

TO: University of Oregon Senate
FROM: Ian F. McNeely (History), Undergraduate Council Chair
RE: Undergraduate Council end-of-year report
DATE: June 21, 2012

Program review

Reviewing proposals to add or change majors, minors, certificates, and other programs serving undergraduates is the bread and butter of the Undergraduate Council's work. We work directly with faculty who submit proposals and help them to implement our suggestions for revision in ways that respect their disciplinary expertise and at the same time uphold university-wide standards to ensure quality.

This year we reviewed and approved the following programs, making recommendations for changes in some cases:

- Human Physiology major
- Comic and Cartoon Studies minor
- South Asian Studies minor
- Chinese Flagship Certificate Program
- School of Journalism and Communication honors program

The proposal for the South Asian Studies minor was used to test a new form developed by Karen Sprague (Undergraduate Studies) and Ruth Keele (Academic Affairs) aimed at streamlining the approval process for new minors. A few kinks still need to be worked out, but in the main, the new form made for a more substantive and collegial review, with less bureaucratic hoop-jumping, than had previously been the case. In the future, the Undergraduate Council may wish to fine-tune the process, and the form, further.

Improving the process for approving new courses

This year, responding to widespread faculty disgruntlement with the course approval process, the Undergraduate Council opened a discussion on the issue. The Council does not wish to encroach upon the Committee on Courses (UOCC) or interfere with its mandate to maintain quality control and oversight of the curriculum. But complaints about the course approval process are so widespread that it falls within the Undergraduate Council's purview to ask whether our system adequately serves the needs of our faculty and students for innovative quality instruction.

Below are the chief problems that have come to my attention as UGC chair. Some can be addressed simply by better communication; others raise deeper policy questions.

- Proposals for new courses often take too long to be approved and, in the past at least, were sometimes sent back for revisions months after being submitted. Communication between committees and proposing faculty is frequently perceived to be poor, the standards of evaluation are not widely understood, and some feel that the process as a whole can be arbitrary and capricious.
- Some faculty feel that the curriculum committees micro-manage new course proposals, raising inappropriate and meddlesome questions about course content and failing to defer to the disciplinary expertise of proposing faculty. To cite one egregious example among several that have come to my attention: an anthropology professor who listed Orwell's *Burmese Days* on her proposed syllabus for a class on colonialism was reportedly told that this book "belongs" to English literature and could not be included as a required reading in her course. The professor in question could not remember whether this directive came from the UOCC or the CASCC—a confusion which is itself symptomatic of a wider lack of understanding about the process.
- Some faculty do not understand why a new course proposal must go through three—sometimes even four—separate substantive review committees before entering the catalog: those at the departmental, college, and university levels, plus the dimly-understood ICGER (Inter-College General Education Review) Committee for review of group-satisfying Gen Ed status.* (Oddly, multicultural Gen Ed status is reviewed by the UOCC and not ICGER.) There is much duplication of effort and confusion of competencies among these various levels. Nor have the various committees made clear guidelines about their division of labor, i.e. about which substantive curricular decisions, if any, can be devolved downward and which must be monitored at the university level.
- Many faculty do not know which course changes (e.g. to a description or title) can be made through simple administrative action and which trigger a full-scale review of the course. Some avoid making routine changes for fear of being subjected to a lengthy and frustrating process, and perhaps even made to re-justify a longstanding and fully functioning course anew.
- Some faculty who wish to modify the content of an existing course choose simply to ignore its official catalog description, knowing that any course already on the books is not subject to oversight by the curriculum committees. The advent of extended course descriptions for Gen Ed courses, which can be changed at will by faculty members, makes it possible to maintain a semblance of truth in advertising for the benefit of students and the general public. But as a result of widespread noncompliance, there are large numbers of courses in the UO Catalog that are not being taught in their officially advertised form.

* ICGER was established by Senate legislation on Mar. 14, 2001 (as [US 00/01-03](#)) but seems to be neither a Senate nor an administrative committee. It is impossible to tell from the Senate archives who chairs the committee or how it views the policymaking charge given it by section 3.2 of the Senate legislation.

