

Interdepartmental Courses Approval Process

Implementation Plan - Actions Points

In January 2008 Senate made recommendations to the Provost of a revised undergraduate interdepartmental (INTD) course approval process, recategorization of some existing INTD courses as University (UNIV) courses, and creation of a new University Interdisciplinary Courses Committee. This report summarizes an implementation plan approved by the Provost to implement the recommendations in Fall 2008.

1. Interdisciplinary Initiatives in Undergraduate Courses

The importance of interdisciplinary study to undergraduates is expressed in the University of Connecticut's Academic Plan. "Traditional disciplines, particularly in the arts and sciences, play a key role in [the prospects for success of our undergraduates]. They provide students with the foundational knowledge and basic skills needed for success in graduate and professional school and *for the interdisciplinary collaborations that are often key to addressing complex social issues*" (emphasis added, Academic Plan, 9/3/08, p. 7). Consistent with the practices of top public universities (especially Michigan and North Carolina), the University of Connecticut will offer its undergraduates excellent courses in traditional disciplines *and* with interdisciplinary approaches. The combination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses builds the intellectual habits of mind to sustain UConn graduates in long, successful careers in which integration of knowledge, skills, creativity, and flexibility is essential.

Part of the Provost's role is to encourage faculty and programs to make effective innovations in undergraduate teaching both within and across the academic disciplines. Some interdisciplinary initiatives of faculty will fall entirely within the scope of their department's courses; others will be appropriate for cross-listing (e.g. when two departments agree that the particular course fits equally comfortably within *both* departments' disciplinary course offerings). The interdepartmental (INTD) designation is another option for interdisciplinary initiatives and may be adopted when at least two departments share "ownership" of a course, for example, through team teaching or rotational instruction across disciplinary departmental boundaries.

By "interdisciplinary" we adapt the definition used in the Academic Plan and mean, broadly, that the subject matter or pedagogic method of the course reflects "the many strategies and methods used in scholarship, research, and creative work that entail crossing the boundaries of disciplines to address problems whose study and solutions transcend any single discipline (including interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary strategies and methods)" (Academic Plan, 9/3/08, p. 3, fn.).

2. University-wide Undergraduate Programs

The INTD course designation is currently home for courses associated with a wide range of programs designed for University of Connecticut undergraduates, whatever their major and school or college affiliation. Such significant undergraduate programs include the University of Connecticut Honors Program, First Year Experience, and Senior Year Experience. Some other programs have important constituent courses among INTD offerings: Study Abroad,

Urban Semester, the Individualized Major Program, the Diversity minor, and Linkage through Language. Programs such as these, and the courses associated with them, are valuable structures in which students integrate academic and co-curricular experiences, and reflect in active-learning settings on the links between theory and practice.

The University of Connecticut Academic Plan places importance on the forms of learning cultivated in such courses as these. “[The Academic Plan] emphasizes a holistic vision of education that promotes civic involvement and cultural competence in a diverse and global environment...” (Academic Plan, 9/3/08, p. 4). “[W]e seek to prepare today’s students for the world of tomorrow by cultivating in them an appreciation for the differences among us; developing their leadership skills as well as their basic skills; encouraging habits of collaboration, teamwork, and problem-solving; and creating more opportunities for them to work closely with each other and with our faculty in small classes, on challenging research and creative pursuits, and in real world situations across the state” (Academic Plan, 9/3/08, pp. 7-8).

3. University Senate Recommendation

In January 2008 Senate approved a recommendation (originating in Senate Scholastic Standards Committee) to the Provost for revisions to the process for reviewing and approving INTD courses. Key parts of the recommendation were:

- Recognition of two types of current INTD courses
- Creation of a new University review committee to replace the INTD Curricula & Courses Committee
- Redefining the University review committee’s role in the INTD course approval process

On March 20th, the proposals were discussed at an Associate Deans’ Council to which C&CC Chairs were invited. This document summarizes decisions taken by the Vice Provost – the Provost’s designee in this matter – about how to proceed with the implementation of Senate’s recommendation.

4. Distinguishing UNIV Courses from INTD Courses

Under Senate Guidelines “[t]he Interdepartmental designation is used for courses that are truly interdisciplinary or interdepartmental; courses under the sponsorship or scope of a single department are given the departmental designation (e.g., History 195).”^{*} Thus, INTD courses are meant to be interdisciplinary and sponsored by more than one department. In other respects, however, INTD courses are meant to be courses originating in and subject to the normal practices of academic departments and their schools and colleges.

Whatever the original intentions concerning INTD courses, INTD courses as they exist today are a mix of interdisciplinary courses taught by faculty and courses associated with undergraduate programs not based in schools or colleges (e.g. the First Year Program or the university-wide Honors Program). Senate recommended the re-categorization of INTD courses into two subject headings: interdepartmental (INTD) courses and University (UNIV) courses. This recommendation is accepted by the Provost.

