Modesto Junior College Curriculum Committee

Content Overlap

During the development of a new course outline, faculty developers consider whether the content of a proposal may overlap the content subject matter of another department. Such overlap is a very common occurrence at institutions and many course proposals with overlapping content are approved by college curriculum committees. The following sections discuss the principles and process to be applied in reviewing content overlap.

Principles of Content Overlap

The following principles are guidelines for the review of content overlap. These principles establish the basis for the consideration of overlap by departments involved in the creation and review process and, if necessary, content overlap review by the Curriculum Committee; however, it is not assumed that a course would have to meet all the criteria to be approved. Reviewers (such as curriculum reps, deans, and technical review committee members) should use the text of proposed and existing course outlines of record during their review.

1. The primary goal in the review of content overlap is to ensure that students are well served by the content of a course and, when significant content overlap is necessary, there are discipline-specific rationales for the overlap that the proposing department can clearly articulate.
2. Content overlap will be justified by establishing that the overlap is part of the core instructional mission of the department. Departments will avoid unnecessary duplication of coursework available through any other department's established, regularly offered courses. Courses offered at least once every two years are considered regularly offered courses.
3. Content overlap will be limited to specific skills and knowledge needed for student success in the overlapping course as outlined in the course objectives. Significant overlap will be permitted when such overlap provides the student with specific skills and knowledge within the accepted scope of the academic discipline of the proposing department. For example, if the students can acquire needed skills or knowledge from an existing course, then the content overlap would not be allowed, but if the students in a particular discipline need a more focused course that will be necessary for their success, then the content overlap would be allowed. The proposing department is responsible for determining the skills and knowledge necessary for student success within the proposed course.
4. The instruction provided in the overlapping content will be enough to meet the student learning outcomes for the proposed course.
5. If the course title or catalog description contains reference to overlapping content, the course title or catalog description should provide students with clear and logical information regarding overlapping content to ensure that students understand the relationship of a course's content to the student's educational goals.
6. When courses are revised, the review of content overlap should address the extent to which the revisions maintain the original scope and framework of the course.

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All courses must be in a discipline. Some courses may be placed in more than one discipline, indicating that a faculty member from two or more disciplines would be qualified to teach the course. Other courses may not clearly fall within a discipline, in that they might combine two or more disciplines to such a degree that they need to be taught by someone with some preparation in each of the constituent disciplines. These courses are designated as interdisciplinary.

For credit courses, the discipline lists are taken from the "Minimum Qualifications for Faculty and Administrators in California Community Colleges", which contains two lists: "Disciplines Requiring a Master's Degree", and "Disciplines in which a Master's Degree is not Generally Expected or Available." For noncredit courses, Title 5 Section 53412 establishes qualifications for instructors of noncredit courses.

The MJC Curriculum Committee recognizes emerging fields often do not fall cleanly within existing disciplines. Technological developments change the nature of work within disciplines and developments in pedagogical practices often point towards interdisciplinary approaches. Since the initial publication of discipline lists by the State Academic Senate, there have been frequent revisions, with the most recent published in 2018. While a discussion of content overlap can be perceived as something to be avoided and that discipline areas are territories to be defended, content overlap is, in some instances, inevitable and desirable. Departments are encouraged to innovate, and work collaboratively where such collaboration is seen as mutually beneficial for students and pedagogically sound. The collaboration will optimally occur in the beginning development/creation stages of the course proposals.

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