Faculty Council on Academic Standards Policy on Oversight of Courses

In order to make the process of course approval transparent, this set of guidelines and principles was created by the Faculty Council on Academic Standards (FCAS) in consultation with the Office of the University Registrar. The aim is to document current practice, place that practice within the existing faculty governance structure, and provide a pathway toward course approval upon which University units (which includes departments, programs, and any other group of faculty that offers courses for University credit) can depend.

The University of Washington Curriculum Committee (UWCC) is a semi-independent committee composed of individuals whose primary missions are to represent the Seattle, Tacoma and Bothell faculties; the Graduate School; Undergraduate Affairs; FCAS, and the Office of the University Registrar. In terms of faculty governance, UWCC reports to FCAS, as FCAS is charged with “...inter-institutional academic standards.” In terms of administrative oversight, it is housed within the Office of the Provost. It is (semi-) independent in that most of the business of UWCC can be conducted without consultation with either the Provost’s office or FCAS. These matters include routine approvals for course creations and changes. It is only semi-independent in that the FCAS members of UWCC (with support from the Office of the University Registrar) will provide a monthly summary to FCAS for notification purposes and will bring any courses about which questions arise to FCAS for review. This semi-independence allows the committee to maintain its largely administrative function, but also clearly to establish faculty governance over curricular matters. As with all issues of concern to academic standards, FCAS will consult other councils, committees, offices and units on an as needed basis.

Guiding principles:

1. Curricular content—what is included in a course and how that course is taught—is best established by the unit that “owns” the course (i.e., “owns” the prefix, course number, and title). Ownership here refers to the unit that originally proposed the course and can usually be established by the prefix, e.g., ANTH belongs to the Department of Anthropology and ENGL belongs to the Department of English (but see below for more information). The Faculty in a unit are the subject matter experts and are best able to assess the appropriateness of the materials and methods associated with the course, especially given that pedagogy and content need to be aligned with trends particular to disciplines.

2. Just as departmental Faculty members are knowledgeable about course content and pedagogical concerns, so too are the Registrars subject matter experts on curriculum management (e.g. registration, transcripts, etc.). While a Faculty member’s relationship with a course often ends when the course grade is submitted, the Office of the University Registrar maintains records indefinitely. The office interacts with students, some of whom are currently enrolled while others were enrolled decades ago. Transcripts are the record of a student’s University work and
are often read and assessed by agencies with no affiliation to the University of Washington, such as potential employers or graduate schools. Frequently, course prefixes, numbers and titles are the only information available to these outside entities when attempting to establish the educational attainment of our students, because the instructor of record is not available or no longer can provide a relevant syllabus. Consequently, course prefixes, numbers and titles are critical curriculum management elements and the Registrar’s perspective is, of necessity, long-term—with an emphasis on stability and clarity. While faculty may have insight into transcript elements, it must be recognized that transcript/student record elements are not inherently pedagogical and thus the Registrar's long-term perspective is of great benefit and is not an attempt to influence pedagogical content.

3. In the past, disciplinary boundaries were more easily defined, but more recent trends have focused on the value of inter/transdisciplinarity in approaching academic content. While offering much insight into the academic content and delivery side of the University, such intersection can cause questions of ownership to arise among units on the curriculum management side. For instance, does the Department of Statistics “own” all introductory course(s) in statistical analysis?

**Ownership:** the unit that initially proposes a course and obtains approval owns the course. Ownership implies rights to change all aspects of it, including credit hours, course description, and delivery methods, via the course change process. Owners can also eliminate courses. With the rights of ownership come the responsibility of notifying units that depend on the course for such things as prerequisites and requirements of admission to, and graduation from, the major. In some cases, these dependent units may be obvious, while in other cases, the course might be so broadly utilized that a general announcement to the University is appropriate. The Office of the University Registrar can be of help in determining which other units should be contacted.

4. Beyond ownership of courses, other issues have arisen more recently among the campuses that can be sorted into two basic issues: equivalency and overlap.
   a. **Equivalency:** University of Washington courses are deemed “equivalent” when the content is sufficiently alike that one course can substitute for another in all instances (e.g., as prerequisites, as transfer articulated courses, or as major/degree requirements). Equivalency is established at the discretion of the units that own the courses. A unit is not required to accept an equivalency proposal from another unit. If one course is changed, equivalency is broken, although it can be restored if all affected units agree. Equivalency needs to be established in the curriculum management system, but is encoded into the Degree Audit (DARS) and, therefore, equivalent courses automatically count as prerequisites and admission or graduation requirements throughout the University. Units that use, but do not own, courses cannot refuse to accept the judgment of equivalency made by the courses’ owners. Equivalency is not applicable to courses offered by units on the same campus; in these cases, joint-listing is appropriate.
b. **Overlap**: courses that share some content, but are not sufficiently alike to be equivalent, can have overlap. Like equivalency, overlap is determined by the units that own the courses. Courses with overlap are established so that students do not receive “double-credit” for the same content. Overlap acknowledges that courses can be substantially similar without being equivalent.

