



University Senate PROPOSAL FORM

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Title of Proposal:	Student-Initiated Courses (SICs)
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Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):	Undergraduate
Description of issue/concern/policy in question:	Some universities have a program that allows students to create their own courses (e.g. Rice, Stanford). UMCP currently does not have a program allowing students to do that.
Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:	To create a program similar to those at other universities that allow students to create courses. This would make UMCP even more desirable which would lead to a variety of advantages, which include an increase in number of students, which results in an increase in money and school status. It also gives the students an opportunity to gain experience in areas that that would normally be very difficult to get.
Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:	The President's Promise promises that "each student can engage in a special experience and offers the opportunity for extraordinary growth." The SICs can be included in the choices for the promise. The program could be initially based on the programs from other universities and then deviate when the basis is set. Details are in the attached paper.
Additional Information:	See the attached paper.

*Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to senate-admin@umd.edu or
University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall,
College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!*

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Introduction

What are Student-Initiated Courses?

Student-Initiated Courses (SICs) are courses that students create and oversee on a topic of their choosing. The topic can range from important issues such as stem cells, to various concentrations such as “Chemistry of Beer and Wine,” to hobbies such as yarn weaving. These courses are similar to one-credit seminars and practicums that are offered here at UMCP. Students like to take SICs because they are fun, interesting, and not as difficult as average college courses.

Examples at Other Universities

A large number of schools currently have programs that allow students to create SICs. One in particular is University of California, Berkeley; they have a student-run program called DeCal which administers the SIC service at Berkeley. Their website consists of full details on their history and detailed instructions for students on how to create a course. The website also contains a list of courses that are currently being offered as well as a list of courses that were previously offered. Since UC Berkeley happens to be one of UMCP’s peer institutions, it should not be too difficult to persuade them to help in the creation of our own program.

Survey Results

I surveyed 24 students at UMCP and asked if they would like to take SICs on a topic in which they are interested. I received a uniform 24/24 “Yes” on this question. Then, I asked if they would still take it if SICs were unable to boost their GPA. Only one person switched to “No” (See Fig. 1 in the Appendix). That means a large majority of students wish to take courses in which they are interested not for a GPA boost, but for a learning experience. I also asked if students would like to create courses. Out of the 24 respondents, only 10 said “Yes” (See Fig. 2). This is still good as we do not want over half of the students to attempt creating SICs – it could overburden the university. For the students who said “Yes” to this question, I also asked what courses they would like to create, and I received a myriad of responses including: cooking, social dynamics, art/animation, and competitive gaming. If I had more data, there would definitely be a much wider range of courses that students are willing to teach.

Proposed Program

President's Promise

The President's Promise states that "each student has the chance to engage in a special experience and offers the opportunity for extraordinary personal growth... [Some students] take on leadership roles or find fulfillment in community service programs" (The President's Promise). SICs would be a very good addition to the list of opportunities provided by this promise as it fits the description very well and it gives students experience that they would receive with the other programs as well.

SIC Creation Procedure

It is very important to ensure that the course creation process is easy because more students would be more willing to participate. In all universities that allow SICs, students must follow certain procedures to allow them to create their course. UC Berkeley defines these students as course facilitators:

"You are a facilitator, not a lecturer, not an instructor. You are there to help students teach each other. You don't have the threat of a letter grade at your disposal – rather, the merit of the subject material has to stand on its own. Your course must engage them. Most importantly, you are not their friend. You are their peer, and ultimately their evaluator. You must be willing to fail a student who deserves to fail. Many students see DeCals as merely an easy work-free way of getting units; don't let them sabotage your integrity by proving them right. Facilitating can be psychologically taxing. Be prepared for it. The only way to learn how to facilitate / how to teach is... to teach. Experience and introspection will guide the evolution of your teaching philosophy. Everyone teaches in their own different way, it's just a matter of finding your own groove." (How to Facilitate)

Similar to the other universities, the facilitators will be required to create a detailed syllabus stating the content being taught throughout the fifteen weeks of the semester. Facilitators must also find a faculty sponsor to help in the course creation process and in teaching the course. The faculty sponsor must be willing to sponsor the course as well as to help the facilitator organize the course as faculty are already experienced in this field. To ensure that the course does not consist of only the facilitator, the facilitator must also provide a list of at least six students who are interested in the course. The maximum seat count will depend on the course's initial popularity and location.

