

A historical view of curricular changes to the Cornell University Biological Sciences major

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The course requirements for a bachelor's-level degree program are intended to create a "meta-curriculum" that together provide a certain core competency in the major discipline. In the field of biology, the fundamental building blocks of this core competency have been rapidly evolving, expanding, and diversifying over the past decades, leading to restructuring of departments and curricula. In 2010, Cornell University implemented revised requirements for the B.S. in Biological Sciences degree, which included replacing a two-semester required Introductory Biology course with a set of three introductory-level courses; students can enroll in *any two* of these courses. The revised meta-curriculum did not, however, make any changes to the Genetics lecture and laboratory courses, which are among the only mandatory courses in the department. Thus, the prior molecular biology knowledge of students enrolled in Genetics is more heterogeneous than it was before 2010. I am interested in understanding the impacts of this change on student learning outcomes. However, much of the most relevant "literature" on this question dwells solely in the recollections of long-term instructional faculty and staff, who comprise the institutional memory of the course. As a first step toward designing well-founded research on the student impacts of these changes, I have drawn on contemporaneous written records and conducted narrative interviews to construct a history of the redesign, its objectives, and its outcomes. This work will provide necessary context to the development of additional quantitative and qualitative instruments, e.g. those that gather data directly from students.