

SENATE COMMITTEE ON CURRICULAR AFFAIRS

Uniformity of Course Abbreviations within Disciplines

(Legislative)

[Implementation: Upon Approval by the President]

Introduction

The purpose of this legislation is to provide a process for achieving a unified system of course abbreviations following the 1997 reorganization of the University.

Discussion and Rationale

In a draft report (2/25/1997) on curricular issues, the Steering Committee for Transition in the CES enunciated the principle that

“[a]s far as possible, a common naming and numbering system will be used throughout the University.”

This tenet had been laid out as one of five overarching principles guiding the transition in an earlier memo (10/11/1996) from John Brighton to the Steering Committee:

“Every effort should be made for curricular consistency among the campuses. The first two years of the baccalaureate programs should be compatible to allow easy flow among campuses during this period. Upper division courses should also be consistent with some allowances for course differences in special areas where local needs and opportunities call for distinction. The principles apply to Penn State Erie and Penn State Harrisburg as well. ... A common university course numbering system will be followed.”

Though the Steering Committee acknowledged that

“[w]here unique names and numbers are in the best interests of a quality program, these names or numbers will be retained,”

the expectation was that this would only occur in exceptional cases. The uniformity of the University curriculum in terms of courses is crucial if Penn State is to “retain its character as one university” (Brighton, 10/11/1996). In the *Guide to Curricular Procedures*, the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs (SCCA) notes that

“All faculty members, regardless of their location or academic home, will be considered a part of the University faculty in their discipline. In the context of the curriculum this implies that the discipline faculty in the different colleges

are expected to work together collegially in the development of new and revised academic programs and courses.”

Thus, courses are not to be viewed as owned by departments or colleges, but by the University with oversight provided by the entire faculty in the discipline. At present, the mechanism for that oversight rests upon the consultative processes required by the University Faculty Senate as well as the college Deans through their responsibility for hiring faculty and assigning them to the courses delivered at their locations. It should be noted that a unified system of course abbreviations need not, and is not intended to, lead to uniformity at the programmatic level. Programs do not find their unique identity by way of course abbreviations but through the selection of courses required for their degrees and the faculty who deliver those courses.

The SCCA has been encouraging new course proposals to avoid location-specific course abbreviations while simultaneously trying to remove such designations where they already exist, primarily at the Behrend and Capital Colleges. Delays have occurred as issues of “ownership” are discussed through the process of consultation. In order to clarify the issues involved and to provide further impetus to the process of bringing some order and coherence to the University’s course offerings, the SCCA makes the recommendation below.

Recommendation

The SCCA will develop and maintain a list of accepted course abbreviations corresponding to disciplines (for example, “MATH” for any Mathematics course). Any new or existing course will be assigned one of these abbreviations. If the numerical sequence corresponding to a given abbreviation is exhausted, a new abbreviation will be created by SCCA in consultation with the faculty in the affected discipline. Otherwise, proposals for courses with abbreviations other than those on the SCCA list must have supporting documentation accompanying the course proposal.

Principles of Implementation

1. The SCCA in consultation with special disciplinary subcommittees (see #2) will determine the appropriate course abbreviation.
2. To reconcile existing courses, special faculty subcommittees of SCCA will be formed that will have appropriate disciplinary and location representation to reconcile existing courses. These special committees will be charged with identifying courses that are identical but offered with different abbreviations, or are similar enough for a common reconciliation to be achieved. These courses would then be given an accepted abbreviation, as would unique courses which have no counterparts.

For example, a committee of faculty members in Psychology from the Behrend College, the Capital College and the College of the Liberal Arts might find that PSYCH 486 (Abnormal Psychology, Behrend), PSYC 486 (Abnormal Psychology, Capital) and PSY 412 (Abnormal Psychology, Liberal Arts) are similar enough to be replaced with a single designation such as PSY 486. This same committee might find no course comparable to PSYCH 220 (Cross-Cultural Psychology, Behrend) offered at any other location and so designate it with the appropriate new abbreviation (and change the number if necessary).

3. The SCCA will develop a timetable and an expedited process for implementing this legislation.

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