

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 Sharon Bzostek, sbzostek@sas.rutgers.edu SAS Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education.

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 addresses as they pertain to the challenges of the 21st century our students will face.* These courses are central to the [Core Curriculum](#) and generally should be candidates for one of the Contemporary Challenges goals.

Focused on *big ideas and questions*, Signature Courses provide students with an experiential introduction to the 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. 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 an arts and sciences education.

The SAS *Signature* Course Selection Criteria:

- 1) The course focuses on broad, intellectually sweeping, multi-disciplinary question(s) of enduring and current importance (generally summed up with a pithy memorable title. The course focus will be appealing to first-year students beyond those interested in a particular major and is accessible 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 with other Signature courses.
- 2) The 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 (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 [Core Curriculum learning goals](#). 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. *We highly recommend that faculty that are considering proposing a Signature course reach out to faculty that have taught Signature courses about their experience.*

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 generally carry departmental numbers; 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

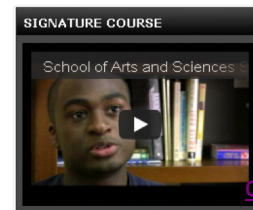
SAS Signature courses should be designed to *satisfy one or more of the SAS Core Curriculum's learning goals*. Faculty should clearly identify the Core Curriculum learning goals that students in the course will achieve in the course proposal and on the course syllabus. Please also include *a plan for 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](#).

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.

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.

David Goldman, Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, is available to provide assistance as you develop appropriate assessment tools. dgoldman@sas.rutgers.edu



[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)

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 – 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).

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 the 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.*