SPECIAL REPORT

OF THE

ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL

concerning

POLICY REGARDING APPROVALS FOR
SPECIAL TOPICS COURSES
(#8419)

Presented at the
814th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
April 28, 2022

ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Carol Barr, Carolyn Bassett, Bryan Beck, William Brown, Allison Butler, Marcy Clark, Morgan Donovan-Hall, Sharon Dormier, Laura Francis, Janet Fink, Kate Green, Keisha Green, Jennifer Heuer, Matthew Komer, Lt. Col. David Lemery, Mark Liberatore, Linda Lowry, Andrea Malaguti, Sarah Pfatticher, Jennifer Randall, Caleb Rounds, Sylvia Salas, Tigran Sedrakyn, Barry Spence, Patrick Sullivan, Laura Vandenberg, Jack Wileden, Kate Woodmansee

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

The Academic Matters Council recommends approval of this proposal
Background Information

A. Special Topics courses, numbered X97, are presently governed by a confusing set of policies and practices. Most courses in the X97 range, have not been approved through the regular course approval process. This is because departments can currently schedule these courses on their own directly with the Registrar’s Office.

B. Special Topics courses numbered X97 have consistently been treated as exempt from the permanent course approval process and used by departments in a variety of ways.

C. In general, no credit-bearing course offered with any regularity or intended to be a continuing part of an academic program should be able to be offered without formal review by the Faculty Senate. In particular, the current process for Special Topics courses (X97) results in a level of confusion that weakens faculty governance of curricular matters and a de facto process that in some cases circumvents the expected review of new permanent courses.

This proposal is intended to clarify and concretize an expedited course approval process for X97 courses.

Proposed Policy: Approval of Special Topics Courses (CCMS proposal # 8419)

A. Approval of existing Special Topics courses

Via an ad-hoc group appointed by the Secretary of the Faculty Senate and the Vice Provost’s office, all current X97 courses that have not yet undergone the formal approval process shall either be submitted to CCMS within 1 academic year of the formal Faculty Senate approval date of this policy or be removed from the course catalog (see Appendix for rationale and operational plan).

B. Unusual circumstances that may warrant the creation of new, temporary Special Topics Courses include the following:

   a. The process of hiring of a new faculty member is finished too close to the start of a particular semester to allow the formal approval process to be completed in time to add their new course(s) by the start of term; or

   b. A visiting instructor will be offering a specialized seminar on a topic that the department does not cover in its current regular course offerings and does not anticipate adding to those offerings in the foreseeable future; or

   c. A regular faculty member is asked to teach a course that addresses a timely issue or topic that the department does not cover in its current regular course offerings
and does not anticipate adding to those offerings in the foreseeable future or the request to teach the course is too close to the start of a particular semester to allow the formal approval process for an experimental course to be completed in time to add the course by the start of term.

In the above cases, faculty and departments will submit the new Special Topics Course as an Experimental Course (x90) to allow for an abbreviated approval process. This expedited course approval process requires submission of a course syllabus and related information, is submitted in the CCMS portal and allows for a course to be run exactly once with approval of the Secretary of the Faculty Senate and a Senior Vice Provost or equivalent representative of the Provost’s office. This expedited approval process is to be available for only a limited time period (roughly two to three weeks) prior to the start of each fall and spring semester.

The first offering of the course under this expedited approval process counts toward the three-offering limit on all Experimental Courses. Second and third offerings of the course as an Experimental Course require approval through the regular (non-expedited) process applied to all Experimental Courses. Subsequent offerings as a permanent course require approval through the regular conversion process.

APPENDIX:  
Rationale and operations plan

The current informal course approval process has resulted in 5000+ X97 courses listed as still active, and needing resolution through a process that will involve either formal approval or discontinuation of the course.

To bring the current Special Topics courses (X97) into compliance with the new policy, all current X97 courses listed as active will need to begin the formal approval process or else be removed from the course catalog.

Current X97 courses will need to follow this process: 1) Departments will determine which X97 courses they want to remove and alert the Registrar; 2) Departments will determine which active X97 courses they want to remain active; 3) departmental representatives will submit these courses through an expedited approval process, where the course syllabus is vetted by the Secretary of the Faculty Senate and the Senior Vice-Provost, or representatives from their offices, and representatives from the Academic Matters Council and Graduate Council.

All X97 courses that have not been submitted for full course approval within 1 academic year from the approval of this policy will be removed from active status and cannot be taught again as a special topics or experimental course.

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve the Policy Regarding Approvals for Special Topics Courses, as presented in Sen Doc. No. 22-079.