Specifics

SICs will be one credit using pass/fail grading. The schedule will be to the facilitator's choosing, but the course should not be more than three hours per week. Also, there should be a maximum number of credits a student can receive from SICs. Three or four may be the best option as it would then count for one elective course. Another option would have the limit be solely based on the maximum Pass/Fail credits one can have, which is currently twelve. Additionally, a facilitator may only initiate a limited number of courses, so that other students may have a chance and it would also be a good experience for the facilitator to decide who would be the best successor for a certain course. Course evaluations for SICs should be no different than those for other courses.

Administration

Almost all programs that organize SICs are organized by students. In some universities, the program is managed by their Student Council. Since we do not have student councils in every field, the administrative decisions may be slightly biased. Therefore, I propose that we create a new committee solely for organizing SICs. The Senate may be involved to make the process smoother. The committee could even be a part of the Senate, consisting of one faculty chair and the remaining being students in various fields.

Approving Courses

The program's administrative committee will handle the proposed courses from facilitators. In order for a course to be approved, the facilitator proposing the course must have fully completed the procedures described earlier. This procedure includes creating a well-detailed syllabus, finding a faculty sponsor, and obtaining a list of students to take the course. The syllabus must be well organized and contain enough information to fill all fifteen weeks of the semester. It does not matter how important the topic is for the students' career – as long as enough students are willing to learn about it, it can be accepted. In the event that two facilitators wish to create courses about the same or very similar topics, the facilitator with the better syllabus plan and/or academic standing will have priority. Co-facilitating may be permitted.

Categorization

The SICs can either be categorized in the already existing departments, or into a new department, such as USIC. If the SICs are categorized in the existing departments, then the course description could look like:

“CHEM198 The Chemistry of Beer and Wine (SIC); (1 credit) Grade Method: P-F”

If all the SICs were always the same course number or limited to a range of numbers, then it would be very easy to navigate the Schedule of Classes to find them. The other option is to put all the SICs into the new department, so everything is easy to find. That is how the other universities handle this situation. The problem is that not only will all the course topics be scrambled, but students will not see the class if they are scanning for extra one-credit classes and do not know about this program, which hopefully will not be the case. My suggestion is that the numbers can be whatever number is available, and the course has the (SIC) tag, similar to the CORE class tags. There will also a link that shows all SIC courses organized under each department, again, similar to the way CORE classes are handled. That way, students who know about the program can find classes easily, and students who are just scanning for classes can too.

Facilitator Restrictions

Facilitators who are planning to teach their own SIC may not enroll in their own course. Instead, a one-credit UNIV course can be created for the student teachers to take that deals with the learning experience or similar issues. Facilitators do not need to be paid for instructing a course, as many students are willing to create a class just for their own experience. If encouragement is absolutely necessary, which I personally doubt, there could be a small stipend of at most fifteen hundred dollars per semester (\$12.50/hr for 7.5 hrs/wk), similar to most teaching assistant stipends.. Facilitators may not directly charge fees to their students but should

instead ask students to purchase materials from a separate vendor, such as the University Book Center. When a facilitator decides to pass or fail students, the facilitator should give this information to the faculty advisor, who then reports it to the university.

Name of the Program

An important issue is the name of the program. It would be best if the program name was not simple and straightforward like “University of Maryland, College Park Student-Initiated Courses Program,” as I personally find it rather boring. A proper name can be decided by the student body after dealing with the more important details.

