Dear Curriculum Council,

I write to ask that you consider changing, or at least making an exception to, a policy regarding expedited curriculum proposals. The issue I wish to raise has important implications for the School of Public Policy and for the Sociology Program within it.

First, some background. When I ran the Political Science major, starting in 2014, we had a serious problem of low enrollments in our classes and declining numbers of majors. We had prerequisites on many of our courses, including Bacc Core courses, which made it more difficult for students to register for them. I became convinced that these prerequisites were depressing our enrollment numbers and perhaps, indirectly, our number of majors. I proposed to the Political Science faculty that we eliminate all prerequisites, and they agreed. Using an expedited curriculum proposal process, I was able to quickly carry this out. Our enrollments quickly rose, as did (for a number of reasons) our number of majors. Today Political Science classes are generally full or nearly so.

The Sociology Program, however, still suffers from many of the problems that Political Science had five year ago. They have very low enrollments in many of their classes, including their Bacc Core courses. I believe that one important reason for this is that all of their courses have a prerequisite of SOC 204, Introduction to Sociology, or, in some cases, SOC 204 or some other lower-division course. Even graduate courses have these prerequisites. So, working in my new capacity as Interim Director of the School of Public Policy, I asked the Sociology faculty to consider doing the same thing that Political Science did: drop all prerequisites. At a meeting of the Sociology faculty on May 3, 2109, they agreed. They have authorized me to remove all prerequisites, with a single exception of the second course in a two-course sequence required of majors.

I promised the Sociology faculty that I would get to work right away and use the same expedited process to quickly remove the prerequisites. My hope was that we could improve our enrollments quickly—next year. I probably don't have to remind you that the stakes are even higher now than they were for Political Science five years ago. Under the new budget model on campus, the income of academic units is largely determined by the student credit hours taught. But when I emailed Cheryl Hagey about getting this process started, she informed me that the policy on expedited curriculum proposals has changed, and the list of types of proposals for which the expedited process can be used no longer includes dropping prerequisites. Consequently, Cheryl informed me, we need to do a full Cat II proposal for each affected course. At this point, my hopes of quickly helping the Sociology program, and quickly improving student access to its courses, have been dashed. Instead of a quick administrative process, I am faced with the prospect of shepherding roughly sixty proposals through a full Cat II review, a process that will take at least a year and will involve many hours of work for many people.

I suspect that the reason for excluding the removal of prerequisites from the expedited curriculum proposal process has something to do with a desire to bring courses into the curriculum proposal system so that they can be more fully reviewed. I understand this need, as we have no process for periodic review of non-Bacc Core courses. I would support a system of periodic review of all courses, but I think that to rely on small and simple changes like dropping a prerequisite to substitute for a more systematic and regular process is unfair and inefficient. It converts what could (and, in my view, should) be a straightforward administrative process into an arduous, almost Sisyphean task of moving dozens and dozens of full Cat II proposals through the Curriculum Proposal System.

It should also be noted that what I wish to do will adversely affect no students, but will only improve their access to a broader range of courses. As things stand, if a student wishes to take an upper-division or graduate Sociology course but has not taken the prerequisite, that student must either take the prerequisite first, or apply for a waiver. The crux of what we

wish to do is to remove these impediments and thereby make our courses more available to students.

As I stated at the outset, I would like to see the policy on expedited prerequisites changed to include the removal of prerequisites. I hope that you will consider this. But this, I suspect, would be a longer process, and for me, as a unit head trying to adjust to the new budget model, time is of the essence. I therefore respectfully request that you authorize an exception to the current policy and allow us to remove the perquisites from all Sociology courses (with the single exception noted above).

Thank you for considering this request. I would be happy to meet with you or to otherwise discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,

Andrew Valls
Interim Director, School of Public Policy