Encompass Spring 2010 Education Survey

Here is the expanded set of responses from the survey on Duke Curriculum that we conducted in March, 2010 among Duke undergraduates.

- Classes that students took that did not interest them, but seemed to guarantee an easy A:

  Psychology (Psych 11) 6 respondents
  Rocks for Jocks (EOS 11) 6 respondents
  Religion 3 respondents
  Chemistry (Chem 83) 2 respondents
  Cultural Anthropology 2 respondents

  Among others were Evolutionary Anthropology, Theater Studies, Women's Studies, Dance, History, Linguistics, Music, and Sociology

- From open-ended responses about Duke Curriculum (all the original spelling and punctuation preserved):

  1. I think that the QS requirement needs to be spread across more types of classes so for people who REALLY hate math, aren’t stuck taking a math class that is very difficult and not at all aligned with interests.

  2. Pratt needs to work in more electives. The curriculum focuses so much on pre-requisites in the first 2 years that its hard to be exposed to enough engineering classes to really decide if that’s what you want to do. I think there should be more emphasis on free electives than on requirements, or at least a little more freedom in what requirements people can take. Its too bad that people take classes they aren’t interested in just to boost their grades. But if they’re taking a heavy load anyways, its hard to blame them.

  3. some classes should integrate more current events into their material, and teach students how the subjects apply to TODAY.

  4. College is supposed to be a time for you to explore, take different classes, and learn what you are interested in. Because Duke students are so intelligent, there arises a huge disincentive to take courses outside of your comfort zone because your gpa just gets hammered, and if you have any intention of applying to grad schools or laws schools, this becomes an issue. I think a pass/fail grading system to a degree could be useful. I know this is partially in place but I do not think many people are familiar with it.

  5. there’s no reason to make some classes (like big weed out classes) so hard to get good grades in, we’re all good students

  6. There is no reason to have the Math 102 requirement for Econ majors. The core econ courses only use 1% of the material taught. The math requirement is to weed people out plain and simple and contributes nothing to the understanding of econ.
7. QS Requirements are terrible.

8. I like Duke's graduation and distribution requirements and I don't think they should be changed!!

9. I believe in a liberal arts-style education so I have no problem with math, science, or language requirements even if they are not my specialty. It would be hard to convince me that they should be pass/fail. People have access to the curriculum requirements before they choose to come to Duke and should be aware of what a degree entails before complaining about a hit to their GPA because of a stats course.

10. Although I have not taken any classes just to get an easy A, I do think it is common for many students to do. Because GPA is so important, many students would rather take an easy class than explore a more difficult subject that they are interested in.

11. THE NEUROSCIENCE MAJOR PRE/CO-REQUISITE REQUIREMENTS ARE RIDICULOUS! No other B.S. in any other science at Duke requires you to take advanced courses in EVERY OTHER SCIENCE (i.e. neuro requires math, bio, chem, AND physics before you can even get to the interesting neuro courses that you're here to study). In addition, the requirements are far beyond what the neuro departments at Emory and even HARVARD require. I know that there are a lot of other students out there like me who are passionate about neuroscience, but are discouraged by the bullshit they have to wade through to get to any actual neuroscience. By the time you finish the pre/co-recs, there is no time to fit in the neuroscience electives you were really getting at in the first place. Brilliant.

12. I understand the concept of a liberal arts curriculum, but it's frustrating having to take a course that is geared towards a math or science major.

13. It's a pain but I know why its there.

14. The Chemistry department and the Math department are absolutely ridiculous. Yes, there are some students who excel, but MANY students struggle. Relatively decent test scores are harshly curved; it is nearly impossible for those who aren't as "gifted" to achieve an A. A's shouldn't be nearly impossible to obtain - we're here to learn, not spend countless nights studying and getting almost no sleep just to do "fine."

15. Pass fail for all classes! Especially non major requirements! Students should be allowed more say in the grading system for some classes. For example, in math classes, homework should be an opt in grade - the tests are actually better reflections of your understanding anyways.

16. Writing 20 is a waste of time for those of us who actually earned our admittance. It's clear that there are certain groups that need help with their writing: many recruited athletes, some legacies, development admits, and, yes, I hate to say it, but minorities as well. I understand that some people are completely incompetent when it comes to writing a paper; I just resent the fact that I am forced to waste a semester so that other people's failings can be addressed.

17. I'm graduating in three years because my family cannot financially afford four years. People always defend the rigid requirements with "well, the requirements force us out of our comfort zones and help us learn things we wouldn't." I think that's ridiculous. We're paying for an education, and we're paying a LOT of money for it. I'd agree wholeheartedly about the whole renaissance man mentality if this was some cost-neutral fairy zone, yeah... but it isn't. The fact that we're paying gobs and gobs of money to take (often) extremely stressful classes we don't want to take at all, with no recourse for getting out of them as they simultaneously do significant harm to our GPAs and help us in no way get a job after graduation... it's just astonishing that we put up with this, and it's more astonishing that there's no particularly good way to fight back. I have yet to hear a particularly good defense of the system as-is
that actually engages the fact that we’re spending so much money just to stress ourselves out. I’d love to hear it, if there is one...

18. We need more opportunity and freedom to take courses with a pass/fail grading system. There are courses I would like to take at Duke just because I am interested in the material and would like to develop my knowledge on the subject, but there is less of an incentive to take it if I think it might negatively affect my GPA.