Relationship with UC Berkeley

Finally, since UC Berkeley is one of UMCP’s peer schools, if we are ever having trouble in any aspect, we could contact them at any time for assistance. We would also be listed in DeCal’s “DeCal at Other Campuses” page (<http://www.decal.org/about/decal-at-other-campuses>) so that we would be united with other schools that offer SICs.

Benefits

Leadership and Teaching Skills

The most important benefit is that the facilitators will develop important skills at UMCP, two of them being leadership and teaching. Leadership will be strengthened as the facilitator guides and gives enthusiasm to the students. Having good leadership skills will be very beneficial to any student as he/she moves on after graduating. Teaching skills will obviously be strengthened since the facilitators teach the course. Teaching will be a very valuable skill for the students who wish to become teachers for grade school, or students who wish to go to graduate school to either become a teaching assistant or ultimately become a professor. Even if the student does not have a future in educating, having good teaching skills will still be very important in the workplace to provide instructions to those who need it.

Enhanced Variety in Curriculum

The students taking the SICs will have the opportunity to learn about subjects in which they are interested that are not offered anywhere else. An enhanced curriculum will greatly broaden a student's viewpoints and become more well-rounded. Also, learning about enjoyable subjects will reduce stress caused by the other aspects of college.

Social Capital

Each SIC should be comprised of students who enjoy the subject, so the facilitator and the students all have similar interests. This will further increase their social capital as SICs are generally more collaborative as opposed to lectures where there are very few student-to-student or even student-to-professor interactions.

Increased Recruitment

Having SICs available at UMCP would make the university more desirable for incoming freshmen. Therefore, the university will have a better chance in receiving better students, which will boost our status. Further predictions are difficult to foresee without a slippery slope.

Increased Revenue

More freshmen results in more money for the university from tuition and living expenses. Also, having more students taking more credits also nets more tuition fees. Recall that facilitators do not need to be paid unless they need motivation, so there does not need to be a large investment to start this program.

Potential Problems and Strategies to Manage Them

Duplicating Club Activities

Some courses may be very similar to clubs. However, there are already courses and clubs that have the same topic. For example, there are sports clubs and there are also sports courses like in the Kinesiology department. The difference between the two is that clubs mostly do not require attendance and courses usually are very intent on improving the skills involved. Therefore, if a facilitator decides to create a course that is very similar to a certain club, the club should at least be involved in the organization of the course. For example, the facilitator could be involved in the club or the club can be used for advertising the class and vice versa.

Lack of Academic Merit

Some courses may also seem to be completely unacademic. For example, there are courses at other universities whose topics are “Playing Outside” and “Star Wars Galaxy.” However, the facilitators for these courses created syllabi and interesting descriptions for these classes to make students even more interested in the subject. For example, the Star Wars Galaxy course description states:

“Come learn the most exciting and climactic events from all epochs of Star Wars—those explosive turning points in the shaping of the Galaxy. Follow the adventures of Luke Skywalker as he struggles to rebuild the Jedi Order; behold the black soul of each Dark Lord of the Sith, from such familiar names as Darth Sidious and Darth Vader, to ancient Sith Lords so strong with the Dark Side they could annihilate entire planets with a single thought. Learn how Hutts reproduce and why clone troopers can slay Jedi but their stormtrooper descendents can't even kill Ewoks. All this and much much more!” (Heiken)

The syllabus for this course can be found in the appendix.

Knowing about the Star Wars Galaxy may not seem to be the most useful skill for one's future, but this is basically a literary analysis class, which should be a perfectly academic course. In fact, in Fall 2010, there was an Honors seminar about J.R.R. Tolkien.

Poor Facilitators

Occasionally, a SIC may end up as a failure because of the facilitator. The facilitators are trusted to follow their approved syllabi to ensure that the course does not become disorganized. In the event that a course fails, the facilitator must take responsibility and take some form of punishment or redevelopment, such as attending a seminar or writing an apology letter to the administrative committee and the faculty sponsor, and a failure in the one credit UNIV course that facilitators may take. If a facilitator decides to abuse the power and privileges given, such as failing an entire class without a good reason or accepting bribes, then this facilitator must be severely apprehended.

