Faculty and Curriculum Development Centre

Guidelines for course titles and course descriptions

Roderick, Carol

Guidelines for Course
Titles and Course Descriptions

Course titles and course descriptions work together to provide students with a summary of the knowledge, skills and sensibilities they will explore in the course. They also highlight the teaching methods, learning activities and modes of assessment that will be used. Effective course titles and course descriptions are clear and written to increase student interest.

Here are best practice guidelines for writing course titles and course descriptions:

Course Titles:
- Are 30 characters maximum, including blank spaces, due to parameters in the student information system
- Reflect the course content and approach to learning
- Do not contain the program name in the title
- Use a capital letter for the first word and all other key words in the title, including compound words, e.g., *Cross-Disciplinary*
- Do not capitalize articles (*a, an, the*) conjunctions (*and, for, nor, of, so*) and prepositions (*as, at, by, from, in, of, on, through, to, versus, with*) unless they are the first word of the title
- Use *&* rather than *and*
- Present abbreviations without a period, e.g. *Intro* or *Hist* rather than *Intro.* or *Hist.*
- Use number characters instead of numerals or spelled-out numbers, e.g. *8* rather than *VIII* or *eight*

Course Descriptions:
- Are 100 words or less
- Accurately describe the knowledge, skills, and sensibilities addressed
- Highlight teaching methods, learning activities and modes of assessment
- Are written in the present tense with active verbs
- Use vocabulary that is accessible and consistent with students' grasp of discipline-specific terminology
- Employ language that is direct, concise, and professional
- Do not contain self-evident phrases, e.g. *In this course...* or *Students will...*
- Do not contain personal pronouns such as I, you, or we
- Use short clear phrases
- Avoid naming specific software or hardware that may change over time
- Avoid repeating the course title in the course description
- Co-requisites and conditions do not appear with the course description in Colleague. Where this detail is needed, add a note to the bottom of the course description.

    For example:

    Note: Students must register in both LIFE-2001 and LIFE-2002 to allow for continuity and, both courses must be taken in the same academic year.