Grace Alexander

js7694ce@metrostate.edu

Social science department advisement: How I didn’t get the memo

I am a senior in the social science department at Metropolitan State. I really enjoy and respect my department faculty, but I have had a major problem leading up to my graduation date in 2016. I followed the written rules of sequence for classes to graduate as a social science major, set out by the department. For other students, course pairing exceptions were made within the program. A fellow student and I were left behind one semester because the majority of other students were advised and approved to take two core classes in one semester rather than two separate semesters; we were not.

The sequence that is set out by the department dictates that classes are needed in a certain order, but an exception can be made with “department approval.” The guidelines for core classes are as follows, “(Classes) must be taken in four separate semesters in the order listed above. SSCI 300 and SSCI 311 may be taken concurrently with departmental approval.” The words used for how a social science major takes their core classes sounds rigid, “must be taken,” but instead, the department gave the exception or approval to twelve out of fourteen students that I was to complete my BA within the College of Arts and Sciences. Alternatively, I began my senior year with a new group of students, most of whom I had never met before, while my newly found university friends were one semester ahead of me.

Now this could seem like I messed up: I didn’t read the fine print, I didn’t put pressure on department faculty to forgo guidelines. My reasons for not asking were simple — I honestly thought the way the department set up the curriculum was the best way to get the most out of the program.

From my experience and the dictionary, out of fourteen, twelve approvals seems more like the majority than an oddity. The deed has been done and within the new group of seniors that I hope to graduate with, there are eleven students who also were allowed, some were even pushed, to double up on two specific core classes.

SSCI 300 is a new requirement for the department, being formed in 2014, this must just be a transition period for the sequence of courses. Why have there been two separate semesters of students being forwarded more quickly? How long is this transition period going to last? How long has it lasted? I have personally expressed disappointment in how this situation has unfolded, and blame was put on a lack of experience with advisor guidance. An argument could be made that blame should be put on elite departmental approval instead.

Unfortunately, there is one more consequence to this intricate situation. There are a small number of graduates from the social science department, usually around fifteen each semester. There is a final capstone course requirement with two choices, empirical research or conceptual research. These capstones are rotated every other semester, with the exception of the last two semesters because a certain faculty member is on sabbatical. I am aligned with the conceptual capstone because of the sequence set out by the department. If, for educational or career purposes I wanted or needed to complete the empirical capstone, my graduation date would be a full year later than the students I began my program with.

In some respects, I personally feel lucky that I got to know two groups of people who are amazing, thoughtful and intelligent, but I can only wonder if I would have been able to grow more myself, and within the department if I had the same student comrades as I did from the beginning.

I would implore the faculty and advisors of every department, chiefly the social science department to rewrite or rethink the way you would like students to complete your guidelines. Would you like students to focus on the final capstone, and pair classes respectively? Would you like students if possible, to graduate with the same group, creating solidarity and lifelong rapport? If you want department approvals or exceptions to be the vast majority, express that in your department major checklist.

I took the classes the way professors wanted the courses to be taken. This critique of the department was hard to write because the faculty members have given me so much. For other students it might be an entire year set back because of these choices, so it had to be written. Would you like your students to feel empowered walking across that stage? As I hope to walk across that stage and give a nod to those who helped me complete what took me nearly a decade, I hope I feel that empowerment, because right now I feel ditched and forgotten.