



MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 29, 2000

TO: College Presidents
Chief Continuing Education Officers

FROM: Steve Scott

SUBJECT: Course classification and audit reviews

As part of the yearly program audit conducted at each community college, program auditors routinely check courses for proper course classification. Recently, it appears some concern and confusion regarding this process has surfaced. This memo is intended to clarify the audit procedures used to review courses for proper course classification.

There are many instances where it is appropriate to offer similar subject matter under different program classifications. For example, both art and computer classes may be offered under curriculum, occupational extension, and/or community service programs. However, since these three programs are intended to meet different community needs and are funded in different ways and at different rates, the college must ensure that each course offered is appropriately classified under the correct program area. Program auditors verify proper course classification through class visits and review of class documentation in order to ensure that classes are being conducted in accordance with their program classifications as defined in 23 NCAC 2(E).0101.

When considering the proper course classification for a course, **course content and college intent are the key determinants**. How these two factors are reviewed by program auditors is discussed below:

- 1. Course content.** Auditors check to make sure that the course content, as evidenced by the course outline and class activities during unannounced class visits, is appropriate for the way the course has been classified. Curriculum and occupational extension courses should have learning objectives which are reflective of the educational and training purposes of these programs. Generally, community service courses tend to be less rigorous and to focus on students' personal or leisure needs rather than occupational or professional employment. Additionally, class activities should be reflective of the course outline. Often, auditors find that a class may look like it is appropriately classified based on the course description and outline, but that the instruction actually taking place would be more appropriately classified under a different program area. Instructors should understand the importance of using a class outline that accurately reflects the actual class content and activities so that college staff may appropriately classify the course.

2. **Course intent.** In order to review the intent of the course, auditors consider the manner in which the course was offered and publicized. Factors such as course length, class location, course repetition, course structure (being divided into multiple levels, etc.), and advertising methods are reviewed. These factors indicate the reason the course was offered and the student and community needs the course is intended to address. A course should be offered in such a way as to meet the purpose of the program area in which it is classified, as specified by 23 NCAC 2E.0101.

There are a number of factors that may trigger an auditor to review a particular class or program, one of which is the type of students who routinely register for the class. However, the perception that course classification is based on student intent or that student composition must meet some sort of "50% rule" is inaccurate. Auditors have never used student make-up as a hard and fast rule for course classification; rather, it is sometimes used as a flag to identify classes that may need to be reviewed for appropriate content and delivery. Often, extended patterns of student participation, as reflected over multiple semesters, may indicate that a course needs to be reclassified. Since instructors often modify courses to meet student needs, classes that are routinely attended by students taking the course for reasons other than the original course intent often evolve into avocational or other types of courses.

In particular, recent concerns over course classification have centered around classes in which a large number of seniors are registered. In the past, curriculum and occupational extension classes that have evolved into avocational or recreational classes have typically attracted a large number of retirees and, as a result, classes comprised primarily of senior citizens over a period of time will probably receive a closer look by the auditors. This is probably the reason for the impression that auditors base course classification on the demographics of the students. However, the fact that a course is attended primarily by seniors would never, in itself, be the basis for a determination that a class was not truly curriculum or occupational extension. Course content and the manner in which the course is offered are, and always have been, the determining factors for course classification.

Colleges concerned with ensuring that a course is properly classified should pay attention to the course content and the manner in which the course is offered. Curriculum and occupational extension courses that routinely attract students who enroll for personal or leisure enrichment purposes should be reviewed by the college to determine their proper course classification. Often, we find that these courses are not being delivered in the manner originally intended and may, therefore, need to be reclassified. When courses are offered in such a manner as to appropriately fit under a specific program category and instructors adhere to course outlines that are reflective of the course classification, these courses are not likely to attract large numbers of students enrolling for avocational or other reasons over extended periods of time and proper classification is not likely to be an issue.

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If you have questions concerning proper course classification, please do not hesitate to contact your local program auditor or Shea Henson at (919) 733-3051, ext. 203.

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