Course Attribute Policy

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A. Introduction and Rationale

Course attributes are a powerful tool for identifying courses that have a specific role to play in the curriculum. They are used to identify courses in the Guide, in the Course Search & Enroll App, and SIS, and with appropriate resources and planning have the potential to be used on transcripts, degree audits, and in other curricular data systems. The presence of a course attribute makes it practical to do reporting and analysis relating to students and faculty/instructors for a group of courses with a common course attribute. (For a list of attributes as of Fall 2018 see https://kb.wisc.edu/lumen/page.php?id=78715.)

The purpose of this policy is to set criteria for when a course attribute is appropriate and outline the proposal process to follow for establishing new course attributes (see Section D for process information). The nature of the proposal to the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) is influenced somewhat by the nature of the plan for the course attribute. If the attribute is simple, well-justified, and does not establish a broad academic requirement, or incur substantial costs, the proposal process is straightforward (see section D). If the course attribute carries more complexity and/or requires a fiscal commitment, then broader planning and additional endorsements will need to accompany the proposal to the UCC.

Criteria must be set for the course attribute. Ideally, the criteria are sufficiently straightforward that department-level and school/college curriculum committees and the UCC will be able to apply the course attribute criteria without substantial training or without the need for a standing committee of faculty/staff to conduct reviews for approvals.

For course attribute criteria that require a standing committee for review or have other substantial resource implications, the faculty/staff originating the proposal will need to develop a plan and seek approval and a commitment of required resources before UCC approval of the course attribute criteria; specifics will depend on circumstances (see section D).

Once a course attribute is approved, it may be added to an existing or new course through the course approval process (supported by Lumen Course Proposal System), with the usual opportunities for approval by the Subject owner, the school/college, and the University Curriculum Committee.

B. Scope of this Policy

Course attributes are useful to identify groups of courses that share common features that are not represented in some other way but are of interest or value to a broad range of students and programs and serve institutional goals or priorities.

Course attributes are generally justified when they:
- Serve broad populations of students and programs across multiple schools/colleges.
- Serve an academic or strategic purpose, meet an accountability requirement, or serve a compelling and enduring student interest.
- Are the single authoritative source of information for the concept they embody and do not duplicate or conflict with another authoritative sources of information such as the curricular requirements for a specific degree/major.
- Are applied at the "catalog level", that is the course attribute applies to all offerings and every section of a course each time it is scheduled, and the offering department makes a commitment to ensure that the course attribute criteria are always met.

Course attributes that are applied at the "section level", which are used only in rare instances (e.g. Section Level Communication B, residence hall sections, learning community sections, community-based learning) will not be considered under this policy. Similarly, course attributes that are proposed as optional for offerings will not be considered.

Course attributes that are used for purely administrative purposes are also not covered by these guidelines. Such attributes are not visible to students, do not appear in campus publications (Guide, Course Search and Enroll App, etc.), the Lumen Course Proposal System or data systems outside of SIS, and are maintained administratively. Implementation of such course attributes (for example, CDR related, COOP, obsolete course policy) are determined by the Office of the Registrar and Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR).

Course attributes that require substantial resources to be implemented and maintained will require that the additional planning and commitment of resources takes place before the UCC consideration of the actual course attribute proposal. The proposal that comes to UCC will describe those approvals and resource commitments. Examples of course attributes that need extra resources are those that appear on the transcript (official or unofficial); attributes that are used in a degree audit (such as DARS or Academic Advisement); attributes that need review by a dedicated or formally established committee; attributes that require the addition of a workflow step in the Lumen Course Proposal System; or other new administrative overhead. Decisions associated with the resources and funding would need to be devised on a case-by-case basis and be approved by those with the appropriate authority before UCC consideration. An existing example of course attributes that incur a substantial and ongoing resource commitment are the undergraduate general education attributes, which have distinct governance and approval steps supported by standing committees.

