carry any more than two (2) courses per semester. Students may not apply more than five (5) IVHS credits toward graduation requirements.

To initiate IVHS coursework the student must complete the entire course registration process, which includes indicating a desire to take the IVHS course on the instructor recommendation form. An instructor and the department chair in the discipline should evaluate the student's ability to work independently as well as the appropriateness of the class in their course of study before recommending the course.

3. Research Summary

The need for a clear policy regarding non-master schedule courses developed during a Keystone Council administered focus group in December of the 2004-2005 school year. During this Focus Group faculty were asked to share their feelings about Illinois Virtual High School (IVHS) courses. This question came from the administration and was based on the number of enrollments (72) in IVHS coursework during that year. While the question centered on IVHS, during the Focus Group the discussion was widened to include faculty response to all non master schedule coursework including Area Vocational Schools (AVC), coursework at Illinois State University (ISU) and Heartland Community College (HCC), and University of Missouri correspondence courses (U of M).

Based on this Focus Group, Keystone Council appointed an ad hoc committee to recommend a policy regarding non-master schedule courses to the administration. The ad hoc committee spent the rest of the school year clarifying the issues that needed resolution and research procedures necessary with the administration.

The ad hoc committee then developed and implemented a student survey and asked all students currently or recently enrolled in non-master schedule courses to respond to the survey. Members of the committee also conducted interviews with stakeholders such as students in IVHS and other non-master schedule courses, faculty, guidance counseling staff and administration. The ad hoc committee gathered enrollment numbers with the help of the guidance counseling staff.

Using this data and a cursory article review the ad hoc committee developed a policy for IVHS coursework at University High School which would replace the current Distance Learning Course policy in the student handbook.

4. Areas for further research / policy consideration

While conducting research on the impact of IVHS and other non-master schedule courses on U-High several indirectly related issues were brought to the attention of the ad hoc committee. It is the committee's recommendation that Keystone or the administration consider these issues for further research and policy development in the future.

a. Revisit Course registration procedure

One area of concern for some faculty is the amount of input they have into the coursework students are allowed to take. In several cases interviewed and surveyed staff felt they had been "overridden" or "disregarded" by guidance counseling staff in regard to a non-master schedule course selection, and more broadly, to U-High student coursework selection. The current course registration procedure requires faculty input for student coursework but also gives guidance counselors the flexibility they may need in order to best serve the needs of each individual student. It is possible that the course

registration procedure may need to be revisited in order to formalize the role of the faculty in this important process.

b. Revisit policy for Independent Study coursework

In researching non-master schedule coursework it became clear that some teachers feel as though there are inconsistencies in Independent Study coursework from teacher to teacher. There is also an inconsistency in the policy regarding Independent Study as it applies to Physical Education and the P.E. Waiver policy.

c. Investigate ways IVHS coursework can be further supported at U-High

While this policy supports IVHS coursework because it offers students many benefits, it is clear that there are some controversies in this type of instruction as well. It may be useful for U-High to investigate ways to further support students taking IVHS courses, such as making technology available to them as well as supplemental instructor support and formal progress reporting.

d. Reconsider Consumer Economics course

While the policy demands that students take all core curriculum at U-High except in rare cases, student and administrative responses indicate that consumer economics may be an exception to this rule; the course is required by the state but offers little to U-High students, who see taking the course online as a way of preserving a rigorous academic schedule. Perhaps the course should be made more challenging at U-High or students should be allowed to take the course online at will.

e. Reconsider Teacher Aid enrollment and requirements

During the Faculty Focus Group and during the course of this research several faculty expressed concern over perceived inequities in teacher aid work and the amount of work teacher aids are required to do.

e. Consider requiring enrollment in an online course

Some data suggests that requiring an online course may be a healthy addition to college preparatory curriculum.

f. Support / encourage U-High faculty to engage in online teaching endeavors

If evidence supports the need for students to develop online learning skills, then teachers at U-High should be encouraged to incorporate those skills into their classrooms, and further, to redesign their courses into online hybrids or even completely online courses as there is a larger demand for courses in this format.

g. Consider how to implement online course material in the instruction of clinical experience students

Clinical experience students would seem to benefit from an awareness of online course materials as well as awareness of the current debate regarding this issue.