

## THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

### COMMON CORE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

#### Policy and Guidelines on Offering Common Core Courses

#### 1. **Course Offerings and Structure**

##### *Commencement of Offer, Deferrals and Replacements*

- 1.1 Courses will be endorsed by the Common Core Curriculum Committee, for submission to the Academic Board (AB) and Senate for approval.
- 1.2 Once endorsed by the Common Core Curriculum Committee and approved by the AB and Senate, requests for deferral of commencement date will be considered in exceptional cases and subject to approval by the Common Core Curriculum Committee. Requests for deferral shall be made by the teaching unit(s) and the home Faculty/Faculties to the Director of Common Core Curriculum.
- 1.3 Circumstances such as personnel events (e.g. leave taking, contract expiry, resignation) and unsatisfactory course performance (e.g. persistent unsatisfactory enrolment, unsatisfactory course evaluation) may necessitate the replacement of courses. Requests for replacement of courses triggered by personnel events shall be made by the teaching unit and the home Faculty to the Director of Common Core Curriculum for consideration by the Common Core Curriculum Committee. With regard to unsatisfactory course performance, the Common Core Curriculum Committee will initiate appropriate procedures to replace courses either by inviting the teaching units / Faculties concerned to offer replacement courses or by drawing on the Committee's course pool which consists of pre-approved courses for offer as and when necessary. (Also see section 4 'Course Monitoring and Review Mechanism'.)

##### *Number of Sections, Caps and Format of Courses*

- 1.4 The number of sections, caps and format of courses that need to be offered will be determined by the Common Core Curriculum Committee on the basis of the preferences indicated by Course Co-ordinators in their original course proposals as well as by other determining factors such as the number of course enrollment places required each year. Course Co-ordinators and the Department(s) and Faculty/Faculties involved will be informed of, and invited to confirm, the number of sections, caps, and format of courses to be offered.

##### *Revision of Course Particulars*

- 1.5 Requests to revise course particulars (including the course title, course description, assessment methods, learning outcomes, learning activities) shall be made by the Course Co-ordinator to the Director of Common Core Curriculum. Such requests shall be considered by the Common Core Curriculum Committee.

##### *Lectures and Tutorials*

- 1.6 Common Core courses normally consist of 36 hours of contact, with a 2-hour lecture and a 1-hour tutorial (i.e. small group face-to-face discussion) per week over a period of 12 weeks. These arrangements, however, may vary depending on the type of course and the Course Co-ordinator's rationale given in the course proposal. The total number of student workload hours required for a six-credit course is between 120 - 180 hours.

- 1.7 In order to allow flexibility in the teaching of the courses, it is expected that the number of tutorial hours range from 8 to 12. To ensure teaching-learning quality, the size of the tutorial group should not exceed 12 students. Tutors are required to attend all the lectures in order to be best prepared for their own facilitation of student discussions. The mode of tutorial arrangement, however, may vary for Common Core Global Experiences (CCGEs) courses, which are designed for students away from the HKU campus.

#### *Class Scheduling*

- 1.8 The scheduling of the teaching semester (i.e. first, second or summer semester) will be based on the preferences as indicated in the original course proposal. Course Co-ordinators will be notified of, and invited to confirm, the recommended semester(s). Once approved, requests to re-schedule to a different semester shall be made through the Faculty Dean and Department Head concerned to the Director of Common Core Curriculum.
- 1.9 Due to time-tabling and venue constraints, most classes will be scheduled on Wednesday afternoons and a few others on Saturday mornings. Course Co-ordinators will be consulted before the Wednesday / Saturday slots are finalized.

#### *Teaching Venues*

- 1.10 Venues for lectures to be held on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings will be centrally allocated by the Examinations Office *via* the Academic Support & Examinations (ASE) Section of the Registry.
- 1.11 Venues for tutorials and other organized teaching activities such as seminars will be arranged by the Course Co-ordinators concerned. A limited number of central venues are available for tutorials and will be centrally allocated by the Examinations Office *via* the Academic Support & Examinations (ASE) Section of the Registry.
- 1.12 Requests for central tutorial venues and special requests for centrally administered venues may be made by the Course Co-ordinators with the Examinations Office through the Co-ordinators' Department/Faculty offices.