C. Criteria for New Course Attributes

Course attributes apply at the course level and, when approved, are attached to a course in the course catalog, and signal a commitment by the offering department(s) that the course will always be offered in a way that meets the requirements of the course attribute.

A proposal for a new course attribute will be considered by UCC for approval if:

- The attribute serves broad populations of students and programs across multiple schools/colleges.
- The attribute serves an academic or strategic purpose, meets an accountability requirement, or serves a compelling and enduring student interest.
- The attribute is the single authoritative source of information for the concept the attribute embodies and does not duplicate or conflict with another authoritative sources of information such as the curricular requirements for a specific degree/major.
- The attribute is applied at the "catalog level", that is the course attribute applies to all offerings and every section of a course each time it is scheduled, and the offering department(s) makes a commitment to ensure that the course attribute criteria are always met.
- Application of the attribute to any given course is durable and rarely changed.
- The criteria for the course attribute are specified in a fairly simple and straightforward manner to allow for implementation within the standard course proposal process, or else resources are available to support more complex evaluation of the course attribute criteria.

A course attribute is not appropriate:
- To identify groups of courses that are already identified by course numbering schema, Subject designations, or other existing identification schema.
- To identify groups of courses associated with a single degree/major, specific degree requirements, or certificate program.

D. Process for Approval of a New Course Attribute

A planning group with faculty representation should prepare a proposal that includes the following information.

A. Composition and nature of the planning group and primary contact person.

B. The name of the proposed course attribute.

C. Rationale and need for establishing the course attribute. Does it address an institutional priority or need? Does it serve a reporting requirement? Why is it important? Does it meet a compelling and enduring interest?

D. How does the proposed attribute meet the criteria for a course attribute?
   a. How is it relevant to a broad population of students across multiple programs and schools/colleges?
   b. How will it track student participation in activities that have a strategic importance to the university, or meet an accountability requirement?
   c. How will the attribute serve a compelling and enduring student interest?
   d. How is it distinctive from information that is tracked in any other manner and not in any way duplicative of existing ways to track courses?
   e. Once attached to any specific course, would the attribute be a durable feature that is rarely changed?

E. Specific criteria for the course attribute.

   Generally, these criteria must be specific and simple enough that they can be readily understood by individuals proposing courses across the approximately 190 Subject areas across campus based on written materials embedded in the Lumen Course Proposal System and without substantial training.

Criteria may be based on the use of specific learning outcomes for courses that carry the attribute. If opting to include specific course learning outcomes for the attribute, the proposer should work with the Student Learning Assessment Office to make sure that the learning outcomes are clear and can be assessed.

Criteria may be based on the inclusion of a specific statement about learning or content in the course description.

Criteria should specify any limits on what level or kind of course the attribute can be applied to (example: undergraduate only, group instruction only, etc.) and any resource considerations associated with these limits.

Content in the syllabus is not sufficient to set criteria because the syllabus that accompanies a course proposal is an example and not a durable part of the course information.

F. Will the implementation of the course attribute require resources beyond basic resources? If so, the proposal must be accompanied by documentation that resources or funding has been committed. Examples of course attributes that will need extra resources are those that appear on the transcript (official or unofficial); attributes that are used in a degree audit (such as DARS or Academic Advisement); attributes that need review by a dedicated or formally established committee; attributes that require the addition of a workflow step in the Lumen Course Proposal System; or other new administrative overhead. Consult APIR staff to develop details on a case-by-case basis.

G. Planning and implementation timeline. The implementation plan should include information about how existing courses will be considered for the attribute and if a time-period for one-time provisional attachment of the course attribute to courses will be considered.

The proposal should be submitted to the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR) for consideration and for circulation to the campus community for comment, if appropriate. APIR staff will work with the planning group to develop a full proposal and will consult with the Office of the Registrar about implications of the implementation.

Proposals need approval of the University Curriculum Committee and when appropriate the University Academic Planning Council.

Once approved, APIR and the Office of the Registrar will coordinate with appropriate partners in support of implementation.