Conclusion

Allowing SICs would be very beneficial to UMCP because the students here would be able to gain valuable experience such as leading and teaching skills, and those who do not facilitate will be able to learn about topics they enjoy and to have more fun. The university will also be more desirable for incoming freshmen, causing higher recruitment and more income. In conclusion, I hope you consider this proposal for the better of the university.

Appendix

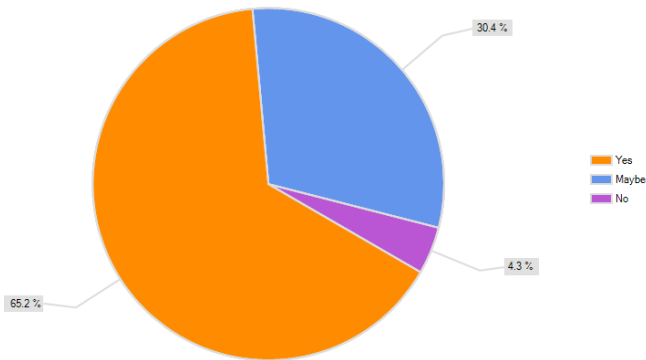


Fig 1. Results of the question: “Note that you most likely cannot boost your GPA with [SICs], but only receive an elective credit. Would you still take them?” Number of people surveyed: 24

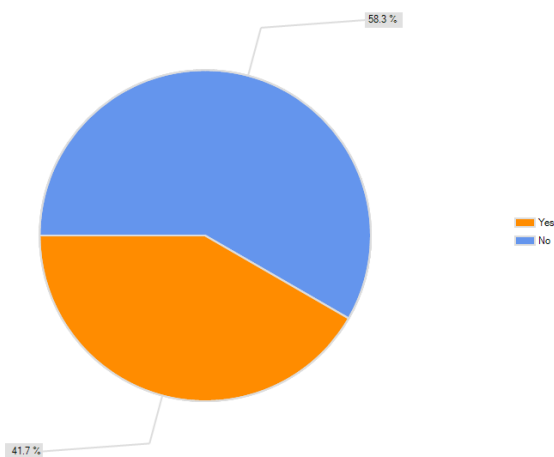


Fig 2. Results of the question: “Student-Initiated Courses are courses that a student can create and they can be just about anything. Would you be interested in creating a course?” Number of people surveyed: 24

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"Student-Initiated Seminars." *Office of the Dean of the College*. Web. 16 Oct. 2010. <http://www.princeton.edu/odoc/special_academic_programs/studentinitiated_seminars>.

The President's Promise. Web. 10 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.presidentspromise.umd.edu/home.cfm>>.

The Star Wars Galaxy

The Page

The class webpage is www.bookworlds.org. It contains all the published information about the class (including this syllabus).

The People

The course coordinators who will be teaching this class are:

Kevin Heiken

CLASS EMAIL: please email Kevin Heiken at krheiken@berkeley.edu if there are any questions or concerns

The sponsoring professor for this course is Jason Schlude of the History department.

The Class

This is a two unit pass/not pass course in the History department. Due to History department policies, the class can be taken only as a 98. However, both upper and lower classmen will be able to enroll. Section will be held on Tuesday, 5-7pm. The class will give students a comprehensive overview of the Star Wars Galaxy from the colonization of the galaxy 100,000 years before the Battle of Yavin to the final peace between the Empire and fledgling New Republic 24 years after the Battle of Yavin.

The Book

We will be using Star Wars: The New Essential Chronology by Daniel Wallace. The book is about \$25. It is essentially a Star Wars text book and gives a comprehensive history of the Star Wars galaxy and its key events. Students are expected to purchase the book themselves.

