



## Memorandum

TO: Faculty Council Executive Committee

From: Scott Van Bramer

Date: December 11, 2011

Re: Transcript Designations and Academic Affairs

---

### Rationale:

The Faculty Council Academic Affairs Committee was asked to review and approve a new academic transcript designation for Service Learning. In executing this review, FCAA discovered that although Widener has other academic transcript designations (writing enriched courses, honors courses, etc.) there is no formal policy regarding the process by which such designations are created.

It seems clear that the Academy is moving toward more transcript designations overall. In addition to Service Learning, the University might be interested in adding other designations to the academic transcript in the future.

In light of that, FCAA is recommending that the University create a clear process for the addition of academic transcript designations to the University wide transcript system. In so doing, FCAA is hoping to create a clear system for the approval of designations.

Within the process of creating or approving designations, FCAA is hoping that clear, objective criteria for the designation of any course be documented and available to administration, faculty and students. Within the University, the generation and dissemination of these criteria will allow faculty to recognize when their courses might warrant such designations and will allow students to evaluate clearly their choices in taking these courses. Outside of the University, these clear, objective criteria will allow other institutions to more clearly understand the additional academic rigor required of students in these courses.

FCAA is **not** recommending that each course requesting a designation be approved by this committee. In fact, this would create a burdensome amount of work as well as infringe upon the academic freedom of the individual units.

Since the University transcript is a university-wide academic document, FCAA is recommending that for all transcript designations the criteria, process for the review of courses, and process for the periodic review of courses be approved by FCAA. For designations that are Unit specific this proposal would be reviewed for rigor by the individual Unit and reviewed by academic affairs to evaluate the clarity of the criteria and process. For designations that are University wide, Academic Affairs would judge the rigor and uniformity of the criteria and process.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1.) Establishing transcript designations**

- Proposals for new Widener University transcript designations should be approved by FCAA and Faculty Council
- Proposals for changing criteria for Widener University transcript designations should be approved by FCAA and Faculty Council
- For designations that are Unit specific this proposal would be reviewed for rigor by the individual Unit and reviewed by academic affairs to evaluate the clarity of the criteria and process
- For designations that are University wide, Academic Affairs would judge the rigor and uniformity of the criteria and process.

### **2.) Transcript designation proposals**

- Proposals for Transcript designations should include:
  - Clear, objective criteria for awarding the transcript designation.
  - A clear process for the approval of individual courses. (This will certainly vary from unit to unit across the University, as each unit has its own local process for course approvals.)
  - A clear process for the periodic review of the courses awarded the designation to ensure that they continue to meet the criteria for the designation

### **3.) Approved Designations**

- Criteria for approved designations:
  - Should be included in the University Catalog and listed on the University Web site.
  - Should be readily available to faculty, administration and students
  - Should be used to market the depth and breadth of a Widener University education.

### **4.) Existing designations**

- Criteria for existing designations should be collected, clarified and formatted as indicated above to create consistency throughout the University.
- Implementation for existing designations:
  - Each existing transcript designation across the University (Honors in General Education, Honors in Nursing, Honors in Business, etc.) will be asked to generate a document in the format identified above by the end of Fall semester 2012. (See attached addendum (A) for Honors in General Education)
    - The Honors in General Education document will be generated by the director of the honors program
    - The honors in Nursing document will be generated by Nursing

- The honors in business document will be generated by Business
  - The Writing Enriched document will be generated by the General Education Task Force
- The Academic Affairs Committee will review the documents for each designation to ensure that they have complete information and are not inconsistent with honors designations across academic units.
- The Committee will approve the criteria and review process in order to create a consistent standard for transcript designations across the University.

## **Transcript Designation Memo (Addendum A)**

### **The Honors Program in General Education:**

#### **Current Criteria:**

- 1) small class size, usually capped at 15.
- 2) ideally cover topics of an inventive, experimental nature, subjects not normally found in the traditional curriculum.
- 3) they are usually discussion-based rather than lecture in format.
- 4) they often integrate alternative means of assessment than those found in non-honors courses.
- 5) they are taught by dedicated faculty who challenge and engage students, thereby creating a dynamic, interactive environment that fosters deep intellectual development.

#### **For Honors sections of established courses:**

They should not merely duplicate the same course given to non-honors students, but should be redesigned to suit the abilities of the HPGE students. In other words, the syllabus, text(s), and assignments should depart from the norm, and should provide these students the opportunity to experience material differently than they would in a non-honors section of the course.

#### **Approval Process:**

-For courses specifically designed for the Honors Program in General Education (e.g. ENGL 103 and PHIL 116):

- Courses are approved by the curriculum and planning committee in the Unit where the course is offered. That approval includes review that the course meets the criteria for an Honors course.

-For honors sections of regular courses:

- The honors section of the regular course is evaluated by the director of the Honors Program in General Education to verify that the course meets the additional criteria for an Honors course.
- If a honors section of the course continues to be offered on a regular basis, the instructor will submit the course to director of the Honors Program in General Education for approval as an honors section.

-For special topics courses that are offered on a one time basis:

- the director of the Honors Program in General Education will verify that the course meets the additional criteria for an Honors course.

#### **Periodic review:**

Each semester the director of the Honors Program in General Education will review syllabi and course evaluations to verify that courses in the program continue to meet the criteria for Honors Courses. Courses that do not meet the criteria will either be modified or removed from the program.