- Another way that faculty boycott the process is to offer experimental courses (199s, 399s, 410s, etc.) rather than seeking regular names and numbers for their course offerings. Instructors can circumvent the university policy against indefinitely repeating the same experimental course by modifying the title and/or content—which of course can be a *positive* thing when it keeps a course fresh, innovative, and on the cutting edge of its discipline. There are any number of reasons why overreliance on experimental course offerings is a bad thing: these courses may not count for Gen Ed credit (except on a temporary basis); students and undergraduate programs cannot count on their being regularly offered; and pedagogically deficient courses may slip through the cracks in being exempted from the normal course review process. UO faculty should by all means retain the ability to offer experimental courses—as this flexibility is crucial to maintaining an innovative curriculum responsive to new ideas and pedagogies—but the hurdles to regularizing course offerings should be lowered sufficiently that faculty have a greater incentive to participate in, rather than boycott, the course review process.
- Renumbering courses can often become a Kafkaesque nightmare, driven more by the constraints of the Registrar’s software and database design, and by OUS-level guidelines with which UO may (or may not) be required to comply, than by the needs of faculty who wish, for example, to group together related courses by sequencing them together in the catalog. This spring, the UOCC chair circulated to the Undergraduate Council a nine-page essay entitled “Why People Are Willing to Throw Themselves on a Grenade to Protect Course Numbers,” which was very amusing—and gave important insight into the complexities of the issue—but may not placate faculty members who feel, understandably, that the need for rationality, transparency, and flexibility in the numbering of courses should trump whatever technical constraints the Registrar faces in managing the course numbering database. (The essay appears as Appendix 1 to this report.)
- An undergraduate member of the Council brought to our attention a syllabus for a course she was taking that plainly did not meet the standards of rigor and good pedagogy that should prevail at the university. Since this course is already in the catalog, it was not subjected to any kind of oversight when it was assigned to a new instructor by its host department. This raises a critical question with no easy answer: how should the university maintain quality control in courses that are already on the books and not subject to regular curricular review in any systematic way? I encourage the Undergraduate Council to take up this question and to suggest remedies that respect the disciplinary expertise of faculty members and resist imposing intrusive, top-down solutions.

Happily, two developments have recently occurred that make this an opportune time to improve the curricular review process university-wide:

- the CAS Curriculum Committee has recently developed a “course prospectus” designed to elicit exactly the information that it needs in order to screen new

course proposals within the College. Previously, CASCC members had to hunt around on syllabi to find answers to their questions, and proposing faculty did not know what information was wanted or how their syllabi would be scrutinized to find it. The course prospectus solves these problems. CASCC in fact intends to use it in place of syllabi—but the UOCC is reluctant to recognize this, and will likely still require syllabi instead of (and perhaps in addition to) course prospectuses. Faculty members who already balk at the effort required to put forth a successful course proposal—which entails submitting syllabi, student engagement inventories, justifications of Gen Ed status, explanations of the 4xx/5xx differential, etc.—may become even more frustrated when asked to fill out a prospectus for one committee (CASCC) *and* submit the more conventional materials for a second (UOCC).

- the Provost’s Office is considering the purchase of a curriculum software package that will automate the process of course review. A working group composed of UOCC, CASCC, and UGC members, plus representatives from Academic Affairs and various IT offices, formed in Spring term to evaluate the software. If adopted, the package will dramatically streamline workflow, improve transparency, and facilitate communication and coordination among faculty, administrators, and curriculum committees. While it is critical to remember that software alone is not a panacea—since there are still policy issues to be worked out, including the ones mentioned above—the process of tailoring the software for implementation at UO can be made into an occasion for revisiting policy questions that have dogged the process for years.

“H” designations on the transcript for honors courses

Acting at the request of the UOCC chair, the Council reviewed and approved a list of criteria that must be met for any UO course to bear an “H” appended to the course number on the transcript to indicate honors-level instruction. These criteria were then formally incorporated into the Winter Curriculum Report and approved by the UO Senate.

