Executive Council Special Committee:
  Streaming the Curricular Review and Approval Process

On December 10, 2010, the Executive Council approved appointment of the Special Committee.   It laid out the following overview and purpose:

"Overview: The Academic Senate is delegated authority by the UC Regents to review and approve all courses and curricula. The Davis Division has a three part review process 1) faculty create courses and curricula through the department; 2) the responsible college/school reviews and endorses these; 3) standing committees of the Davis Division has final approval authority for all course and curricular matters.

The timing for this Special Committee results from several recent developments. The campus is in the process of implementing a new Integrated Course Management System (ICMS). This promises to facilitate both the process of submitting new courses for approval and also streamlining the mechanics of the review process itself. Secondly, the recent budget cutbacks have left the campus with reduced resources at the departmental and college/school levels. Reducing the workload at those levels is crucial. The Davis Division is also seeing an increase in the number of courses (and units) being transferred from other institutions and programs. The processes for these have been quite diffuse, and it is time to normalize all of these within the broader context of ensuring excellence of the education we provide our students.

Purpose: A special committee is proposed to review the processes associated with all curricular review (all courses offered towards all degrees by departments, graduate groups, University Extension or other units, including courses offered partially or totally online) to assure the Division has a process in place that is timely and effective. The special committee will review the overall process with a goal of minimizing redundancy, reviews and tasks that do not add value and expediting review and approval. The hope is the special committee will bring forth recommended strategies to reduce overall workload without compromising the rigor of the curricular review process. In addition, the special committee is tasked with consulting with affected colleges and schools to ensure a broad-based and fully informed report and recommendations."

The Special Committee met on May 5, 2011 and June 8, 2011.   The following points were agreed upon:

- All course proposals will be submitted directly by the departments to the Committee on Courses of Instruction. The Academic Senate Office, through COCI, will assign a staff member to review all course proposals for accuracy and completeness before the proposal is forwarded for college or divisional review. The staff member will be tasked with resolving issues and questions with the faculty member and/or department submitting the proposal. Disagreements between the submitting department and the COCI staff may be referred to the Chair of COCI, whose decision is final.

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- In an effort to reduce error rates overall and speed up course approval processing, a record of issues identified by the Academic Senate staff member will be maintained and reviewed annually by the Committee on Courses of Instruction.   The data will be collected with sufficient detail that departments or colleges/schools in need of targeted instruction can be identified. The Committee will be responsible for identifying and addressing routine errors through dialog with individual departments, schools, and colleges and requesting ICMS system enhancement or targeted training to resolve on-going issues.

- To ensure cross-college availability of courses proposed as well as to reduce the number of courses a college/professional school is required to review, the ICMS must establish a queue of courses available for review by each college or professional school.   The course will be available for review by all colleges and schools during this period and comments may be submitted to inform COCI's review. The school or college will have three weeks to identify whether or not the course proposal will be removed from the queue and reviewed at that level. After three weeks all courses remaining in the queue will be directed to COCI for final review and approval action.   If college or school review is elected, the proposal will receive complete review at that level and, if approved, be forwarded to COCI typically within eight weeks. COCI may resolve course issues between colleges. ICMS needs to be designed to allow management of the course in queue by responsible staff.

- ICMS must facilitate cross-referencing of courses.   COCI must have data available to assess the impact of both course cancellation and creation. Insufficient data to assess proposal impact on this campus prohibits effective course management at the COCI and local level. Further the lack of reliable cross-reference allows unintended duplication of course content and effort. COCI will work with the ICMS developers to facilitate effective cross-reference fields in the system.

- The process for identifying the number of units to be awarded is a major source of confusion and reason for return of course proposals to the department, school or college.   The units awarded for each course is a formula based on the Carnegie rule and the effort associated with learning activities selected by the faculty member at the time the course is created. (A list of learning activities is available at: http://academicsenate.ucdavis.edu/committee_cci_learningactivities.cfm.)   The system must be designed to calculate the units based on information input by the faculty member when creating the course. A faculty member may seek to override the assigned number of units by providing a detailed request for review and approval by COCI.

- College and school reviews must be able to focus on content rather than accurate completion of a form.   It is recommended that colleges and schools

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> review only new courses, changes to course description (substantive changes), changes to learning activity which impacts the units awarded, course outlines, readings and waiver of a final. Please note: COCI does not review changes to: instructor, year, quarter, semester or session.

- The determination of GE eligibility for a course may be determined only by the COCI.

- By spring 2012, COCI should report to the Executive Council concerning the progress of the revised process.   This report should include comments regarding COCI workload and the appropriate size of the committee. It should also make recommendations regarding the review of some course approvals directly by COCI without the need for college or school review. Finally it should report to the Executive Director of the Davis Division of the Academic Senate concerning the effectiveness of dedicating staff resources for a pre-review of course proposals.

Special Committee Observations:

- A review of the reasons course proposals are relegated (returned) by college committees and COCI suggests that they are generally because of errors in the calculation of units or the proposal is incomplete.

- The data are not available to definitively determine the cause for delayed course proposal processing.   Anecdotally, there is a belief that course proposals can take up to two years to funnel through the approval process.   COCI conducts a review within 6 weeks of receipt.   COCI's review time is lengthened when a course proposal is relegated due to error or question.