19. It is a silly concept to force a foreign language upon all Trinity students. Although some will undoubtedly love the language of their study, many will seek ways to get good grades without ever having to learn the language because it is not a subject in which they are truly passionate. It’s a waste of resources for the school and for the students who must forgo other classes to fulfill this requirement. Resources in the foreign language department should be allocated to students who actually have a goal in mind of learning the language they study. If other students wish to learn a language later in life or through a much cheaper means, they can take any number of programs outside of Duke which will certainly cost much less when we consider how much 3 course credits (the requirement for someone who is starting at an intro level and will probably not learn the language of their study) cost at Duke. I am not actually learning German through Duke’s foreign language program because I don’t have to learn it to get a good grade and I don’t have the least bit passion for the subject. It is a shame that I have to three classes in the subject area when there are so many areas that I would rather explore.

20. Math is so discouraging I feel like student learn less than they could in a more balanced setting.

21. Labs and recitations should be counted for credit ...

22. For Bio 122, I was in Bio 154 (a neuroscience course, which I am genuinely interested in), but on the first day the professor told us that it would be hard for freshman and probably one of the hardest courses we would ever take. Because I was already taking three other hard classes, I dropped the neuroscience course for a biology course I heard was easier.

23. We should have an open curriculum and completely do away with the Trinity requirements. If Duke is going to hike our tuition we should have some say in the type of education we receive.

24. I think that they should get rid of the 5 SSH classes that Pratt students have to take. Enough Pratt Students would take SSH classes, and it makes it easier to double major.

25. The foreign language requirement needs to be dropped. It’s a silly waste of money to have to spend up to 3 semesters of doing Italian/Spanish when I could be in classes that really engage me. Also, I think we’re smart enough at Duke to be able to choose the courses we want to take, and clearly for many of us that doesn’t involve a foreign language.

26. ALP is a mad hard T-Req to fulfill.

27. I don’t mind having to take science and math classes as a public policy major, but I wish there were more options available for non-majors and that we could take 1 of each instead of 2 of each. Also, the fact that ECON 51 does not count as a QS is ridiculous. In fact, the QS requirement in general is quite frustrating.

28. Remove QS requirement or improve the classes!

29. Just the fact that there are so many subjects with math requirements and the math department for the lower level classes is not good / curves to way too low a grade.
30. The graduation requirements are a bit extreme, ie I took a few classes freshman year that have nothing to do with what I'm studying!!

31. I feel like there's a bit of an excess of curriculum requirements (I'm speaking of Trinity). While some of them do indeed encourage people to get out of their comfort zones and explore subjects, some just put too much pressure on an already busy schedule.

32. Some classes here at Duke are just not intellectually stimulating at all. Sometimes it feels like high school all over again.

33. No one should have to take (and struggle in) classes that don't interest them. Being "well rounded" is an extremely outdated idea that the university shouldn't be forcing upon us.

34. I think students should be more aware of all the different choices they have when trying to fulfill graduation requirements. I feel like students' choices are sometimes very narrow or unoriginal, and there is little incentive to explore outside of your major/minor/certificate when fulfilling those requirements. Many students just want to take a class that will give them that easy A.

35. Duke shouldn't allow students who are familiar with a course's material to take the course. They mess up the curve and screw over other students who are learning the material for the first time.

36. I am not a maths and sciences person by Duke students' standards, so I would love to be able to take the natural sciences and quantitative studies courses pass/fail. Or not take them at all. Also, I would like an English major that focused more on writing and composition instead of reading through classics.

37. The foreign language department is poorly organized and the requirement of three semesters or one hundred level course encourages students to begin in the lowest level possible and ultimately discourages students from pursuing higher listed courses in the foreign language department. Additionally, what I enjoy about some of the "easy A" classes at Duke is that taking the class can become an opportunity to learn for the sake of learning rather than just for the grade. For example, Dynamic Oceans (EOS12) is a requirement for my major and I love the fact that I can attend class and engage in the material without having to stress about constant due dates or an upcoming test where the class average is below 50%. We're Duke students, we came here because of the academic reputation, and when we are paying top dollar for our education, it should mean more to us than a number on our transcript.

38. I don't think treqs are stupid. It is important to be exposed to a variety of topics and to be knowledgeable about things outside of our discipline or career path. It challenges us and makes us good students of life.

39. Irrelevant requirements - like Writing 20 in subjects that don't pertain to one's major or track - should be abolished!

40. More flexibility in the engineering curriculum- way too many requirements before you learn about your major classes.

41. PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE introduce a basic Econ course for non-majors who are simply just INTERESTED in the basics of economics but don't want to have to take Econ 51D b/c of its tendency to A. Kill GPA's and B. Induce unhealthy levels of stress. Yes, I know you can take it P/F, but that doesn't really help because it's still the same weedout class, and hence just as stressful and as upsetting, even if you are somehow able to scrape up a "P." I mean who would put themselves through all that just because they're interested in economics, if it's not going to affect their GPA or credits at ALL?? Both taking Econ 51D as a graded OR P/F course is just not the right path for people who just want a less stressful overview of the basics of economics for their futures, without necessarily majoring or minoring in the subject. Duke students
expect credit for the work they do, so even if it is a more relaxed course, it should still serve some sort of purpose in terms of a class credit...it just shouldn’t be able to count toward any minor or major (maybe just some general T-reqs). Let the non-economics minors/majors learn something we’re interested in without being absolutely murdered in the process!

42. It’s just tougher than I thought it would be.

43. I took Math 32L because it was required for my major. Then Duke changed the requirements for the major so my GPA suffered for no reason.

44. I don’t understand why I have to take a range of courses I have no interest in just to fulfill my requirements! What does literature have to do with math or vice-versa?

45. I was forced to take Physics 63 because I placed out of the Physics 61 and 62 with AP credit. Without the AP credit, I never would have been forced to take this course that ended up killing my GPA.