Soon thereafter, the Director of the College Scholars program in CAS asked the Undergraduate Council to help that program streamline the process for adding “Hs” to small, rigorous General Education courses offered exclusively to College Scholars students. The needs of this program are different from those of most departments seeking the Honors designation, typically for a small number of long-running courses. Since the array of College Scholars Gen Ed courses changes from year to year, a system that requires considerably less time than the current year-long process is needed. College Scholars therefore petitioned the UOCC to consider allowing the College Scholars Advisory Board, under the supervision of CASCC, to oversee compliance with the new “H” criteria for the Gen Ed courses it offers. (The Clark Honors College follows a roughly similar model for the honors-level topics courses that its students take in place of regular UO Gen Ed coursework.)

Since the UGC chair also serves on the College Scholars Board, and co-authored the UOCC petition, he recused himself from the Council's first discussion of the issue. At a subsequent meeting to follow up, the College Scholars Director, together with a College Scholars student, attended the Council to present the rationale behind the petition, which is to enable College Scholars students to gain some recognition on the transcript of honors-level courses they take through the program.

At that meeting, on May 24, 2012, the Undergraduate Council approved the following motion:

“The Undergraduate Council endorses special designations on student transcripts for General Education courses offered as part of the College Scholars program. The College Scholars Advisory Board should develop a process for the determination of such designations with oversight by the CAS Curriculum Committee.

“Such courses will not be required to undergo review for the appropriateness of their content for group-satisfying or multicultural status—since that review will already have been done.

“The Council encourages the sharing of best practices on special transcript designation between College Scholars and the Clark Honors College, but the awarding of such designation to specific courses does not require the explicit approval of the latter.”

However, further discussion on how to implement this recommendation generated much confusion, consternation, and, at times, acrimony, particularly over the issue of course numbering, which threatens to render impossible, or at least unfeasible, any attempt to implement the new “H” policy in practice for College Scholars courses. As a result, the the Council returned once again to the issue at its last meeting of the year. Before making another attempt to solve the problem, the Council thought it wise to identify all of the constraints that affect the awarding of “H” designations for honors courses, distinguishing the *technical* constraints faced by the Registrar from the *policy* constraints imposed by the UOCC.

A document enumerating those constraints is appended to this report as Appendix 2. It should not be taken as an *endorsement* by the Undergraduate Council but simply as a draft summary, possibly still incomplete or inaccurate, of current practices guiding the UOCC and the Registrar in the adding of “Hs” to student transcripts.

Syllabus archive

On May 24, 2011, the Undergraduate Council approved the following motion:

The Undergraduate Council recommends that the university develop a syllabus archive (at least for General Education courses) to help students, faculty, and community members learn of UO course offerings.

Grade culture

Relatively few departments have complied with University Senate motion US 10-11/11a, which requires them to formulate nonbinding grading standards for their undergraduate offerings and to post those standards online. Next year the Council may wish to work with the Office of Academic Affairs to promote better compliance with this motion and/or reassess its approach toward the problems of grade inflation and improving the UO grade culture.

The sale of course notes online

The Council had a productive discussion of the problem of undergraduates either offering their lecture notes free of charge to large numbers of fellow students—or offering them for sale, sometimes by mass emails on the Blackboard program. Use of Blackboard for commercial purposes is clearly prohibited by university policy, but otherwise the guidelines on the appropriateness of students sharing, or marketing, their notes are unclear. The Council felt that rather than formulating a university-wide policy, it should encourage individual instructors to handle this issue as they see fit, possibly making it a “teaching moment” in large lecture classes.

The minutes of the March 16, 2012 meeting provide a useful summary of this discussion.

Appendices

1. “An Important Safety Tip, or Why People Are Willing to Throw Themselves on a Grenade to Protect Course Numbers” (Paul Engelking, UOCC chair)
2. “Policy and Procedure for Honors Designation” (Karen Sprague, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies)

APPENDIX 1

An Important Safety Tip or Why People Are Willing to Throw Themselves on a Grenade to Protect Course Numbers.

Dr. Egon Spengler: There's something very important I forgot to tell you.

Dr. Peter Venkman: What?

Dr. Egon Spengler: Don't cross the streams.

Dr. Peter Venkman: Why?

Dr. Egon Spengler: It would be bad.

