

## Updated Report of the Committee to Review Special Studies Courses

April 29, 2014

At the request of Senior Associate Dean Bobbi Owen, the Report of the Committee to Review Special Studies Courses has been updated to reflect actions taken subsequent to the May 14, 2008, filing of the report. Chaired by Prof. Miles Fletcher in the Department of History, the Committee to Review Special Studies Courses had been established in early fall 2007, and the Administrative Boards of the General College and College of Arts and Sciences were informed of the charge at the September 9, 2007, meeting: “to assess the validity of the various SPCL courses.” The report was completed by May 14, 2008, and accepted by Senior Associate Dean Owen, who pursued the implementation of its recommendations.

At the time, beginning in fall 2007, SPCL courses were numbered 390, 391, 392, 396, and 397, with various section numbers defining what were essentially 14 separate courses. For example, SPCL 390.001 was used to enroll students in Alternative Spring Break, whereas SPCL 390.002 identified the Advanced Leadership Development Seminar. This numbering convention was a holdover from the practice of identifying section-specific courses using SPCL 90 and 91P prior to 2004, when the SPCL courses were renumbered to the 390 series.

This update presents in its entirety the Committee’s original May 14, 2008, report. Information that explains how each recommendation was implemented has been added as indented, **boldfaced** text after each “Explanation” section.

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## **Report of the Committee to Review Special Studies Courses**

May 14, 2008

At the start of the fall semester 2007, the Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education in the College of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Bobbi Owen, asked Professor W. Miles Fletcher of the Department of History to chair an Ad Hoc Committee to review Special Studies courses offered by the College. The goal of the Committee—hereafter referred to as the Special Studies Review Committee (SSRC) or the Committee—was to examine all categories of Special Studies courses in terms of their academic rigor, effectiveness, and contribution to the overall undergraduate curriculum. The Committee included John Brodeur from the Carolina Leadership Development Office, Professor Jane Danielewicz from the Department of English, Dr. Melissa Exum (Associate Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students), Professor Thomas Hill from the Department of Philosophy, and Professor Richard McLaughlin from the Department of Mathematics. It is our understanding that this is the first attempt at a comprehensive review of Special Studies courses during the past three or four decades.

The SSRC held six meetings between September 2007 and April 2008 to gather information and to discuss recommendations. We much appreciate the help of Senior Associate Dean Bobbi Owen, Associate Dean Jay Smith, the staff of the Office of Undergraduate Curricula, Julie Chase (Assistant Director of the Carolina Leadership Development Office), Professor Kenneth Janken (Director of Experiential Education), Betsy Taylor (Graduation Coordinator in the Academic Advising Center for the College of Arts & Sciences), Mimi Keever (Director of the Peer Tutoring Program), Professor Pat Pukkila (Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research), Jenny Huq and Leslie Parkins (Director and Associate Director respectively of APPLES), Eileen Hannan (Director of the Center for Public Service), and Leon Hamlett in the University Registrar's Office for their help in obtaining information about various types of Special Studies courses. The Committee also interviewed Associate Dean Jay Smith, Julie Chase from the CLD Office, and Mimi Keever from the Peer Tutoring Program.

The SSRC below makes three general recommendations pertaining to all Special Studies courses and then follows with a specific assessment of each of nine major categories of Special Studies courses. In some cases the Committee makes a recommendation for changes and in some cases it does not. The Committee urges that the recommended changes be implemented in a timely manner.

### General Recommendations

1) When possible, academic units should sponsor courses that are currently offered as Special Studies Courses. It is particularly important that courses that award three hours of graded credit be sponsored by academic units.

Explanation: in general, academic units take responsibility for creating and supervising undergraduate courses at the University. The rationale for exempting certain courses

from this policy, such as courses offered as Special Studies courses, is not clear. In addition, given the continually increasing duties of the Office of Undergraduate Curricula, it is unrealistic to think that this Office will be able to provide effective supervision for courses offered under the Special Studies program.