## **2. Staffing**

#### *Staffing for "Formal Teaching"*

- 2.1 Under the current arrangements, financial resources are allocated for teaching Common Core courses in the form of professoriate positions. In most cases, full-time professoriate staff (i.e. Assistant Professors or above) are expected to take up the "formal teaching" of Common Core courses (as opposed to tutorials) and serve as Course Co-ordinators.
- 2.2 Some full-time academic-related staff and professional practitioners [i.e. Lecturers / Senior Lecturers / Principal Lecturers / Professional Practitioners / Senior Professional Practitioners / Principal Professional Practitioners / Research Assistant Professors] with the following parameters may serve as key teachers or Course Co-ordinators with up to 100% of formal teaching.
- 1 year full-time formal teaching experience at HKU
  - good teaching performance
  - holder of PhD and/or with substantial relevant professional experience
- 2.3 In order to ensure coherence, no more than four teachers should co-teach a course.

- 2.4 Subject to the special approval of the Common Core Curriculum Committee, distinguished visiting professors, retired HKU senior professoriate staff with a distinguished teaching record and full-time professoriate staff from non-teaching units with affiliation to a Faculty may take up “formal teaching”. Retired HKU senior professoriate staff and full-time professoriate staff from non-teaching units may serve as Course Co-ordinators, while for visiting professor – in view of the temporary nature of their appointments – the associated Faculty would need to appoint a Course Co-ordinator to provide administrative oversight, in addition to a share of the teaching load if so desired.

#### *Use of Guest Speakers*

- 2.5 Course co-ordinators may invite guest speakers to speak on a certain topic / issue / aspect of the course subject (e.g. to share with students their experience in the field). In order to ensure the coherency of the course experience for students, guest speakers should take up no more than a total of three sessions of the course.
- 2.6 Given the nature of guest speakers, they should not be involved in assessing students’ work and are not subject to the administration of the Student Feedback on Teaching & Learning (SFTL) Questionnaire.

#### *Staffing for Tutorials*

- 2.7 In addition to funding “formal teaching”, resources will be allocated for conducting Common Core tutorials. Such tutorials may be conducted by Teaching Assistants, Lecturers and Assistant Lecturers (or comparable teaching grades) or postgraduate research students (RPgs)<sup>1</sup> as determined by the Course Co-ordinators concerned in consultation with their home Departments/Faculties. It should be noted that the workload of postgraduate studentship holders should not exceed the maximum number of hours as prescribed by the Graduate School.
- 2.8 All staff and RPgs appointed to conduct Common Core tutorials are highly encouraged to attend the workshops for Common Core tutors available each semester.

#### *Assignment/Substitution of Course Co-ordinators and Key Teachers*

- 2.9 Faculty Deans concerned may assign/substitute Course Co-ordinators and key teachers so long as:
- (i) the Course Co-ordinators and key teachers are full-time professoriate staff (para 2.1 refers), or full-time academic-related staff or professional practitioners with parameters as specified in para 2.2 above,
  - (ii) no more than four teachers will co-teach a course (paras 2.3 refers), and
  - (iii) an updated list of the Course Co-ordinator and teacher(s) for each course will be submitted to the Common Core Curriculum Committee one semester before the start of the course for the Committee’s reference and record.

### **3. Assessment**

#### *Assessment Arrangements*

- 3.1 Arrangements for continuous assessment will be made by Course Co-ordinators.

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<sup>1</sup> Research postgraduate students must be able to conduct tutorials entirely in good and intelligible English. The quality of the tutorials will be closely monitored by the Committee through the Student Feedback on Teaching & Learning Questionnaire.