Dr. Peter Venkman: I'm fuzzy on the whole good/bad thing. What do you mean, "bad"?

Dr. Egon Spengler: Try to imagine all life as you know it stopping instantaneously and every molecule in your body exploding at the speed of light.

Dr. Ray Stantz: Total protonic reversal.

Dr. Peter Venkman: Right. That's bad. Okay. All right. Important safety tip. Thanks, Egon.

—*Ghostbusters, 1984*

Students at the UO register for more than 100,000 classes each term. More than 25,000 student records are active at any one time. An archive of records of all former students and courses has to be maintained. The UO requires a systematic way to track, access, search, sort, and evaluate all of these records. Information in this database also has to be communicated to and from various machine and human users, both on and off campus.

The short answer as to why futzing with course numbers is so discouraged is that course numbers are used as *data keys*. A variety of people, and machines, need to interpret them in the same, standard way. For this reason, unique design standards for data keys—in this case, course numbers—are promulgated, which allows them to be understood in common by all users.

OUS has promulgated a standard, seven-character course numbering system. Much of the institutions in Oregon, including the UO, and actually implement an eight-character course number: the first seven characters that conform to the OUS standard are padded out by a last, eighth character that is intended to serve a variety of purposes locally at each individual institution. It would seem that each institution could use the extra, eighth character for any purpose it wishes. That turns out to be not the case.

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,—A. Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*.

Key Database Principles

Much effort has gone into the theory and practice of handling large databases since the University of Cambridge issued the first degree in Computer Science in the 1953. Twenty years later, one whole volume of Donald Knuth's *The Art of Computer Programming*, was devoted to the principles behind just *finding* and *organizing* records [*Volume 3, Sorting and Searching*, first edition, 1973]. While refinements of search and sort algorithms have appeared in the last 30 years, a principle concept—a *data key*—remains.

APPENDIX 1

A data key interfaces an object “out there” to its representation as a data record “inside” the data bank. The relationship is like this:

object ↔ data key ↔ data record.

Names often serve as “data keys” for us. We are used to non-unique keys in natural languages: “Bill” can also be “William,” and any person can know any number of “Williams.” While useful, non-unique keys require going beyond just the key, using the context of the object and the contents of the record to match them. People are good at interpreting context; computers are terrible. As are other people not used to each local social customs.

Ideally, physical objects, data keys, and data records are related one-to-one-to-one. Each key pulls up a single data record, and each data record can be found by knowing its unique key. The correct key gives you the correct record that goes with the external object it refers to. Unique keys are things like social security numbers, student identification numbers, ISBN numbers, and, we would hope, course numbers.

The collection of linked records is termed a referential database. As experience with large databases has accumulated, maintaining database *integrity* has been shown to rely on several principles regarding data keys.

A database that has unique, principle data keys for all records is said to possess *entity integrity*.

Data tables have to exchange information with other, “foreign,” data tables. This requires use of “foreign keys” to search for records. Foreign keys should also be unique, if possible. Otherwise, data transfer is not one-to-one. This would necessitate further human or machine processing to resolve search ambiguities.

As data is added or removed from data tables, links are formed and broken. It is important that all data keys actually point to actual records! (Everyone is now familiar with the 404 “page not found” error message for broken web links.) A database that maintains links and prevents breaking them is said to have *referential integrity*.

A third principle of data base integrity is *domain integrity*. Each data field should contain only values that are well defined. Otherwise logical operations may not resolve, or may produce incorrect results. This is especially important for data keys. For example, expected values for a data field called “sex” may be “F,” “M,” or “U” (unknown). A sort performed on records based upon gender would not know how to correctly treat an individual record encountered with a value of “1” in this data field.

One last principle of databases comes into play: ideally there should be only one active copy of any data record. Or at least all copies of a data record should automatically update with any changes made to the master record.

APPENDIX 1

“Due diligence should be applied when deciding on the immutability of primary key values during database and application design.” –*An SQL Manual*

OUS Course Numbers

In 1987, House Bill 2913 directed the Oregon University System and Community Colleges to jointly develop, to the extent possible, a common course numbering system for lower-division transfer courses. As part of this process, OUS systematized a general format for all course numbering.