While FCAS and the Office of the University Registrar can facilitate conversations among affected units regarding equivalency or overlap, the decision rests with units. In the situation where units cannot agree on equivalency or overlap, the courses are deemed to be different (not equivalent and with no overlap) and coded appropriately. These different courses, then, do not automatically count as prerequisites or for admission or graduation requirements. Even if courses are deemed non-equivalent by the units which own them, other units can establish courses as satisfying their own prerequisites and requirements.

5. Courses offered by different units on the UWS campus should not overlap in content to the extent that the units determine that students should not get credit for both courses, with acknowledgement that the extent of the overlap is often not fixed for courses, but rather variable and specific to each offering of the courses. If multiple UWS units want to collaborate to offer courses that use interdisciplinary methods or examples, joint-listing is appropriate. Generally, UWS units should not offer the same content under a different course number and name, but rather should seek joint status.

6. Courses are approved for units to offer, not for individual faculty to teach. Thus, a UWS unit proposing a new course should provide to the UW Curriculum Committee a complete new course application including detailed analysis of a) how the new course fits into the pedagogical mission of the unit, b) how the new course is similar to, and different from, other courses within the unit and across the Seattle campus, and c) how the unit has interacted with other potentially affected units with regard to course development. Signatures from the chairs/directors of all affected units and, when affected units are in different Colleges or Schools, the appropriate deans are required and indicate concurrence of all affected units. The Office of the University Registrar, because it is experienced in managing the curriculum of the University, can be an invaluable source of advice about potential other units with similar curricular interests. The responsibility for contact and negotiation rests, however, with the initiating unit. When there is substantial course content overlap, or use of words/phrases that might imply content ownership by a different unit, the proposing unit is required to share course development ideas with the potentially impacted unit and to seek agreement from the potentially affected unit and Dean's office about the new course. Submission of course creation paperwork without evidence of collaboration with other affected units in the form of signatures will be returned to the initiating unit.
7. In cases where an agreement among affected units cannot be made, the UW Curriculum Committee will refer the application to FCAS, which will make a binding ruling. FCAS looks unfavorably on units which do not fully participate in pedagogical discussions centered on student learning. Defending historical turf or perceived ownership of words is not adequate reason to deny creation of new courses, nor should a unit propose creation of a course for non-pedagogical reasons.

8. In order to facilitate communication among units regarding courses, the Office of the University Registrar will maintain a database of courses that are currently in the approval pipeline. The initiating unit will enter the course into the database after approval by the unit and other units will be able to review the proposed courses. If a unit encounters a newly proposed course with which they believe an existing course overlaps substantially, then the overlapped unit should contact the initiating unit. If conflict over ownership and/or overlap cannot be worked out among affected units, as a last resort, FCAS, in consultation with the Office of the Provost, will make a binding decision.

9. In addition to the elements of approval described above, the University has established basic standards for courses for which the UWCC checks as part of its review. These are generally University level requirements and so are germane to all units on all campuses. These include:
   
a. **Required credits** (also called General Education requirements): Established by the University in the Student Regulations (Chapter 114.2.B), the requirement to earn credits in these courses is applicable to all UW students seeking baccalaureate degrees. Consequently, maintaining accurate designations is a critical function of the Registrar’s office.

b. **Course numbering**: Because course numbers may be the only indication of the level of academic content of a course long after it is taught and because some units have admission and graduation requirements that specify the number of credits students may or must have at certain levels, consistency across the University is necessary. In other words, a 100-level course (1xx) indicates introductory material described in the course title, while a 400-level designation with the same title indicates advanced undergraduate content. What content is characterized by “introductory” or “advanced” is often discipline specific, but general consistency across the university is important.

c. **Learning goals and learning assessments**: University policy requires learning goals and learning assessments to be clear, appropriate to the course level, and provided to students who are registered for the course.

d. **Attendance/participation**: Unless required for accreditation purposes, University policy does not allow attendance to count toward or against the final grade. Participation may count in the calculation of the course grade,
but if faculty intend for it to contribute >15% of the total course grade, the method of assessing participation needs to be clearly delineated.

e. **Interaction:** Although how instructors interact with students and students with other students may vary substantively among disciplines, interaction among students and between instructors and students is an essential component of course design. Originally raised in the context of distance learning, the issue of assuring that the framework for appropriate interactions exists has become a relevant University requirement for all courses.

10. The questions and wording on the forms used for course creation and change are managed by UWCC in consultation with FCAS, FCTL, and the Office of the University Registrar. Changes to those forms must be approved by FCAS.

*Approved by the Faculty Council on Academic Standards on March 20, 2015*