^{*} Senate “Guidelines for Submitting Course Proposals (Nov. 1995, updated 2002)” (<http://www.senate.uconn.edu/GUIDE1.html> as retrieved on Jul 15, 2007).

Distinctions between INTD, UNIV, and other possible categories of courses will be made with guidance from the following defining questions and circumstances.

INTD: The primary basis of INTD course recognition will look to course “ownership”: does “ownership” reside in two or more programs or departments based in one or more school or college? Is there at least one academic department that:

- * makes a commitment to arrange and oversee course teaching by faculty or others with suitable qualifications;
- * makes a commitment to review and oversee the course syllabus and catalog formalities; and
- * makes a commitment to ensure the academic quality of the course?

An INTD course must be interdisciplinary in some respect (but, as discussed at 1. above, it is not assumed that all interdisciplinary courses are INTD).

UNIV courses are “owned” by programs that are not based in schools or colleges (e.g., student affairs or other programs, divisions, or non-departmental units of the University).

- * No academic department has made management commitments to the course (involvement of a faculty member is not the same as departmental commitment – even when shared with one or more other departments – to manage a course).
- * Commitments to arrange and supervise teaching, to review and oversee the course syllabus and catalog formalities, and to ensure the academic quality of the course are (effectively) underwritten by the Provost’s Office.

Such courses may be experiential in nature (e.g. peer leadership or mentoring, internship, service learning), focused on student-centered transitions (e.g. to college, from college, to a major, to a career), or intended to build transferable academic competences (e.g. more effective learning strategies, personal inventories of knowledge and skills). While some UNIV courses may be interdisciplinary in content or technique, the primary basis of UNIV course recognition will look to course “ownership” or, more specifically, the absence of ownership by one or more academic departments.

Note: UNIV courses are assumed to be 1000- or 2000-level courses which may fall within the existing powers of Senate to “accredit” courses after advisory vetting at the program-level and by UICC (see 5 below). Rare exceptions would be one credit courses where target student enrollment is by juniors or seniors (e.g., the existing Senior Year Experience course).

5. University Interdisciplinary Courses Committee (UICC)

A new University Interdisciplinary Courses Committee (UICC) will replace the INTD Curricula & Courses Committee (INTD C&CC was formed in September 2006 and met regularly until December 2007). It will report formally to the Provost, who will be assisted by the Vice Provost in dealing with UICC matters. However, the wider accountability of the UICC to the University community will be acknowledged through:

- annual reports to Senate and
- regular communication with school and college C&CCs and deans (especially associate deans for undergraduate education).

6. UICC role and responsibilities

UICC serves to clarify and advise faculty members and staff who propose interdisciplinary and/or program-based, non-departmental courses on the approvals required. UICC carries out advisory vetting and provides oversight of interdepartmental (INTD) and university (UNIV) courses. While the UICC will act as a “gatekeeper” for the INTD and UNIV designations, UICC will not accredit new courses; schools and colleges, as well as Senate for particular types of courses, are the course accrediting bodies.

7. UICC membership and chair

Senate recommended, and the Provost agrees, that UICC membership will include:

- A faculty member (and specified alternate) from each School/College who is appointed by Provost, but after consultation with School/College Deans and the Chairs of School/College C&CCs. Ideally, each School or College appointee would be a member of the School/College C&CC.
- Professional staff member(s) with responsibility for INTD and/or UNIV course administration who is (are) appointed by Provost, but serve as ex officio, non-voting members of the UICC.
- A faculty chair who is appointed by the Provost, but who is an individual recommended by Senate Nominating Committee, and, ideally, would be an individual who has chaired a school or college C&CC.

8. Senate’s recommended approval process (January 2008)

Senate recommended, and the Provost agrees, that:

- Courses must receive **departmental approval** (from all departments involved or sponsoring the course proposal) **or program approval** (from program advisory boards or curriculum committees) before they will be reviewed by UICC.
- Courses that the UICC has approved for **INTD designation** would be forwarded to the **C&CCs of participating Schools/Colleges** for review and accreditation.
- Courses that the UICC has approved for **UNIV designation** would be forwarded to **Senate C&CC** for review and accreditation.
- INTD or UNIV courses requiring **additional Senate action** will be directed to Senate C&CC for general education, satisfactory/unsatisfactory course grading, 1000- and 2000-level course approval, and any other Senate course approval that might be required.

9. Review of current INTDs

Senate recommended that **all current INTD courses should be reviewed** within a 3-year period to confirm INTD categorization or recategorize as UNIV courses. This recommendation is accepted by the Provost. To avoid confusion, we recommend delaying until the end of the review period the use of the new designations. However, in the meantime catalog listings will include a descriptor of the colleges/schools responsible for the courses.