The OUS course number format consists of seven characters in two fields: four letters (or trailing blanks) in a subject code field, and three digits in a course numeric field: e.g.,

ABCD 123
ABC_ 123

These seven characters should uniquely identify a course.

The course naming system is more flexible. In addition to the course title, it allows a letter after the last digit after the title: e.g.,

“ABCD 123H Honors Data Structures”
“ABCD 123X Experimental Data Structures”
“ABCD 123U Data Structures in Cuneiform Writings”

The trailing eighth character after the digits is not formally part of the OUS course number format. Individual schools *may* use a trailing letter to indicate a special place or purpose of the course in their curriculum.

Different schools may use different letters in this position to mean different things. OSU and UO use a trailing H for honors; PSU doesn't. An X designation is used at OSU in place of our generic “410” number for experimental courses. PSU uses a U designation to indicate a course is part of one of their upper division clusters. UO recently instituted an M for multilisted courses. Commonality of letter usage, and understanding of letter usage, at different institutions is not assured.

As an example of usage, consider
“The following list of computer courses has meet the approval of the OCCC. Course numbers ending with the 'x' suffix means that a college may attach their own letter(s) to signify the application or language being taught.”
--OCCC. [http://209.237.84.181:7600/index.php/OCCC_Course_List]

Or, consider when PSU renumbered three math courses, MATH 105, MATH 245 and MATH 111, which are often in a transfer student's portfolio, as MATH 111A, MATH 111B and MATH 111C, it caused enough difficulty that the matter was brought

APPENDIX 1

to the attention of JBAC. [http://www.ous.edu/sites/default/files/state_board/jbac/files/2-8-00.htm]

The only portion of these extended, eight-character course numbers that is defined in common for all OUS institutions consists of the first seven characters.

Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.
—*Ecclesiastes* 11:2 (KJV)

Course Numbers at the UO

Now examine the practice.

Because an added trailing letter does signify something about a course, it should be recorded and passed along with a course number. And, sometimes it has been used to signify substantial differences in courses. For example, PSU's brief, ill considered, use of MATH 111A, MATH 111B and MATH 111C for different courses now necessitates *all* institutions to distinguish between a MATH 111A, which is not equivalent to MATH 111, and a MATH 111C, which is. So course numbers, including any trailing letter, must be recorded faithfully.

The UO adopted the BANNER data interface to manage data maintained within an ORACLE database. BANNER, as shipped, allows up to four characters in a subject code data field and five characters in a course numeric field.¹ When combined, these two fields form a primary data key uniquely identifying each course.

As implemented, UO uses *eight* of these nine possible characters: four alphanumerics (or blank) appear in the subject code field, and *three numerals and one trailing letter (or blank)* determine the course numeric field: e.g.

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ABCD 1234  
ABCD 123_  
ABC_ 123H
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The optional trailing suffix letter (H, X, U, M, ...) that institutions may append to the OUS course number is "shoehorned" into the BANNER system by placing that letter in the course numeric field. BANNER allows this because it was written broadly enough to allow use of any *alphanumeric* character in the course *numeric* field.

Locating the optional, trailing letter in this position has some advantages. The trailing letter always prints as part of the course number on the transcript. It can never be separated from the course number and lost. Older courses did not have to be renumbered: legacy courses with trailing letters could be entered into the database with their old numbers. Most importantly, it allowed recognition of any differences between courses signified by any trailing letters.

Locating the eighth character in the data key itself has consequences that come with these advantages: it is always an active part of the data key.

APPENDIX 1

This eighth alphanumeric character (which could be any of 26 letters or a blank) can now name $26 + 1 = 27$ times as many possible independent “courses” as just a seven-character data key could. The majority of this larger address space consists of ghost addresses for records that would not be expected within the OUS course number specifications.

This is dangerous. On this campus and elsewhere, humans and machines perform various data functions. They may use BANNER data, but may or may not recognize the last, eighth character as part of the course name data key, or may use it improperly, since it is not specified as part of the OUS course number standard.

With an eight-character course number we can create “courses” and course names that can’t be recognized or properly understood by all possible users!

