

RFP: SAS *Signature* COURSES

<http://sas.rutgers.edu/signature>

The SAS Signature Course Steering Committee (SCSC) invites proposals for SAS Signature courses. Review of proposals by the SCSC is on-going and most frequently is an iterative process. Faculty are urged to make initial inquiries before investing time in crafting full proposals. Please send ideas, inquiries, and proposals in care of Susan Lawrence, slawrence@sas.rutgers.edu, SAS Dean for Educational Initiatives and the Core Curriculum.

About SAS *Signature* Courses:

The Signature Course Initiative supports the development of *new courses of grand scope and size that introduce students to the enduring questions that the liberal arts and sciences disciplines within the modern research university address, particularly as they pertain to the challenges of the 21st century our students will face.* These courses are central to the new [Core Curriculum](#) and are particularly important to the 21st century challenges section of the Core.

Focused on *big ideas and questions*, Signature Courses provide students with an experiential introduction to the liberal arts and sciences curriculum. Created and regularly taught by our *outstanding teacher-scholars* who have a particular *mastery of the large lecture format*, the Signature course model is designed to create large groups of students with a common basis for intellectual exchange *and* honor outstanding SAS faculty by showcasing their teaching. The SAS Signature Course Initiative brings together primarily first and second year students with “our most eloquent and demanding faculty from across the disciplinary spectrum,” to make the world of ideas tangible for our students and ignite the transformative process that characterizes liberal arts and sciences education.

The SAS *Signature* Course Selection Criteria:

- 1) focus is on broad, intellectually sweeping, multi-disciplinary question(s) of enduring and current importance (generally summed up with a pithy memorable title); focus is appealing to first year students beyond those interested in a particular major / open to students with a broad range of disciplinary specializations. Other relevant departments have been consulted and their expertise, where appropriate, has been incorporated; and the course fits well into the broader SAS curriculum and does not overlap (too much) with other Signature courses.
- 2) faculty member(s) has a demonstrated ability to successfully engage students in the large lecture format and makes a minimum three year commitment to teach the course endorsed by faculty members’ department chair (after three years the Steering Committee will review the viability of continuing the course, with the presumption being that well-enrolled courses will continue)
- 3) explicitly addresses and engages new [Core Curriculum learning goals](#); preference given to courses linked to a 21st C Challenge and a 21st C learning goal. Incorporates direct *assessment* of Core Curriculum Learning Goals using an embedded assignment scored on the [Core rubrics](#)
- 4) adopts a workable course structure suited to the needs of novice undergraduates and includes a plan for staffing recitation sections

The SAS Signature Course Steering Committee (SCSC) invites proposals for SAS Signature courses from members of the faculty who excel in the large lecture format and would like the opportunity to teach these special courses on *a regular basis for several years*. A minimum of a three-year commitment is required from faculty with SCSC annual review subsequently.

FOCUS

Creative proposals for *multi-disciplinary (or pre-disciplinary) courses of broad intellectual sweep* suitable for students *from across the disciplines* are sought for this initiative. Courses may carry departmental numbers or the SAS interdisciplinary number; they should be offered at the 100 or 200 level and be *open and accessible to students with a broad range of disciplinary specializations*. At the same time, we urge departments to make room in their major requirements for the student who begins in one of these courses and subsequently seeks to major in the area even if some other 100 or 200 level introduction to the discipline is also required for the major.

CORE CURRICULUM GOALS

SAS Signature courses should be designed to *satisfy several of the new SAS Core Curriculum's learning goals, especially one of the 21st Century Challenge learning goals*. Faculty should clearly identify the Core Curriculum learning goals that students in the course will achieve in the course proposal and on the course syllabus. Please also include *a plan for assessment of student success in achieving the Core learning goals as described in* [The Faculty Guide to Submitting Courses for Certification in the Core Curriculum](#), which is available on the SAS OUE web page. <http://sasoue.rutgers.edu>

ASSESSMENT OF CORE CURRICULUM GOALS.

Signature Course proposals must meet all the same assessment requirements as any other course being proposed for certification in the Core Curriculum. We do require Signature Courses to report their assessment results annually and hope that they will be a model for Core Curriculum assessment.

As described more fully in the [Faculty Guide to the Core](#), *a "best practice" assessment is simply to consistently include an assignment or exam question that asks students to "do" the certified Core goal in the context of the specific course material, and score the assignment using the rubrics that the CRC has developed for each of the Core learning goals*. Click [here](#) to see these rubrics. These rubrics are designed at a level of generality that allows them to be used to assess achievement of Core Curriculum goals in many different disciplines.

In addition, given the special role and prominence of Signature Courses, we employ one indirect assessment measure by adding one prompt to the Student Instructional Rating Survey forms that asks the students to indicate how likely they would be to recommend the course to other students. Ideally, this involves faculty agreeing to allow online administration of the SIRS.



[click here](#)

Interested faculty are urged to review our past and current offerings. A full catalog of our Signature Courses is available at <http://sas.rutgers.edu/signature> (please click on each for a fuller description) along with pdfs of the brochures we have done each semester (see links on the right). Of particular note is the Signature Course video available above. In addition, there are videos of each professor discussing his or her course available at <http://www.youtube.com/course?list=EC884308377251E44D> (Rutgers Channel: School of Arts & Sciences: Signature Courses)

Assistant Dean for Assessment, Karen Dennis, is available to provide assistance as you develop appropriate assessment tools. She can be reached at kdennis@sas.rutgers.edu.

