



Memorandum

**FACULTY OF
LIBERAL ARTS &
PROFESSIONAL
STUDIES**

**Committee on
Curriculum, Curricular
Policy & Standards**

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To: LA&PS Chairs and Directors

From: Professor Allan Weiss, Chair
Committee on Curriculum, Curricular Policy and Standards

Date: April 8, 2014

Subject: New Course Proposals

c.c. LA&PS Undergraduate Program Directors
LA&PS Administrative Assistants

As you are aware, the Committee on Curriculum, Curricular Policy and Standards of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies reviews the proposals submitted by units for new courses and programs, changes to courses and programs, and various other curricular innovations and modifications. For some time, members of the Committee have had concerns about how new course proposals are presented to the Committee. For future new course proposals, please consider the following. Failure to ensure your proposals are complete and clear may lead to their being rejected and returned to units for revision.

Course Numbering:

It is the unit's responsibility to assign numbers to proposed new courses. You may give the same number to versions of a course with different credit weights—for example, a 3-credit and 6-credit version of the same course—but you must be able to convince the Committee that the two versions are essentially the same course. Please submit separate proposals for the different versions, so that the Committee can evaluate whether the required readings and assignments are appropriate for the different weights. On the other hand, assign different numbers to similar courses where necessary; for example, if you have a 6-credit course covering a long historical period and two complementary 3-credit courses that each cover half of that period, give each of these three courses a different number. Either way, ensure that the Course Descriptions fully justify the distinctions between courses, explaining why versions of the same course have the same or different numbers.



Course descriptions:

In some proposals, we have found that the Brief and Expanded Course Descriptions are so different as to seem to be describing different courses. Generally speaking, you should use identical wording in both the Brief and Expanded versions: use the Brief Description as the first paragraph of the Expanded Description, and then in the latter elaborate on points made in the former.

Also, the style in the Descriptions should be formal; the Descriptions should address course content and not (through pronouns like “you”) the student. The writing should also be correct--spelling and grammatical errors detract from the effectiveness of the proposal and waste time as committee members endeavour to decipher what the proposers meant. Please review your Course Descriptions, and indeed the proposals as a whole, for proper writing.

Readings:

Course proposals will be judged on the appropriateness of the number and types of required readings and other assignments (films to be viewed, etc.). Please keep in mind what is a reasonable amount of reading to assign in 3- and 6-credit courses, remembering that the first class is introductory and the last will be held when students are working on assignments and have little time for further reading of course material. The committee has noted a progressive expansion of “Suggested Readings” lists; some have gone on for many pages. The committee only needs to see a list of possible outside readings students might be encouraged to do, not a complete bibliography of the field. Given that students will be busy doing their required readings, those proposing new courses should keep in mind that students will not have much time to go beyond them. Lists of suggested readings should not be so long as to discourage students from taking courses.

Put required and suggested readings in the appropriate boxes; do not combine them in one.

Course Design and Rationale:

When offering a course rationale, be specific and direct. Vague rationales that do not address questions of unit and Faculty needs tell the Committee nothing about whether the course is worthwhile or not. For example, in one proposal we saw the following offered as a course rationale:

“This course allows us to continue to develop our curriculum around content based themes in the program and around the strengths of our faculty research specializations.”

Tell the Committee directly and clearly how the new course contributes to your unit’s overall curricular plan, specifying what the students will gain from taking the course and what they could not gain by taking courses already offered. Explain why the course is designed as it is, outlining why the material is being covered at a particular year level or point in the course. How will tutorials be used? What skills are to be taught, and in what format? The more detailed and well thought-out the proposal when it comes to such pedagogical considerations, the better able will we be to evaluate and respond to the proposal and see its merits.

Evaluation:

By regulation, students may not be required to attend classes nor be graded on their attendance. Thus, in your proposals DO NOT include attendance in your evaluation, even in participation grades, although you may of course refer to attendance in your course syllabi. Also, do not be too specific about assignments (such as what the essay topics will be), or what the lecturer/tutorial leader will discuss. In other words, do not constrain future instructors too severely—you cannot do so, anyway. While the current instructor proposing the course may have strong ideas about what will and should be done in it, readings and assignments change over time—even when the course is taught by the same person. Neither a unit nor the Committee would ever hold an instructor too strictly to what is in the course proposal; the proposed evaluation is considered a guideline only. Nevertheless, too much description sounds like prescription. Be reasonable when it comes to grading schemes; give assignments appropriate weight in the overall scheme depending on how much work they require. For example, if you assign weekly journal entries, remember how time-consuming these are and give them a high value.

Type of Course:

Special topics courses are fine; they can act as empty shells for visiting professors and other special circumstances. Avoid “Selected Topics” courses, however, as these can lead to a proliferation of course numbers and courses taught only once. Please check the regulations governing these types of courses.

Consultation:

For the purposes of identifying course credit exclusions and in the interests of collegiality, units proposing courses that may overlap with those in other units are required to consult with those units to determine whether similar courses are already being offered elsewhere. If there already exists a course similar to the one being proposed, the units should determine whether it is appropriate to treat them as course credit exclusions, or perhaps to cross-list them. It should be noted, however, that consultation does not give other units the right to veto new course proposals. Frequently, proposals are presented to the Committee without those consultations being completed. We recognize that responses from other units are not always forthcoming in a timely manner, and in such cases we will be understanding. However, in general we insist that all consultations be completed before you submit the proposal, and that you provide evidence of those consultations. Thus, please fill out the relevant documents and provide email trails showing the consultation. If it is clear that the unit proposing a course has not done enough to consult with other units, or that forms are not completed demonstrating that the consultation has been done, we will return the proposal immediately for completion.

Following the Committee’s guidelines and requirements as outlined above will facilitate and expedite the proposal process, relieving much of the burden borne by staff and members of the Committee. Complete, articulate, and fully justified proposals will ensure speedy feedback and, one hopes, approval.

Thank you.