A mere trifle consoles us, for a mere trifle distresses us. –B. Pascal, *Pensées*.

A Binding Contract

Our predecessors solved our problem by a work rule:

Course numbers may not differ solely in just the last letter (or blank).

For example, if ABCD123 is a seven-character course number, we are free to assign any letter, or blank, to make an eight-character course number, say ABCD123H, for a unique, eight-character key. But now, according to the work rule, we should not create any other course name beginning with ABCD123 (not even ABCD123_, with a trailing blank instead a letter).

Our work rule allows us to uniquely associate only one eight-character key in BANNER with any individual seven-character key.

Now we may use either the seven-character data key, or the eight-character data key, as appropriate.

To reiterate: for this work rule to work, we may not use two, eight-character course names that only differ in the last, eighth, position.

Dr. Ray Stantz: I think we'd better split up.

Dr. Egon Spengler: Good idea.

Dr. Peter Venkman: Yeah... we can do more damage that way.

—*Ghostbusters, 1984*

$1 \neq 1 + 1$.

We may have tried an alternative workaround: why not just disregard any trailing eighth character entirely as part of the course key? Why not just allow two eight-

APPENDIX 1

character codes, say ABCD123_ and ABCD123H, to always represent the same course, ABCD123, inside the system?

While consistent with the OUS course numbering, a significant reworking of our data system and extensive modifications of the course records themselves would be required to disregard the trailing eighth character as part of the course number. And, as we have seen, sometimes we need to recognize a difference. But let's push on and see how this could be implemented.

BANNER considers each eight-character course number as a data key, uniquely representing a course. All eight characters are an active part of the course number. If we create the course numbers ABCD123_ and ABCD123H, we need to build a course record for each, and includes both courses in the course inventory. Although we may think of them as one and the same course, a database always thinks of them as two *different* courses.

So, following the logic to its conclusion, why not just make two *identical* course records? One for ABCD123_ . One for ABCD123H.

Now no longer would one, single, record exist for what we may consider as the same course. This has two major implications.

1. Modifications made to one record do not naturally propagate to its copy under the other number.
2. All logical references to one course number must now be modified to include the other course number, too.

The last is particularly dangerous, since all prerequisites and degree requirements are programmed by hand with logic functions. Everywhere “ABC123” is found, “(ABC123_ .OR. ABC123H)” must be programmed into the logic for prereqs, degree audits, transfer equivalencies, etc.

In this situation it is easy for the information in the system to become inconsistent. We are losing referential integrity. This is very hard to debug, since ball instances that don't correspond to what was *intended* have to be found. ²

These difficulties are aggravated by courses that would receive a letter suffix for just one term. This can't be handled by just opening a section of an existing course. A different course number requires a new course record to be built and cataloged, along with all the links and logic that refer to it. And all of this would also have to be maintained well into the future.

This problem is not terribly serious for courses that are used solely for obscure senior courses used only for a single program or major, and not university requirements. Students who use these are likely to graduate, and not require significant tracking in the data system.

APPENDIX 1

The problem is most serious with courses for freshmen who may take them to satisfy general education requirements, or may use them for transfer credits. Any departure from good database standards requires significant and intensive human intervention. *Any department, or faculty member, involved in such a course may be (will be) required to ascertain the suitability of that course to satisfy standards well into the future, until all students who may be using that course for university, departmental, or transfer standards graduate (or give up).*

We do have a workaround for courses that may differ from term to term: topics courses and generic courses.

Topics courses, and some generic courses, currently provide the ability to run temporary courses, or run courses under different names, without having to do a full course build.

Topics courses may be run different names each term. Topics courses may have multiple sections, each with different titles during any term. This is possible because the course titles are not part of the primary data key, the course number. The [topic] field in the title is generally sufficient to convey specific and unique information about each section of a course.

Topics courses, having been reviewed, may serve for majors, minors and certificate requirements.

The second workaround involves using a generic course number, such as a x99 or a 410 for a temporary course. The UO is unique among OUS institutions in having a generic 410 number that can be used to launch an experimental course without going through the curricular review process. Again, a unique course title may be tailored for the appearance of individual course sections in the course schedule.

