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***PLACEMENT OF  
COURSES WITHIN  
DISCIPLINES***

*The Academic Senate*

*for*

*California Community Colleges*

## **Placement of Courses within Disciplines**

### **Preface:**

This paper discusses a topic which is multifaceted and is at once practical and concrete as well as philosophical and controversial.

It is hoped that this paper will help local senates who have not yet undertaken the process of assigning courses to disciplines or who are updating or revising. The paper discusses why the need exists and outlines a process to help local senates get started. The process described in the paper relies on faculty's professional integrity to do an assessment of discipline preparation and course content.

What this paper does not do, is cover all the possible problems which might arise during the assignment process. Ultimately to solve these problems, local senates may need to serve as judges hearing testimony and rendering a final decision respecting the basic principles under which the disciplines list was established.

### **Introduction**

Prior to July 1, 1990, credentials determined which subject matter areas community college faculty could teach. Upon passage of the Community College Reform Act (AB 1725), credentials were no longer issued and new hiring was to be based upon a set of minimum qualifications for a given discipline. The disciplines and related disciplines were proposed by the Academic Senate and set forth in the discipline's list adopted by Board of Governors. The language in the legislation referred to "any courses" taught instead of "subject matter areas" of credentials which was linked to TOPS codes. Therefore a determination must be made as to the discipline preparation appropriate and adequate for each individual course.

### **The Problem**

During the recent review of the disciplines list, it became apparent that many colleges have not completed this task or do not understand its purpose. Faculty hired under the credential system are allowed to teach any course within the subject matter area of the credential. It is not clear which courses a faculty member may teach when hired with discipline minimum qualifications until courses have been assigned to disciplines. There are two questions faculty must ask and be prepared to answer.

1. When someone is hired with the minimum qualifications for one discipline (e.g., history), what courses may he/she teach if the college has not assigned courses to disciplines?
2. When a course is to be offered, what discipline specific preparation is appropriate to teach that course?

This paper attempts to provide a local senate guidance in designing a process at the local campus to address these questions.

In most cases, the courses on a campus will be placed in a single discipline. For example, most of the history courses offered at an institution will be listed under the discipline of history. However, consider a course in the Economic History of the United States. Should it be listed under the discipline of history or economics? Or is it possible that both economics and history are suitable preparation? In which case, would it be appropriate to list the course under both the disciplines of history and economics? By doing this dual listing, the institution states that it is possible for individuals who meet the minimum qualifications of history or economics to have the expertise necessary to teach this course. For the purpose of this paper, this process is called multiple-listing and does not mean that the course must be listed as History 101 and Economics 101. (Listing a single course offered for either history or economics credit is appropriate referred to as double coding.) Multiple-listing addresses the issue of what academic background is the minimum qualification to teach the course.

Another option is to list the course as interdisciplinary<sup>1</sup>, assuring that the instructor would at least have some preparation in both history and economics.

### **The Principle**

The guiding principle for this task must be based on course content and personnel issues. It is necessary for faculty to separate themselves from their personal biases and assess each course based on the subject matter being taught and giving consideration to emerging disciplines. Faculty are reminded that, according to law, no matter a course is placed, individuals holding valid credentials that would have allowed them to teach the course pre-AB 1725 are still qualified to do so.

It is important to understand that not all programs or department titles are disciplines. The decision to place a course in a specific discipline is based on the body of knowledge necessary to instruct the course. When the subject matter as stated by the official course outline is common to more than one discipline, it is appropriate for the course to be listed in all appropriate disciplines. If, however, a broader knowledge base is necessary, the course should be listed as interdisciplinary and the disciplines involved listed.

### **The Process**

As provided for in the Title 5 regulations, Section 53200, Strengthening of Academic Senates, the process of placing courses within disciplines must be done by faculty through the academic senate. How multi-college districts should proceed depends on whether each college has a separately accredited curriculum or whether the district has a district course numbering system. If each college has a separate curriculum, it would proceed as a single campus district. If, however, a district has a

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<sup>1</sup>Minimum qualifications for interdisciplinary are a masters in the interdisciplinary subject or a masters in one of the disciplines included in the interdisciplinary area and upper division or graduate coursework in each of the other disciplines.

district curriculum committee, the process would vary slightly. What happens if the faculty at different district colleges disagree regarding on the listing of a course to a discipline? If a district senate exists, that senate may want to adjudicate the disagreement and make the final decision. If, however, there is no district senate, the local senates may wish to convene a special committee with representatives from all colleges to discuss the issue and make a recommendation to the local senates.