**April 2014 Update: In general, academic units now supervise most of the SPCL courses. Only four SPCL courses, each distinct in its course information, remain active courses:**

**SPCL 290 Special Topics (three credits, graded)**

**SPCL 395 Advanced Projects (one credit, Pass/Fail)**

**SPCL 400 CSTART (one credit, Pass/Fail)**

**SPCL 493 Undergraduate Internships (one credit, Pass/Fail, does not count toward graduation)**

**These four courses are housed in the Office of Undergraduate Education, which oversees their scheduling; however, scheduling authority for SPCL 400 CSTART has been delegated to Honors Carolina. Though SPCL 290 is a three-credit graded course, it is not routinely offered but remains an option for students in extraordinary circumstances who may need to earn three credit hours to graduate or for instructors who receive special permission to offer a unique course that cannot be housed in an academic unit.**

**Information about what happened to the rest of the SPCL courses is contained later in this updated report.**

2) Each major type of course that continues to be offered as a Special Studies course must have its own separate course number and title easily identified in on-line listings of courses and in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.

Explanation: Committee members have found confusing the use of multiple sections of just a few Special Studies topics numbers in the range from 390 to 397 to offer a variety of different courses. The difficulty of identifying the titles of different sections of Special Studies courses has hindered the collection of information about them. Committee members were elated, if somewhat frustrated, to learn after several months that a “written key” existed that matched titles with various course numbers and section numbers, but even that document was not complete.

**April 2014 Update: As indicated in Recommendation 1 above, the remaining SPCL courses have unique numbers and course attributes, as do the courses for which academic units assumed responsibility subsequent to fall 2008. Though SPCL courses are included in the online Connect Carolina course inventory, they are not listed in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*, because they serve students in particular circumstances, require special permission to enroll, and consequently are not available to the general student population.**

Let us give some examples of the change that we are proposing. CSTART courses should have their own number and should not be sections of SPCL 390 mixed with various APPLES courses, two leadership development courses, internship courses, and the “one-credit for graduation” course. Similarly, leadership development courses should not be listed as sections of SPCL 390, SPCL 391, and SPCL 396, along with other types of courses. Instead, each leadership development course that continues to be offered as a Special Studies course should have its own number. There is no apparent reason for all SPCL courses to be listed in the range of numbers between the numbers, 390-397.

**April 2014 Update: The CSTART guidelines developed as a consequence of the 2006-2007 review of the program are attached to this update. CSTART courses were given a unique number, SPCL 400, effective in spring 2010. The School of Education assumed responsibility for the four leadership development courses, effective in fall 2009; the courses currently are offered as EDUC 309 NC Fellows Sophomore Seminar, EDUC 316 Advanced Leadership Development Seminar, EDUC 317 Dynamics of Effective Leadership, and EDUC 318 Peer Leadership in the University Environment.**

3) Each new course that is proposed as a Special Studies course must be submitted for approval by the Administrative Boards of the College in the same manner as courses offered by academic units in the College. Unless there is clear evidence that an existing SPCL course was in the past submitted to the Administrative Boards for approval, that course should be submitted to the Administrative Boards for approval as soon as possible, if it continues to be offered as a Special Studies course.

Explanation: Offering Special Studies courses as sections of “special topics” courses in the range of 390-397 may have enabled courses to be created without going through the normal process of approval by the Administrative Boards. The Committee found in its investigations that in the past some courses, at least according to personal recollections, had gone through the official procedure for approving courses but that others may not have done so, even though they have in effect become permanent courses that are offered regularly. To eliminate any doubt, to the extent possible a course offered through the Special Studies program must have its own number and be subject to the regular approval process.

**April 2014 Update: Beginning in January 2009, all changes to SPCL courses, including revisions, renumbering requests, and minor miscellaneous changes, such as changing the grading basis for the course from graded to Pass/Fail, have been reviewed and approved by the Administrative Boards. Though some SPCL courses have been renumbered since fall 2008, no new SPCL courses have been added to the course inventory since then.**

#### Specific Assessments and Recommendations

(Please Note: the Committee reports enrollment data with some trepidation and readiness to apologize for inaccuracies because of the confusing ways in which SPCL courses have

been numbered and the resulting challenge of trying to figure out which number goes with which course, a problem that has been compounded by the switch in all course numbers in the College in the fall 2006.)

