To: Lee Willard, Associate Dean, Trinity College of Arts and Sciences  
From: Susan Wynn, Chair, A&S Courses Committee  
Re: Annual report for the Courses Committee

The Arts & Sciences Courses Committee meets weekly for 1.5 hours during each semester. We thank Kate Walko for her efforts and patience in supporting our work through March, when she left Duke for another position. A new assistant, Becca Ibarra, began work on June 4. Susan Wynn was appointed chair in August, 2017.

Committee Members for the 2017-2018 academic year:

Susan Wynn (Education), Chair  
Jennifer Ahern-Dodson (Thompson Writing Program) (August-January)  
Clark Bray (Mathematics)  
Kip Frey (Sanford School of Public Policy)  
Keval Kaur Khalsa (Dance)  
Eliana Schonberg (Thompson Writing Program) (from January—present)  
Nina Sherwood (Biology)  
Stephen Vaisey (Sociology)  
Jesse Summers (Academic Dean), ex officio

No ECASC representative was appointed ex officio to the committee this year.

7/1/2017 - 6/1/2018
Add 283  
Change 365  
Special Topics 349 (including 49 first-year seminars)  
Drop* 47  
Total 1044 (997 reviewed by the Committee)  

*not reviewed by committee

Backlog and total workload—The year began with a significant backlog of courses and only three committee members remaining from the previous year, so we were delayed in our first meetings. We nevertheless processed all of the course requests submitted by the deadline before bookbagging began each semester. However, this required the committee to have quite intense meetings each week it met and, additionally, for the chair and Jesse Summers to meet for several hours one-on-one. Also, Jesse Summers spent extra hours soliciting feedback on additional course requests by email to make decisions when the committee was unavailable. Late submissions are a perpetual problem, and some are unavoidable. Even without late submissions, though, the committee would work better if it had more time in the schedule, and we will look for ways to improve its efficiency in the coming year.

Electronic agendas—The committee transitioned from a paper-based to an entirely electronic agenda for meetings and record keeping, which has two benefits. Eliminating paper agendas makes the committee’s work more efficient during meetings, and having a single electronic record reduces the
possibility that the committee’s decisions will be incorrectly recorded and implemented.

**Research codes**—The committee receives a number of requests for courses to receive an R code for collaborative research. This is especially true for courses affiliated with Bass Connections projects. The criteria for the R code are clear, however, that courses cannot receive an R code for research unless each student produces their own independent work. The committee notes that this might be a topic for Arts & Sciences and/or Curriculum Committee to consider.

**Modes of inquiry**—The committee spent a disproportionate amount of time on course requests by graduate students that were poorly formulated or that asked for far more than the committee judged to be reasonable. In response, Eliana Schonberg met with several instructors one-on-one to help them understand what a W-coded course requires. The committee has also set up plans to begin training with graduate students, led by Eliana Schonberg initially, on the topic of what a W code requires. The courses committee has also discussed providing a general training for graduate students for 2018-19 as a short-term solution. However, training and review of graduate students’ course requests should occur at the department or program level.

**Instructor Consent**—The committee formulated internal standards, vetted by the academic deans, to guide our evaluation of requests for instructor consent. The risks of allowing instructor consent for a course without a clear, defensible, neutral reason are significant and open the instructor and university to charges of bias. The committee therefore allows instructor consent only when enrollment in a course should be restricted to people in a particular group (e.g., Focus courses), but otherwise insists that courses should use prerequisites or should ask the Registrar to reserve a number of seats in the class (e.g., for majors, seniors, etc.). We have updated the course request website so that a person submitting a new course request will be aware that instructor consent is unlikely to be approved except in these narrowest of cases.

**Other website changes**—In addition to updating language on instructor consent, the course request website was updated so that the DUS would receive more information when a course request was processed. Previously, they were only informed that a change had happened but not what the change was, which led some instructors to believe erroneously that changes or codes had been approved when they had not. Instructors should therefore be less likely to inform their students erroneously that their courses have curriculum codes that were not approved.

**Registrar review**—We have changed the processing of course requests, beginning this summer, so that all requests are first reviewed by the Registrar for language consistency, course numbering, course number conflicts, and so on, and only then are the requests presented to the Courses Committee. This will allow administrative problems to be caught early and changed easily before the requests have spent weeks or months waiting for full review by the committee. The Registrar has also prepared a document to distribute to all DUSs by fall 2018 with clear summaries of course request procedures and guidelines.

**House courses**—Enrollment in House Courses is now limited to 18 students each, in keeping with their character as small, discussion-based courses. In conjunction with Joe Gonzalez in Housing and Residence Life, we will begin hosting House Courses in the common rooms of the residences of the student instructors, whenever possible, and will begin other efforts to tie House Courses more closely to residential life.

Respectfully submitted,