

Registrar concludes graduation check

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Editor-In-Chief

Several seniors planning to graduate in May will not according to a final graduation check concluded by the Registrar's Office. Knowledge of missing requirements mid-way in the second semester has left many students not only surprised but barred from walking on May 12.

Sue Todd, registrar of the College, has been working on the last of two official checks the Office administers and informing students of discrepancies in their records over the past few weeks.

Todd said that with close to 400 prospective May graduates, checking the records took longer and was more intense than for the previous December graduation.

"It's just the sheer numbers," she said about the May graduating class. "August is nothing. It's a song."

Other reasons for the slow-down in notifying students include having to wait until the drop/add period concluded to begin the check and having to calculate graduation requirements by hand.

The Office is not equipped with a computer system that can automatically analyse records or compute missing requirements. This means a student's file is completely in hardcopy form, comprised of anywhere from five to 10 pieces of paper that display distinct graduation requirements, according to Todd.

Therefore, Todd takes on each student's record with her own set of eyes.

Betsy Stewart, associate registrar, said that the

graduation check is a "very tedious...and cumbersome process" because the Registrar has only her eyes and the course catalogue to use as tools to flag missing requirements.

Stewart also said that the flux of students who drop classes also present a problem for the Office.

"The biggest problem we have is people who drop the courses without checking the graduation requirements," she said.

This makes it more difficult to finalize a student's record because her record may be on track for graduation when she registers in April, but if she drops the class without making sure she is not eliminating a required class, her record is suddenly off track.

"You know how it is in August when people are throwing drop/add slips left and right," said Stewart.

The Registrar's Office conducts two official requirement checks for seniors each year. The first is directed in the summer before the student begins her senior year. Each student receives a copy in the mail of the courses she has remaining before she can graduate. The second check is conducted after the drop/add period during the spring semester.

Senior Lynda-Marie Taurasi has been keeping up with her graduation requirements throughout the tenure of her college career.

However, a few weeks ago she walked into the Registrar's Office to randomly check her records and found out that she was missing a 3-hour social science.

The problem was that drop/add was over. However, the Registrar's Office worked with her, and she was able to add a class at North Carolina State University.

Taurasi said "Sue Todd really helped me. We had it settled within two days. Right now, I am expecting to graduate in May."

However, she contended that the process by which the Office does graduation checks presents a "huge opportunity for human error."

"There is more opportunity for miscommunication between the Registrar's Office and the student in question," she said.

Stewart said that beginning in April, the Registrar's Office will be operating from a new computer system that they hope will make handling students' records easier and more accurate.

The system, called Datatel, was first used in the College three years ago to organize the payroll. Now the system will branch to the Registrar's Office.

Among the features of the system are the capability to create waiting lists for classes and an automatic degree audit function that will allow the staff to immediately tell if a student has a missing requirement or needs a pre-requisite for a course.

"If you saunter in here and want to take Psych 300," said Stewart, "[the system] checks to see if you have all the pre-requisites."

The Datatel system will be ready to operate for pre-registration in April, according to Stewart.

"It makes me feel better that

the whole system will be upgraded," said Taurasi. "But...I'm glad I walked into that office that day."

Stewart also hopes that drop/add will be available for students online in the future. Eventually faculty will be able to pull up an advisee's records from an office computer and print out a copy for her.

If she wants to, said Todd, the student "can go in once a month to get it."

In the meantime, Todd emphasized that the Registrar's Office, the faculty adviser and the student should work together to double check graduation requirements. However, she said, the student is "ultimately responsible for her education."

"That's why we give catalog training to freshmen. That's why we have advisers," she said. "It's just getting there that is painful."

Todd said that there were many prospective May graduates who were surprised to find they had missing requirements.

Out of nearly 400 prospects, she said from one-third to a half of the class had some kind of discrepancy.

She said that their were multiple reasons for the large number: Some students had decided to graduate at a later time but had not informed the Registrar's Office, some had not acquired transcripts for courses taken at other universities, and some were missing hours.

Todd said that many of those students were able to add courses to meet requirements, but more than one senior will not walk in May.

"No one walks without receiving her diploma. It never happens," said Stewart. "When you go across that island, we are going to give you your diploma with your name on it."

In contrast, at some area universities, students can walk in the graduation ceremony because the institution only presents the student with a diploma cover.

Todd mentioned a story about a student from an area institution who will walk in her graduation ceremony but still has 10 hours left to complete toward her degree.

"What does that graduation mean?" said Todd. "What if she never receives the 10 hours?"

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