#### 1) Special Studies Independent Studies

Independent Studies courses (graded and pass/fail) offered through the Special Studies program (SPCL 396.001 and 397.001, respectively) should be eliminated.

Explanation: These courses are not used frequently. While 9 students enrolled in SPCL 90.001 (now 390.001) in the fall 2004, the enrollments have tapered off to 1 in the spring 2005, 4 in the fall 2005, 5 in the spring 2006, 1 in the fall 2006, 0 in the spring 2007, 0 in the fall 2007, and 0 in the spring 2008. Because taking an Independent Studies course under Special Studies requires the approval and commitment of a faculty member in an academic unit anyway, it seems that academic units could assume responsibility for all Independent Studies courses.

**April 2014 Update: The SPCL Independent Studies courses ceased to be offered after fall 2008, the semester after the report of the Committee to Review Special Studies Courses was issued. No students had been enrolled in SPCL 390.001 from spring 2007 through fall 2008. The Administrative Boards approved the request to delete SPCL 397 at the April 9, 2009, meeting; the Boards approved the request to delete SPCL 396 at the September 9, 2009, meeting.<sup>1</sup>**

#### 2) Special Studies Internship Courses

a. Two Internship courses offered through Special Studies (SPCL 390.004 and SPCL 391.004) should be eliminated.

Explanation: Few students use this option. In the fall 2006, the spring 2007, the fall 2007, and the spring 2008, no students have enrolled in SPCL 390.004 and 391.004. In addition, to gain credit for an internship through this option, students need the approval of a faculty adviser in an academic department anyway. Hence, academic units should handle credit for internships.

**April 2014 Update: SPCL 390.004 (a Pass/Fail internship for a variable 1-6 credit hours) and SPCL 391.004 (a graded internship for a variable 1-6 credit hours) ceased to be offered after fall 2008. However, SPCL 390 could not be deleted until all of the special sections of the course, each serving a different**

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, courses are “inactivated” instead of being “deleted”; they remain in the ConnectCarolina course inventory as part of the historical record and for the purpose of issuing transcripts for students who enrolled in the courses when they were active. Inactive courses cannot be scheduled and remain inactive until such time as they are reactivated according to appropriate approval procedures, including approval by the Administrative Boards of the General College and College of Arts and Sciences. For the purposes of this report, “deleted” means “inactivated.” Once approved by the Administrative Boards, requests to delete a course become effective with the subsequent fall semester.

**purpose, had been assigned other unique numbers. This was accomplished by fall 2009, and SPCL 390 was deleted, effective in fall 2010.**

**SPCL 391 stopped being used for graded internships and was retitled Alternative Spring Break, effective in fall 2010. In spring 2012, Prof. Lynn Blanchard, Director of the Carolina Center for Public Service, assumed responsibility for the course and offered Alternative Spring Break as HBHE 610 (now HBEH 610). SPCL 391 was deleted, effective in fall 2013.**

b) The option of obtaining credit for an internship that does not earn credit toward graduation (SPCL 392.004) should be retained.

Explanation: This course serves a valuable function, because a number of organizations that offer unpaid internships require that students receive credit for these internships. Thus granting three hours of pass/fail credit that does not count toward graduation enables students to benefit from these internships without adding an artificial academic component. Twenty students enrolled in SPCL 392.004 in the fall 2007.

**April 2014 Update: SPCL 392.004 was renumbered as SPCL 500 Undergraduate Internships, effective in spring 2010, to give the course a unique number. It was renumbered again as SPCL 493, effective in fall 2013, to conform to the Registrar's Standard Course Numbering System (UPM #4). Currently, this one-credit Pass/Fail course is repeatable for credit but does not count toward graduation. It is housed in the Office of Undergraduate Education.**

**Enrollments in SPCL 493 have been increasing, with between 30 and 45 students registering for the course in the fall semester (typically, after completing a summer internship), and 3 to 6 students enrolling in the spring semester. Total enrollment in 2011-2012 was 36 students; in 2013-2014, 51 students. Three possible factors explain this increase:**

