

Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Guidelines for Evaluating New Course Proposals

Approved by the University Senate on October 2, 2018

A. General Principles on Cross-Disciplinarity and Course Overlap

- Principle 1: Interdisciplinarity is valuable. The interdisciplinary nature of scholarship often results in a degree of overlap between courses. Different approaches to the same topic or subject matter expose students to multiple paths to knowledge and understanding.
- Principle 2: Overlap is not replication. Overlap in course subject matter should not be conflated with replication. The distinction between courses with some degree of overlap should be evident in the course learning outcomes, activities, and assessments.
- Principle 3: No exclusive ownership of areas of knowledge. No department or school has exclusive ownership of any particular topics, themes, disciplines, approaches, methods, or areas of knowledge. Each department or school represents a concentration of expertise rather than an exclusive purview with respect to courses. A department or school proposing a course with content that extends significantly beyond its faculty's general concentration of expertise should demonstrate sufficient expertise to offer that course.
- Principle 4: Curriculum decisions should be based on intellectual and educational rationales. Decisions by review committees about new course proposals should be based strictly on intellectual and educational reasons in the context of a coherent curriculum and not on enrollment or budgetary concerns.
- Principle 5: The GE curriculum is the purview of the entire faculty. The General Education Curriculum is not the purview of any particular department or school. SDSU encourages collegiality and cooperation between and across departments and schools in the continued development of the GE curriculum in service to student learning. Cross-disciplinary conversation and collaboration in the development of new courses can yield innovative approaches in education and should be incentivized.

B. Guidelines for Dealing with Course Proposals Perceived to

Overlap with Existing Courses

1. In proposing a new course, originators should list the courses in the university curriculum that in their judgment might raise reasonable concerns of substantial overlap or replication by review committees. Originators should be responsible for reviewing the course catalog to identify potentially overlapping courses. In order to avoid undue delays in the review process, originators are advised to err on the side of caution and to follow the steps outlined in B.2. below with regard to generating that list of courses.

2. A department or school proposing a new course has the responsibility to initiate a conversation with the departments or schools offering courses with which the new course may overlap. The goal of these conversations is to ensure that the courses complement one another and do not substantially replicate one another (see principle 2). Such conversations should be evidence-based, specifically through comparison of syllabi with focus on their course learning outcomes, activities, and assessments. While the burden of initiating the conversation between academic programs falls on the department or school proposing the new course, both parties should seek a mutually agreeable resolution with reference to the principles in section A. Originators are encouraged to obtain a letter of support for the new course from the other department or school, though a letter of objection may also be submitted. In the event that attempts to contact the other department or school yield no response, course originators are advised to include evidence of a good faith effort to initiate a conversation.

3. In evaluating a new course proposal, review committees should focus on whether a proposed course substantially overlaps with or replicates an existing one. Review committees will need to use their discretion in making this determination. Principle 2 offers concise criteria for evaluation.

The goal should be to prevent the possibility of a student obtaining credit for two separate courses with similar learning outcomes, activities, and assessments. When a review committee has a reasonable concern regarding course distinctiveness, and that concern has not been addressed by the new course originator, the committee should require the originator to follow the steps outlined in B.2. above. Where there is no reasonable concern about significant overlap or replication, review committees may consider overlap between courses as healthy interdisciplinarity and not request the steps in B.2.

4. Review committees should evaluate the complete proposal before making a decision. In doing so, they should focus on intellectual and educational rationales for the new course. An objection from a department or school should not be treated as a veto, a statement of support should not be regarded as ensuring approval, and a lack of any response from a department or school should not be construed as an objection.

Evaluation of Course Proposals

The following guidelines are used by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to evaluate course proposals:

Course Prerequisites and Description

- Does the course title accurately and concisely reflect the course description?
- Is the course description clear?
- Are the number of units appropriate to the course content and mode of instruction?
- Do the required prerequisites logically relate to the proposed course? What purpose do they serve?
- Does it duplicate any existing course(s) presently in the catalog?

Course Justification

- Does the course warrant academic credit?
- Does the need for the course seem sufficient given resources required?
- Do the course objectives address the stated need for the course?
- Do the course objectives reflect the level of the course, as indicated by the proposed course number?
- Do the suggested texts validate the proposed level of the course? Relate to the course content?
- Does the course content articulate with the mission of the university?

Facilities / Resources

- Are unusual resources required? Are they available?
- Did the Dean indicate that additional resources will be needed to offer the course? Does this seem realistic?
- Does the staffing formula seem appropriate?
- Is the mode of instruction congruent with the course objectives (i.e., lectures, activity, laboratory)?

Course Outline

- Does the course outline articulate with the course objectives?
- Does the course outline articulate with the course description?

Grading

- The grading weight, class activities, etc., must indicate a degree of rigor appropriate to the course level.
- The decision to include attendance and/or participation as part of the grading criteria for a class is the prerogative of the instructor. When included, this policy must be explicitly stated in the syllabus and provided to the students during the first week of classes.
- It is the position of the committee that class attendance is not by itself a sufficient condition for determining course grades. Any percentage of the course grade awarded for class attendance and participation should be consistent with the methods used to achieve the specific course learning objectives.

Film Courses

The policy of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee in reviewing film courses is as follows:

1. If the viewing of films within the course is less than 40 percent of the total class time, the course will be classified under the lecture mode of instruction.
2. If the viewing of films within the course is more than 40 percent of the total class time, the course will be classified under the lecture/activity mode of instruction.