Recommendations concerning
Special Topics Courses

The College recognizes many ways in which Special Topics courses enhance its educational opportunities. Special Topics courses are courses which departments and programs can offer on an *ad hoc* basis without going through the usual process of approval required of new courses. Most departments and programs have at least one approved course number for this purpose.

The flexibility made available by our 30 or so Special Topics courses encourages intellectual creativity and innovation. On the one hand, Special Topics courses allow a department or program to offer a course to determine if it should become one of its regular course offerings. Is there sufficient student interest in this topic? Is the professor sufficiently committed to the course to offer it on a regular basis? If the course is interdisciplinary, offering it initially as a Special Topics course enables its faculty to see how they will work together successfully. Courses with innovative and specialized topics or with special curricular innovation are more easily offered initially as Special Topics courses before going through the process of getting a new course approved by the faculty.

On the other hand, Special Topics courses can be offered with the intent of being unique. These courses allow departments and programs to take advantage of timely events (e.g., art exhibits or political events), and of the specific talents of faculty members (including visiting and adjunct faculty). The option of Special Topics courses enables the College to take advantage of these unique opportunities for the benefit of our students. For all of these reasons, and more, the College values its practice of offering Special Topics courses.

While the faculty values having these irregular courses as a regular part of the curricula of its departments and programs, it is important that Special Topics courses not be completely detached. To ensure this, Special Topics courses will be discussed within the department or program before they are announced in the course schedule. The other faculty members of the department or program should understand what the course will probably cover, how the course fits into its curriculum, and why it is being offered. These conversations promote collegiality and ensure curricular integrity.

A course can be *taught* as a Special Topics course only once. Before it can be taught a second time, it must go through the usual course approval process. (It is recognized that a Special Topics course might be *offered* to students, but not actually taught because of insufficient enrollments. So, a course may be offered more than once as a Special Topics course, but may only be taught once as such a course.)

Approved by the Representative Faculty Senate 1/26/09