FORMAT and CREDIT

Each Signature course includes *large lectures and weekly or bi-weekly small discussion sections*. They are typically structured as two 80 minute lectures each week plus a 55 minute recitation section each week (4 credit option – strongly preferred) OR as two 80 minute lectures a week with the second lecture replaced by a 80 minute recitation section every other week (3 credit option).

The Scheduling Office will work directly with departments to arrange lecture space and schedule recitation sections.

FUNDING AND STAFFING – NEW MODEL

Faculty selected to offer a Signature Course will receive \$5000 to support their research, teaching, and/or their department's needs each semester that they teach the course.

In addition, faculty may apply for a one-time allocation of up to \$5000 to support course development prior to or during the first offering of the course. Each semester, faculty may request up to \$5000 for administrative support for the course. (Awards will be based in part on enrollment.)

The Signature Course Initiative will fund the instruction of recitation sections, typically by providing funds to hire PTLs or co-adjutant instructors. If needed, the SAS Office of Undergraduate Education may be able to assist you in locating qualified instructors. The standard staffing ratio for Signature Courses is 25 students per section. Each section is equivalent to 1 credit. Other arrangements for staffing recitation sections are possible, including the use of non-tenure track faculty with annual appointments, as long as the total instructional cost does not exceed 150% of the cost of staffing the sections at standard PTL rates.¹ Departments may also assign their own TAs to Signature Courses but SAS will not provide additional TA support to departments that choose to do so. Proposals for Signature Courses must include a plan for the staffing of recitation sections using **the attached projected budget request form**.

Departments and faculty benefit from the visibility, acclaim, extensive PR presence, and unparalleled teaching opportunity Signature Courses provide. Faculty who have taught Signature Courses routinely report that it is the best teaching experience they have had in the 20 to 35 or 40 years they have been teaching. SAS Signature Courses should be considered part of a faculty member's regular departmental teaching load and as part of the department's regular service contribution to SAS and the University. Signature Courses bear departmental numbers and are included in the department's enrollment figures.

The SAS Office of Undergraduate Education handles publicity, and faculty are advised to apply for speaker support directly through the New Brunswick Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs <http://aresty.rutgers.edu/for-aresty-faculty/educational-enrichment>

¹ Faculty teaching in 2013-14 should contact Susan Lawrence and Mike Beals about the phase in.

A NOTE REGARDING APPROPRIATE STRUCTURES FOR *Signature* COURSES:

Not surprisingly at a research university so rich with faculty expertise in a multitude of areas, faculty proposing Signature courses often jump at the idea of pressing distinguished colleagues into service as experts on specific topics to be addressed under a broad theme. There is, of course, obviously much to be said for such an approach and it mimics the multi-disciplinary experiences we as scholars find so enriching. However, in thinking about structuring a Signature course, there are a number of things about the audience and the mission of Signature courses that are that are worth remembering.

First, unlike our own specialized research and writing, Signature courses are meant to be broad and sweeping in their scope in order to provide students with a context for their more specialized studies later and in order to reignite the innate curiosity all too often tamped down by K-12 experiences. Consequently, it is imperative that the course material cohere for the students --- the danger of bringing in multiple experts is that students will get snapshots of multiple specialized areas without being equipped to synthesis and draw connections between the lectures. There is a danger that they will get 14 exquisite examinations of particular aspects of the fabled elephant, without ever understanding that it is, in fact, an elephant we're examining.

Second, Signature courses are generally 100 and 200 level courses attracting many first and some second year students. These are students that are in the midst of the transition from high school to University and are struggling to learn the norms of our environment. They are, naturally, exceedingly concerned to know what is expected of them – on assignments and exams – but also intellectually. They need a guide. They are easily confused and frustrated by an array of expert lectures that don't make explicit direct links with the material presented at the previous class meeting. They need us, as faculty, to model the connections and coherence we are asking of them.

Reading many student evaluations of courses makes it clear that for all the merits of a 'cast of experts' approach, it is, in fact, extraordinarily difficult to successfully pull off a Signature course employing multiple faculty members. Too often students see it as a parade of "substitute teachers" rather than as an intellectual smorgasbord. For it to work well, the faculty involved must truly work as a team, coordinating their lectures with one another and conveying to the students that they are in constant dialog with one another literally and figuratively. Assignments, expectations and grading must be transparent to the students from the beginning. *There must be one or two central faculty members that students clearly identify as "in charge" – serving as the coordinator and the unifying last word on substantive, administrative, and evaluative issues.*

Hence, there must be a very careful weighing of the advantages of bringing in the advanced expertise of an ensemble cast, with the clear advantages of relying on a single (or pair of) dynamic and engaging faculty member with the breadth of vision and knowledge to bring the subject to life for the students and provoke them to seek out the specialized experts in future upper-level courses.

Signature Course Budget Request Form

Name and Number of Course:		
Faculty and Department:		
Semester:	Anticipated Enrollment:	Credits:
Category	Details	Amount Requested
Support for Faculty Research and Teaching	Automatic When two faculty are team teaching a course, each will receive \$3000	\$5000
One-time Course Development Funds	<i>Provide details and justifications</i>	<i>(up to \$5000)</i>
Course Administration Support	<i>Provide details and justifications</i>	<i>(up to \$5000)</i>
Recitation Section Instructors	<i>Include how many sections are planned and how the department will staff them. Please note that SAS will not approve requests for supplemental instructional funds that exceed 150% of standard PTL rates. e. g. (total enrollment divided by 25) x (1.5 x PTL one-credit rate.)</i>	<i>(up to 150% of standard PTL rates)</i>
Other course expenses	<i>Provide details and justifications</i>	