- 3.2 End-of-semester/year examinations, where applicable, will be arranged by the Examinations Office in conjunction with the Course Co-ordinators through the Co-ordinators' Faculty/Department offices. The Co-ordinators, in liaison with teachers, will co-ordinate arrangements such as the setting and submission of examination questions and the delivery of examination scripts through the Co-ordinators' Faculty/Department offices.

*Grading*

- 3.3 Grade descriptors shall be drawn up for each course to ensure assessment standards. Course teachers shall look closely at the percentages for each assessment task, the clarity of each assignment, and the legibility of the marking rubrics for ensuring that student performance is sufficiently differentiated, both individually and in any group work (which has a bar of 50% on the *total weighting* on 'group work' across all assignments in a course).
- 3.4 **Standards-based** assessment (as opposed to norm-referenced assessment, also known as grading on a curve) does not imply that there will be a preponderance of very high grades. In order to ensure sufficient differentiation of course grades based on student performance, Co-ordinators of courses with grade distributions that are *extreme outliers* to the CC grade distribution (see 3.5 below) shall be asked to submit a rationale and a plan focused on addressing the anomaly before the next iteration, or face suspension of the course. The determination of whether a distribution is deemed to be an extreme outlier is left to the decision of the Committee of Internal Examiners for the Common Core Curriculum.
- 3.5 Listed below *as reference*, is the percentage range of grades based on CC grade distributions in the past years.

Grade	A+	A, A-	Bs (B+, B, B-)	Cs (C+, C, C-)	Ds (D+, D)	F
Range	~5%	25 – 30%	50 – 55%	8 – 11%	1.5 – 2%	1 – 1.5%

- 3.6 When there are two or more teachers teaching and grading a course, moderation of grading should be carried out by those teachers to ensure consistency of understanding and application of grade descriptors and grading standards. By moderation of grading, it is meant that before the actual marking, a small sample of student scripts will be marked by teachers and the grades compared to ensure a common understanding and application of the grade descriptors and grading standards.
- 3.7 Failure in a written examination, or in any other written form of assessment which contributes to 50% or more of the overall result of the failed paper, has to be determined on the basis of the assessment of more than one teacher, or in the case where two teachers have been involved in the assessment of the work of a student and where there has been disagreement between the two teachers, a third opinion (normally that of an external examiner or a teacher of a cognate discipline) will be sought<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.8 Course Co-ordinators shall arrange for marks for continuous assessment and end-of-semester/year examinations to be entered into the Student Information System.

*Course Grades and Failure Cases*

- 3.9 Course grades, together with the recommendations on the handling of failure cases, shall then be considered by the Committee of Internal Examiners for the Common Core Curriculum, which shall comprise the Chief Examiner as Chairman, the Chairman of the Common Core Curriculum Committee, the Deputy Chairman of the Common Core Curriculum Committee, the Ex-officio Member of the Common Core Curriculum Committee, the Director of Common

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<sup>2</sup> Para III. 1(f) of the Terms of Reference for the Committee on Discontinuation (document 158/701 re-amended).

Core Curriculum, the Associate Director of Common Core Curriculum, and the AoI Convenors of the four AoIs as representatives of the Internal Examiners of the respective AoIs, for submission to the Boards of Examiners of the students' home Faculties.

- 3.10 Students who have failed courses may be required to make up for the failure by either:
- (i) undergoing re-assessment / re-examination in the failed course to be held no later than the end of the following semester (not including the summer semester); or
  - (ii) re-submitting failed coursework without having to repeat the same course of instruction; or
  - (iii) repeating the failed course by undergoing instruction and satisfying the assessments; or
  - (iv) taking another course *in lieu* and satisfying the assessment requirements.

The Course Co-ordinators concerned shall make recommendations, taking into account individual student's circumstances, on the appropriate methods of making up for failures, for consideration by the Committee of Internal Examiners for the Common Core Curriculum and for endorsement by Boards of Examiners concerned.