The Rules

Only the instructors are allowed to disrupt the class!

Cell Phones should be switched off or kept silent throughout the duration of the class. If you need to make an important call or are expecting an important call, let us know and you may sit by the door and answer your phone outside. Anyone caught with a cell phone ringing during class will be cast into the Pit of Carkoon.

Latecomers are terrible people. Please be on time. Each late arrival will be recorded, and after three late arrivals it will be considered an absence. If you know beforehand that you will be late, do email us about it and try to make as little noise as possible when you enter the room.

Food: We know you are hungry. Even Darth Vader has to eat sometime (probably through a straw). Because of this, we are rather tolerant of your food consumption. But please, no noisy, smelly, or bothersome food, and please clean up after yourselves. We don't need a Dianoga garbage beast taking up residence in our classroom!

Absences/Cuts: in a perfect world, there should be no cuts, or absences for that matter. We want 100% attendance! If you cannot attend, you must give us notice at least 24 hours before the absence in order for it to be excused. If you miss, even for a valid reason, but don't talk to us beforehand **it will be considered a cut!** Every absence requires makeup work to demonstrate that you have done the reading. Up to **3** excused absences with makeup work are allowed and after that, any absence will be deemed a cut and your third cut is an **automatic fail!** You shouldn't need to miss class six times.

The Grade

This class will be graded on a Pass/Not Pass system and those who pass will be rewarded with two units in the History department. The grade will be based on the following:

Attendance: Attendance is absolutely mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each class. It is *your* responsibility to sign the attendance sheet. If you sign in and leave after 5 minutes, you will be considered absent.

Participation: As the classes are discussion based, participation is essential. What you say should reflect that you have done the assigned reading and understand it. Don't be afraid to speak your mind. Any comment relevant to the reading is welcome.

Assignments: there will be reading assigned every week. If you do not do the reading, you have nothing to contribute to the class and will not pass the quiz. There will be no assignments other than the reading, so by the Emperor's Black Bones please just do the reading!

Quizzes: Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class at the discretion of the instructor and will cover the reading assigned for that section. They are our little way of making sure you are doing the reading. If you fail half the quizzes, you will fail the class. There are no exceptions or excuses. If absent, the makeup assignment given by the instructor will count as making up a quiz.

Final Term Project: You are responsible for one term project due on the last day of class. The project can be either an art project or a group presentation in class. Examples can be, but aren't limited to, a short theatrical production/movie, a song, a dance, a drawing, or a board game. Most anything is acceptable really, but you **must** check with us first to confirm your topic and project. A 3-5 page essay may be written under certain circumstances, but you must talk to the instructor beforehand. You should put approximately 10 hrs of work into your term project and, if you work in groups, that number of hours is multiplied by however many group members you have. If you do not turn in a term project or your term project is so atrociously bad that the instructors deem you did not complete the assignment, **you will fail!**

PS: Plagiarism will not be tolerated! Any student caught plagiarizing will receive an automatic fail!

Reading List

- 1/26:** Course Intro: Origins of the Galaxy (2-5)
- 2/2:** Emergence of the Sith (5-13 To *Trials of Jedi*),
- 2/9:** The Great Sith War (13-22 To Mandalorian Wars),
- 2/16:** The Second Sith War and New Sith Wars (22-30),
- 2/23:** A Failing Republic (31-51),
- 3/2:** The Clone Wars (51-84),
- 3/9:** The New Order (85-89, 106-111 to Rebel Trap),
- 3/16:** Dark Times for Rebellion (111-123 To Alliance Triumphant),
- 3/23:** Spring Break
- 3/30:** Rebirth of the Republic (123-133 to Isard),
- 4/6:** A Shrinking Empire (133-148),
- 4/13:** Empire Resurgent (148-176),
- 4/20:** The Final Years (177-193),
- 4/27:** TERM PROJECT PRESENTATIONS!

**Readings are subject to change*