

**PROPOSAL TO THE UIUC SENATE COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

REVISION OF THE COURSE NUMBERING SYSTEM

Sponsor: UI-Integrate Faculty Advisory Committee, David N. Ruzic, Chair, and Bruce Branham, Member of the Senate Committee on Educational Policy and the UI-Integrate Faculty Advisory Committee. May 16, 2001.

Brief Description: The proposed changes will address inadequacies caused by our current numbering system and bring the University of Illinois into closer alignment with the “best practices” of other peer institutions. These changes will benefit our students, faculty and administration. Implementation of the UI-Integrate project has provided the impetus to make the proposed changes and drives the timing of such decisions.

The course numbering system would be expanded to 000-699.

000 level = do not carry academic credit but do count for tuition and load.

100 level = “lower division” undergraduate courses, typically with no prerequisites

200 level = “lower division” undergraduate courses

300 level = “upper division” undergraduate courses

400 level = “upper division” undergraduate courses that also can be taken by graduate students for credit.

500 level = courses that can be taken only by graduate and professional school students.

600 level = certain professional school courses with restricted enrollments.

The definitions of each level are relatively open-ended so that each Department or College can determine detailed guidelines that best fit its own needs. In general, the 000-level courses are for remedial work that does not count toward a degree. The 100-level course generally corresponds to “entry-“ or “freshman-“ level courses. The 200-level generally corresponds to “sophomore-“ level courses. Transfer credit from 2-yr. colleges around the state would likely correspond to 100- and 200- level offerings. Taken as a whole, the 100- and 200-level courses correspond to the “lower division” of undergraduate courses.

The “upper division” corresponds to 300- and 400-level courses and one would not expect transfer credit from 2-yr colleges to correspond to courses with these numbers. In general one might expect a student to take 300-level courses in his or her junior year and 400-level courses in her or his senior year. The 400-level would correspond to the current 300-level in that in general graduate students could receive credit for 400-level courses.

The 500-level courses would be purely graduate level courses, as are the current 400-level. Professional schools such as medicine, law and veterinary could use the 600-level designation.

Justification: There are six principal improvements that will flow from changing the course numbering system that will benefit students, academic staff, and the University. They can be grouped into two broader categories: internal and external.

(1) Internal House Keeping

(i) Minor Requirement and the “200-level Problem”. The minor requirement at UIUC reads in part, “nine hours of 300-level or designated 200-level advanced courses”. Much confusion has resulted from this statement. The term “designated 200-level advanced courses” has resulted entirely because our current course numbering system can’t differentiate between advanced undergraduate courses and ones advanced enough to be suitable for graduate credit. Under our current system, courses that are offered at the 300-level can be taken for graduate credit. Therefore, a department on this campus can’t offer an advanced course without making it available for graduate credit. Thus many units on campus offer advanced coursework at the 200-level precisely to prevent graduate students from taking these classes for graduate credit, yet these are courses to be taken primarily by juniors and seniors. The proposed implementation allows a much cleaner division. After the 300-level is repopulated with advanced undergraduate courses the minor requirement can simply read, “nine hours of course work at the 300 level or above.” This change would make minor requirements much more transparent to the student, while enforcing the Senate’s intent that a minor should have an adequate number of advanced undergraduate courses.

(ii) Desire for Re-Organization. As stated by Karen Carney, former Assistant Provost, “...departments with large graduate and undergraduate programs have complained that with only four levels of numbering they are in danger of running out of course numbers. Certainly many units use less-than-rational approaches to numbering courses because they have fewer numbers to work with in the first place.” This sentiment is echoed by Keith Marshall, the present Assistant Provost. Recently the Department of Business Administration requested to renumber their 400-level offerings to cluster like classes together. They also requested the use of 500-level for their Professional school offerings. Kirby Barrick, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, College of ACES, is in the process of guiding the renumbering of many of the College’s courses to establish some uniformity across Departments. For example, “Undergraduate Field Experience” would become XXX 250 in each Department. Changes such as these in business Administration and ACES and many other Departments are difficult to implement piecemeal since the effect has repercussions in documentation across the entire campus. Since the UI-Integrate project requires virtually all computerized record keeping functions to be re-written across the entire campus anyway, restructuring the numbering system at this time is likely to be more cost-efficient.

(iii) Professional Schools. The College of Medicine Departments at UIUC are part of the UIC medical school. Students here take the same core curricula as students at UIC, but they can not sign up for the same courses since 600-level courses are not allowed in UI-direct. The UIUC College of Medicine Departments have created a system of shadow numbers so room assignments, timetable entries and other administrative aspects can be accomplished within our present allowed numbering structure. However it is the UIC College of Medicine course numbers which are referred to in curriculum guides and College of Medicine transcripts. This dual numbering system confuses students, faculty and staff. The adoption of 600-level designations, as used at UIC, will eliminate this difficulty and allow other professional school programs at UIUC, such as the Department of Business Administration’s MBA program, to differentiate their restricted offerings from academic graduate programs.

(iv) Pre-College Courses. UIUC currently offers some courses at the 100-level that we consider pre-college and the credits do not count toward graduation, e.g. CHEM 100 and MATH 102, 103, and 104. Offering these courses at the 000-level would eliminate the confusion that results from having some 100-level courses receive credit while courses with the same number in another department may not receive credit.