#### *Treatment of Plagiarism Cases*

- 3.11 Plagiarism is a severe academic and disciplinary offence which should be treated strictly in order to educate students not to plagiarize. Course Co-ordinators shall adhere to the University's policy on student plagiarism with respect to all forms of course assessment.
- 3.12 Course Co-ordinators shall have full autonomy in detecting, identifying and judging if a particular case in question constitutes plagiarism, as well as whether the case shall be reported to the University Disciplinary Committee.
- 3.13 As a uniform treatment for all Common Core courses, when plagiarism is detected and reported to the Common Core Office, zero marks should be given for the assessment component concerned, and in addition a full letter grade for the course taken down (e.g. from "A-" to "B-", from "B+" to "C+") regardless of the percentage the assessment component accounts for.

### **4. Course Monitoring and Review Mechanism**

#### *Student Feedback on Teaching & Learning (SFTL) Questionnaire*

- 4.1 The administration of SFTL will be co-ordinated by the Common Core Office with Course Co-ordinators. SFTL course reports will be made available to Key Teachers, Co-ordinators, relevant Heads of Departments and Deans, and the Common Core Curriculum Committee. In addition, SFTL teacher reports will be made available to individual key teachers with a teaching load of 25% and above and their Performance Review and Development (PRD) reviewers; SFTL tutor reports to individual teachers who conduct tutorials that supplement lectures; and SFTL demonstrator/instructor reports to individual teachers who conduct laboratory sessions and/or supervise field trips that supplement lectures (if applicable). The SFTL reports of teachers, tutors and demonstrators/instructors will also be made available to the relevant Heads of Department and Deans.

#### *Ongoing Monitoring and Support*

- 4.2 The Common Core Curriculum Committee will receive the finalized enrolment figures for Semester 1 courses by the end of September, and those for Semester 2 courses by the end of January of the academic year concerned. Courses with an unsatisfactory enrolment will be identified, and if necessary, Course Co-ordinators, Key Teachers and Deans concerned will be alerted, and support will be provided to polish up course titles and descriptions and/or devise strategies in order to boost future enrolment.

- 4.3 To enable formative advice to be given for the enhancement of course content and delivery etc., the Common Core Director, the Associate Director and AoI Convenors may request to sit in on lectures/tutorials to gain first-hand understanding and facilitate interaction with Key Teachers. In addition, SFTL course reports (or a summary of these reports) will be presented to the Common Core Curriculum Committee for information and discussion, in late March for courses delivered in Semester 1 of that academic year and in late September for courses delivered in Semester 2 of the previous academic year. Pertinent issues will be identified, and relevant Course Co-ordinators and Deans will be alerted. Support on course enhancement will be provided, if necessary, by the Director of Common Core Curriculum/ the Associate Director of Common Core Curriculum/ AoI Convenors/ Leaders and/ or the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

*Formal Review and Curriculum Renewal*

- 4.4 For courses in their first three-year cycle, a formal course review will be conducted at the end of the second year of offering. Thereafter, the performance of courses will be observed through the ongoing monitoring and support mechanism (paras 4.2 & 4.3 refer) and, if needed, the Director of Common Core Curriculum will initiate a formal course review where issues or concerns have been identified.
- 4.5 The formal review will take into account, among other things, the enrolment history, SFTL reports and external examiners' reports. The review will be conducted by the respective AoI review panel consisting of the AoI Convenor, AoI Leaders, the Director and the Associate Director of Common Core Curriculum, and the findings will be presented to the Common Core Curriculum Committee.
- 4.6 Subject to para. 1.4 above,
- (i) courses with satisfactory review results may continue to be offered for another three-year cycle, or be replaced by new courses from the same or a different teaching unit should the offering unit decide to cease offering the course.
  - (ii) for courses which are not considered satisfactory in the formal review, support for course enhancement will be made available through the Director of the Common Core Curriculum, the Associate Director of Common Core Curriculum, and the respective AoI Convenors. Such courses may continue to be offered for another three-year cycle subject to the performance of the first offering of the new cycle. Should there be no improvement, the course concerned may be discontinued from the Common Core menu, and be replaced by a course from the course pool.

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