*Michael: A deer has to be taken with one shot. I try to tell people that but they don't listen.
—The Deer Hunter, 1978*

Following the Blood Trail of the Wounded Course

It may be imagined that since a course may have just had a short existence for one term and departing the next, any problems would be just temporary problems. But when a course is dropped from the curriculum, it doesn't just die. Its actual demise may be as long as a dozen years later, and even then its legacy lives on.

Anytime a new course is created, its record, and all links to it, must be preserved. Timelines for record keeping vary for different requirements, but course records are kept on with "inactive" status for years after being dropped from the curriculum before they are finally "archived." Among other reasons, this allows students to satisfy their degree requirements in the future with courses that they took, but have been subsequently dropped. Courses that have been administratively dropped for inactivity can be resurrected anytime within six years of having last been taught. Typically, a course is not

APPENDIX 1

finally put to rest and “archived” in the data bank until ten years pass from the last time it was taught. Retired course numbers may not be reused for at least seven years.

Not only do students use current courses satisfy requirements, they may also use former courses. If a course is changed, it must be decided for what purposes are the old course and the new course equivalent, and for what purposes are they not? The registrar’s office tries to handle all these special combinations. This situation is made difficult by courses that “wink” in and out of existence.

While not part of a course’s primary key, in BANNER only three dates are assigned to each course to track its history in the curriculum: an adoption date, an activation date, and a deactivation date. This system has difficulty tracking courses that disappear and reappear in the curriculum. The workaround for this problem is to not reuse numbers of courses that have been retired, or at least not within the time period in which students may depend upon the older course to fulfill requirements.

I have made this letter longer than usual, only because I have not had the time to make it shorter.

-- B. Pascal

Summary

While we may view courses as primary objects, and course numbers are just attributes of those objects, in data space, the opposite is true. Course numbers are the defining, primary data keys of course records, and the course records are attributed to these primary data keys, the course numbers. As primary data keys, course numbers are not easily changed, nor are the rules for forming them completely arbitrary.

Footnotes:

¹ The data fields and data types in BANNER are

SUBJ_CODE	VARCHAR2 (4)
CRSE_NUMB	VARCHAR2 (5)

² Courses at the UO may be “multilisted” under two different subject codes. Users must assure the consistency of data records themselves; the data system does not check multilisted course data records for consistency. To warn of the danger that multiple course data records exist for the same course under different course numbers, a trailing “M” is appended to the end of the course number. (BANNER users may use the SSADETL form to find all courses multilisted with a given course.) No other trailing letter is allowed when an “M” is present.

References:

http://www.ous.edu/sites/default/files/dept/ir/scarf/pre_2004_05_data_dictionary/Sect4Table1.pdf

Banner Technical Student Technical Training Workbook
Release 8.0 - April 2008
Updated 4/30/2008

APPENDIX 1

Oracle Database Concepts

10g Release 1 (10.1)

Part Number B10743-01

http://docs.oracle.com/cd/B13789_01/server.101/b10743/toc.htm

APPENDIX 2

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR HONORS DESIGNATION (Karen Sprague, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies)

I'm following up on the discussion at the last Undergraduate Council meeting, and the email exchange that followed it, on the best way to allow appropriate College Scholars courses to be offered as Honors courses. I think it's important to respond to the request from the College Scholars leadership (Marjorie Taylor and Ian McNeely) with a solution that's workable for them, and that also establishes a practical procedure for the campus, generally. As this year's Undergraduate Council discussions have revealed, the current procedure isn't widely understood and it is complicated by the interplay between policy requirements and technical limitations imposed by the BANNER system. I think we all agree that greater clarity is needed, and to move in that direction, I'd like to make two contributions: 1. Review the Council's thoughts on the Honors designation for College Scholars courses, and 2. List the current constraints on giving such a designation, as I understand them. I confess that I don't have a good grasp of either the policy or the technical constraints that exist, despite Paul's vigorous efforts to explain them. My purpose in making this summary is to prompt clarifying corrections that will lead to a document we all understand.

1. **UGC thoughts on the Honors designation for College Scholars courses.** This topic was discussed substantively at two Council meetings: April 26 (neither Ian nor Marjorie was present) and May 24 (both were present).