The local senate has the responsibility to establish processes that include involvement of faculty with the knowledge necessary to evaluate course outlines for content and to assign each course to the appropriate discipline(s). Since evaluating a course outline is the responsibility of the curriculum committee when reviewing new and existing courses, it is possible that the curriculum committee, under the auspices of the academic senate, would be the most suitable group to make these decisions. No matter who is involved in the process or who directs the process, there exists an obligation to seek out the expertise of the discipline faculty when assigning courses to disciplines.

It is also necessary to list the college's noncredit courses within disciplines. Since there are no specific noncredit disciplines, it is recommended that faculty use the areas allowed for apportionment as "disciplines" in noncredit as referred to in Title 5, Section 84711.

How would an academic senate go about placing courses within the appropriate disciplines? This placement will require consideration of the organizational structure of the instruction area. Are the faculty set up in departments or division or in some other way? Besides a college-wide /district curriculum committee, does the institution have smaller division curriculum committees? The hardest part of the process is deciding how best to proceed and how best to design a process that provides for maximum faculty input. The following steps are designed to provide some guidelines the senate or the committee designated by the senate might wish to consider:

**Step 1:** Obtain a complete list of the institution's current course offerings. If information systems is able to design a printout for the process, it might look like this:

Course	Discipline	Multiple-listing	Interdisciplinary? (list disciplines)
Math R			
Math PA			
Math A			
Math B			
Math 1			

**Step 2:** Form appropriate committees for the initial assignment of courses into disciplines. For example, if the college has divisional curriculum committees, give them the courses in their purview to assign. If not, the senate or designated committee may want to form several broad-based groups such as: fine arts, math and science, behavioral and social science, humanities, and vocational. Faculty would be recruited in those areas to convene and do an initial placement of courses within the disciplines of their area(s).

The chair of the process should remember to review with the committees the

difference between multiple-listing and interdisciplinary. When a course is multiple-listed in two or more disciplines, the faculty are saying that the minimum qualifications for any of the disciplines listed would be sufficient, i.e., listing Economic History of the U.S. in both the disciplines of history and economics. However, if the faculty feel the instructor should have some preparation in more than one discipline, the course should be listed in the interdisciplinary category instead of individual disciplines. By listing the economic history course as interdisciplinary, an instructor would need course work in both economics and history.

**Step 3:** Circulate the initial placement of courses to all faculty in the respective groups and to the college curriculum committee for comment. Based on the comments and concerns received, the committees should finalize the list to present to the academic senate and the Board of Trustees for final approval.

**Step 4:** The final approved list should be made available to department/division offices, personnel, and instruction offices.

**Step 5:** The senate should design processes for assigning new courses to disciplines in the curriculum proposal process and for a periodic review of course assignments that corresponds with the discipline review process.

The members of the committees assigning courses to disciplines need to be aware of the minimum qualifications of the disciplines they are assigning. They must be aware that not all department/division titles are disciplines. Some institutions, for example, offer courses in human development, human services and American studies. A review of the discipline's list does not yield these titles, so where would they be assigned? The reviewers must examine the course content and decide of the available disciplines which one (ones) is (are) appropriate including interdisciplinary. For example, some of the human services and human development courses might be appropriately placed in counseling, psychology, or sociology. In contrast, courses in American studies might be more appropriately designated as interdisciplinary where the faculty member teaching the course will need a broader knowledge base to teach the course effectively.

## **Conclusion**

As previously mentioned, it would be impossible to address every contingency that might arise when your senate begins the process. There is no question each senate will have to make some hard decisions. Establishment of a philosophy to maintain academic integrity of each discipline will assist senates in the decision-making process. However, it is important that your process include a method to handle differences of opinion before they arise so that all parties concerned will know what to expect and how the problem will be resolved.