10. Future Review of all INTD and UNIV courses

The Provost wishes that all INTD and UNIV courses should be reviewed at least every four years for (1) appropriateness of categorization; (2) completeness and appropriateness of “ownership” arrangements; and (3) appropriateness of catalog description.

11. Implementation proposal

- UICC role and responsibility statement and job description for UICC faculty chair drafted in **April 2008** (see **Appendix A**)
- Draft document circulated to stakeholders for comment **May 2008**
- Deans asked to nominate faculty members for UICC by **August 15 2008**
- UICC membership agreed by **September 2008**
- Faculty chair recommendation(s) from Senate Nominating Committee by **September 2008**
- Faculty chair appointment (initial three year term) agreed with Provost by **October 2008**
- UICC will have its inaugural meeting in **November 2008** and then meet monthly from **January 2009**
- **In 2008-09**, UICC establishes policies and practices, publicizes its policies and practices, reviews INTD and UNIV new course proposals, and reports its decisions
- **In 2009-10**, UICC reviews existing INTD courses for future categorization as INTD or UNIV courses
- **In 2010-11**, UICC approves catalog recategorization of INTD courses (for 2011-12 catalog)

12. UICC Administrative Support

- **Academic departments** will have administrative responsibility for the INTD courses that they offer; one of these departments will have primary administrative responsibility. **Programs** will have day-to-day administrative responsibility for the UNIV courses that they sponsor, but UICC will review and have continuing oversight of teaching assignments and adequacy of resource arrangements.
- UICC will make **policy to clarify** how **grade appeals, catalog review, updates, and other administrative matters** should be dealt with for INTD and UNIV courses.
- Until 1/1/09, UICC support will be provided by IISP. In practice, IISP Director, Margaret Lamb, and INTD administrative assistant, Anabel Perez, will manage day-to-day INTD administration and assist the UICC in implementing the new process for INTD course approval
- From 1/1/09 UICC support will be provided by a ½ time INTD administrative assistant. INTD will share on a 50:50 basis a full-time administrative assistant with GEOC.

Appendix A

UICC role and responsibility statement and job description for UICC faculty chair

A **University Interdisciplinary Courses Committee (UICC)** will be formed to begin functioning in the Fall 2008 semester. UICC will consist of voting members who are faculty members in the University's undergraduate schools and colleges and non-voting members of staff who have responsibilities for INTD and/or UNIV courses. UICC will serve to clarify and advise faculty members and staff who propose interdisciplinary and/or program-based, non-departmental courses on the course approvals required. UICC will carry out advisory vetting and provide oversight of interdepartmental (INTD) and university (UNIV) courses. While the UICC will act as a "gatekeeper" for the INTD and UNIV designations, UICC will not accredit new courses; schools and colleges, as well as Senate for particular types of courses, are the course accrediting bodies.

Specifically, UICC is charged to:

- **In 2008-09**, establish relevant policies and practices for the definition, approval, and administration of INTD and UNIV courses; publicize its policies and practices; review INTD and UNIV new course proposals; and report its decisions. As part of this work, UICC will make policy to clarify how grade appeals, catalog review, updates, and other administrative matters should be dealt with for INTD and UNIV courses.
- **In addition, in 2009-10**, review existing INTD courses for future categorization as INTD or UNIV courses.
- **In 2010-11**, approve the catalog recategorization of INTD courses into INTD and UNIV courses (for the 2011-12 catalog).

The new committee will replace the INTD Curricula & Courses Committee. It will report formally to the Provost, who will be assisted by the Vice Provost in dealing with UICC matters. However, the wider accountability of the UICC to the University community will be acknowledged through:

- annual reports to Senate and
- regular communication with school and college C&CCs and deans (especially associate deans for undergraduate education).

The UICC will be chaired by a faculty member who is appointed by the Provost from a list of recommended names provided by Senate Nominating Committee. Ideally, the first UICC chair would be an individual who has chaired a school or college C&CC. The faculty chair's responsibilities will include:

- To plan the business of the UICC;
- To work with the designated UICC support staff member to communicate UICC policies, practices, and decisions to relevant campus audiences by a variety of means (including circulars, website postings, presentations, and reports);
- To coordinate and liaise with school and college C&CCs, as well as Senate C&CC and GEOC to ensure that there is a sound common understanding of relevant policies and practices for INTD and UNIV courses;

- To coordinate and liaise with schools and colleges to ensure that University administrative offices (especially the Registrar's staff responsible for scheduling and the catalog, and OIR) have appropriate contacts for INTD and UNIV course administration;
- To respond to enquiries from faculty and staff over the interpretation of UICC policies and practices, or likely approval requirements for INTD and UNIV courses; and
- To represent the UICC's policies or experience on related committees, task forces, or ad hoc projects at the request of the Provost.