April 26 Meeting: Based on the minutes, as well as the recording, of the April 26 meeting, I would say that the Council believes that College Scholars courses meet the Honors criteria of rigor and individualized pedagogy. Although not unanimous, there was strong support for allowing considerable autonomy in conferring the Honors designation. Specifically, the Council favored a procedure that would allow faculty on the College Scholars Advisory Board to review and confer the designation on individual courses, with oversight by the CAS Curriculum Committee. What was not clear was what the designation itself should be – *e.g.* an H added to the existing number of the parent non-honors course, an H added to a generic course number (*e.g.* CAS 101H), an experimental number without an H, but with the word “honors” included in the title. These possibilities were introduced near the end of the April 26 Council meeting, but were not considered in detail and I think it's fair to say that few people at the meeting understood their pros and cons. That's certainly true of me. Moreover, there was no suggestion of recommending a particular one to the College Scholars leadership. Instead, the Council asked to continue this discussion directly with Marjorie Taylor and Ian McNeely. Specifically, before suggesting an approach, the Council wanted to understand how stable the array of College Scholars Honors courses is likely to be. Will the same faculty teach in the program for multiple years, or will turnover be frequent – even annual?

APPENDIX 2

May 24 Meeting: This meeting was the follow-up with Ian and Marjorie, directly, that the Council had requested. The Council re-iterated its conviction that College Scholars courses are Honors-worthy in principle, but did not reach consensus on the extent of review that would be needed to confer Honors on an individual course, or on the nature of the designation itself.

2. Constraints on conferring the Honors designation

a. Constraints based on policy

1.) Creating a new Honors course

- Requires review as a new course by: school/college curriculum committee and UOCC.
- If the course is to count toward General Education group-satisfying requirements, it must also be reviewed by the ICGER (Inter-College General Education Review) committee.
- Multicultural status is reviewed by UOCC, not ICGER, just as is already the case with regular university courses.
- Does one of these review steps focus specifically on Honors worthiness? That is, is there an Honors review function that's analogous to the specialized review performed by ICGER for General Education courses?

2.) Creating an Honors version of an existing course

- Requires review as if it were an entirely new course. Thus, must be reviewed by school/college curriculum committee and UOCC, at minimum.
- Must also be reviewed by ICGER, if it is a General Education course – even if its General Education content is not being changed.
- In this comprehensive review, where is suitability for Honors considered?

3.) General: The UOCC believes that certification of Honors-worthiness through the review process should be translated into action at the actual point of delivery by training of instructors (perhaps even “co-instruction”), providing support, monitoring the courses, and maintaining their honors level quality. Since these practices are not mentioned in the newly-adopted list of requirements for adding “Hs” to course numbers, it is unclear whether the UOCC intends them to be binding as a matter of policy.

APPENDIX 2

- 4.) Asked whether it would be appropriate to have some honors classes designated with an “H” appended to the course number on the transcript, and others designated with the letters “HON” in the course title, the Registrar was inclined to defer to the judgment of the relevant committees.

b. Constraints based on BANNER limitations

- 1.) An H (or any letter) cannot be added to an existing course number to create two courses (honors and non-honors versions of the original course) that can be distinguished by the degree audit system. That’s because the degree audit system doesn’t see the H. While there are exceptions to this rule in the catalog – e.g. BA 352 and BA 352H – it would present severe technical implementation problems if allowed to become general practice. Similarly, experimental course numbers (199, 399) cannot have H added to them.
- 2.) Experimental course numbers (199, 399) cannot be used for courses that count toward General Education requirements or that serve as pre-requisites. [Not sure why, but maybe it’s because these courses can’t be distinguished from one another, except by their titles, and the degree audit system can’t check titles.]
 - There is an exception that allows courses with experimental numbers to be taught once for General Education credit, while permanent numbers are sought.
- 3.) Topics courses provide a way to offer a series of related courses under the same number, without re-review at each change of topic.
 - Can topics courses count toward General Education requirements?
 - Can topics courses serve as pre-requisites?
 - Can topics courses carry the H designation? *e.g.* CAS 101H “Reacting to the Past”