(2) External Perceptions

(i) Employers' and Admission Committees' Misunderstanding of Transcripts. A survey of the 61 peer AAU Universities across the country was conducted by Registrar Alice Poehls to look at their course numbering systems. Though the private schools were more idiosyncratic, a certain degree of uniformity exists among the large public peer universities, especially those in the Big 10. In general, 100-level and 200-level classes are considered "lower division", 300-level and 400-level classes are considered "upper division", and 500-level and above are considered graduate level. Those with different numbering systems are usually quite different either having 4 digits (University of Colorado and University of Pittsburgh) or having all undergraduate work from 0-199 (all University of California campuses). UIUC used to have the same numbering system as is in current use at UIUC. They changed to the "standard" system proposed here in 1991 to distinguish clearly between credit and non-credit courses and to distinguish more clearly between lower level and upper level undergraduate courses.

The current UIUC numbering system is close enough to the "standard" system such that our students can appear to have taken less advanced coursework than was actually completed. The absence of 400-level courses on a typical undergraduate's transcript can be interpreted as not having taken senior-level work. This is particularly acute when comparing a UIUC to a UIC student. Tom Glenn, Associate Dean, College of Engineering at UIC related the following as a common occurrence. A recruiter from Motorola comparing a UIUC and UIC graduating engineer concluded that the one from UIC had taken more advanced course work because of the large number of 400-level courses on the UIC transcript and very few 400-level courses on the UIUC transcript. Since both transcripts were from the "University of Illinois" it did not occur to him that the numbering system had different meanings. A similar misunderstanding is possible when students are being considered for graduate or professional school admission. The Office of Admissions and Records gets frequent calls from academic institutions inquiring as to the level of a given course.

Electronic filtered searches of résumés and transcripts are becoming more prevalent. As employers' and admission committees' software of the future do a pre-screening of potential candidates, we need to ensure our students are not disadvantaged by our numbering system. On first blush our numbering system appears close enough to the "standard" one such that UIUC could get lumped into an inappropriate filtering category.

(ii) Articulation with Community Colleges and 4-year Schools. Many UIUC students take classes at community colleges or 4-year schools over the summer or have transferred from a community college or a 4-year school after their first two years. The community colleges teach only 100- and 200-level courses. Students who take these courses expect they will be able to transfer their credits to equivalent-sounding 100- and 200-level courses at UIUC. However, many of the 200-level courses at UIUC (such as Latin 201, 202, CSB 211, 213, Finance 254, Microbiology 200, 201 etc.) are upper division courses taught primarily to juniors and seniors, but not acceptable for graduate credit. The availability of 000-level courses would also improve the articulation problems with community college courses. Many community colleges offer classes at the 000 level but also may have classes at the 100 level that UIUC does not consider college level. Mapping these courses to a 000 level would help remove some of the confusion that our current system engenders.

The non-equivalency of course levels causes confusion, frustration and misunderstanding across the state, according to Marilyn Murphy, Associate Director of Academic Policy Analysis, who represents the University of Illinois at the Illinois Articulation Initiative meetings. The proposed renumbering would create a much more understandable situation for students and administrators and allow UIUC to be a good partner to the community college network.

Budgetary and Staff Implications and Implementation: Many of the changes described here can be done as a matter of course in the UI-Integrate project and are already paid for. Others, such as the reprinting cost of handouts etc. due to renumbering will have to be born by the Provost's Office or the individual Colleges and Departments. Care will be taken in the timing of these changes to minimize cost. **Commitment of faculty time and effort could be minimal.** The required level of faculty involvement will be determined by each individual administrative unit as explained below.

All course numbers will be reviewed. Keith Marshall from the Office of the Provost will set-up an expedited system for approval. A list will be distributed to each unit of their present course numbers including default new course numbers. That list can be edited freely by the unit in consultation with its Dean's Office. All changes must be returned by a uniform date across campus. The default system will merely add 100 to all current 300- and 400- level courses. Under this option a course numbered "112" or "245" would stay the same, but "350" would become "450" and "401" would become "501." Appropriate courses that would become 000-level and 600-level would also be noted. Virtually no faculty time would be required if a College or Department chooses the default implementation option. However, if a College or Department plans to reclassify some courses into the 300-level all the changes should be made at once. Some Colleges or Departments may want to engage in wholesale course numbering revisions and would be given ample time to accomplish that task.

We strongly believe that this change to the course numbering system at UIUC will be very beneficial to the University community in the long run, and that the short-term costs will be more than offset by the benefits this change engenders.

Statement for Code of Policies and Regulations: Section 78 D. Course Numbering System should be edited to reflect the changes noted here. See attachment.

Effective Date: The effective date of these changes should precede their implementation in the UI-Integrate project. BANNER is scheduled to be fully implemented and in use by May 2004. Curriculum data must therefore be finished by March 2004, ready for Summer and Fall 2004 registration. Though this sounds distant, policy implications such as the ones discussed here need to be largely completed by March 2002 so that the "Design Phase" can begin and run through March 2003. Then the "Implementation Phase" begins and is finished in time for its March 2004 deadline. If course renumbering were completed at the College and Department level by the end of the Spring 2003 semester it would fit this timetable structure. Detailed implementation deadlines should be left to the administration.

Clearance:

David N. Ruzic, chair of UI-Integrate Faculty Advisory Committee