- a) More undergraduates seek internships, especially during the summer, to build their resumes;**
- b) Since April 2010, when the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division issued guidelines to help determine whether interns must be paid the minimum wage and overtime under the Fair Labor Standards Act, more employers have developed internships that they believe are similar to training given in an educational environment and that requires students to receive academic credit in lieu of salary and benefits; and**
- c) Because UNC-Chapel Hill faculty members are restricted to supervising no more than two students in internship courses offered through academic units, and because academic units rarely offer internship courses during the summer, students find enrolling in SPCL 493, which has no enrollment cap, increasingly attractive.**

3) Leadership Development Courses

a) The four regularly offered courses in Leadership Development should each be sponsored by an academic unit. These are SPCL 396.002 the NC Fellows Sophomore Seminar, SPCL 391.002 the Advanced Leadership Development Seminar, SPCL 390.005 Dynamics of Effective Leadership, and SPCL 395.001 Peer Leadership in Residential Communities.

Explanation: To the knowledge of the members of the SSRC, academic units take responsibility for all other regularly offered undergraduate courses, and the rationale for granting an exception for Leadership Development courses is unclear. The continually increasing scope of responsibilities for the Office of Undergraduate Curricula makes it unreasonable to expect that Office will be able to exercise meaningful supervision over such courses.

The Committee did not explore which academic units might be willing to take responsibility for these courses or what incentives might exist for units to do so, but the School of Education is one possibility. Indeed, one of the Leadership Development courses (SPCL 390.005, Dynamics of Effective Leadership) pertains directly to issues in higher education and another course (SPCL 395.001, Peer Leadership in Residential Communities) centers on training for Residential Assistants at the University.

**April 2014 Update: Consistent with Recommendation 2 above, the School of Education assumed responsibility for the four leadership development courses, effective in fall 2009. They are currently being offered as EDUC 309 NC Fellows Sophomore Seminar, EDUC 316 Advanced Leadership Development Seminar, EDUC 317 Dynamics of Effective Leadership, and EDUC 318 Peer Leadership in the University Environment.**

b) If Leadership Development courses continue to be offered through the Special Studies program, SPCL 395.001, Peer Leadership in Residential Communities, needs immediate review, especially as it has a large enrollment and awards three hours of graded credit.

Explanation: The Committee is concerned about several aspects of this course. That said, Committee members realize the importance of providing substantial training to new Residential Assistants and are aware that as a new course it is still in an experimental stage. The specific concerns of the SSRC are as follows. First, the course does not offer sufficient academic content. While leadership courses inherently emphasize practical issues and training more than many courses taught in academic units, leadership courses should relate activities in class to systematic thought and research on relevant issues through the assignment of substantial reading and related writing assignments. Second, the lack of academic rigor is reflected in lenient grading. Out of 114 students in the course during the fall semester 2007, 103 (90 percent) received a grade of A- or A.

**April 2014 Update: SPCL 395.001 Peer Leadership in Residential Communities became EDUC 318 Peer Leadership in the University Environment, effective in fall 2009. The course remains a two-credit, graded**

**course and enrolled 100 students in 2013-2014. Oversight of the course is now the responsibility of the School of Education.**

4) Peer Tutoring Program

a) An academic unit should sponsor SPCL 390.006, the course through which students can gain three hours of pass/fail credit for serving as a peer tutor.

Explanation: As noted above, all other regularly offered undergraduate courses are sponsored by academic units. Because this course pertains directly to issues pertaining to education, the School of Education might be an appropriate unit.

**April 2014 Update: The School of Education assumed responsibility for SPCL 390.006 Peer Tutoring in fall 2009, when the course was renumbered as EDUC 399. At that time it was a three-credit, graded course. It became a three-credit Pass/Fail course in fall 2010 and was renumbered as EDUC 387, effective fall 2013, to conform to the Registrar's Standard Course Numbering System (UPM #4). EDUC 387 enrolled 117 students in 2013-2014.**

b) If SPCL 390.006 continues to be offered through the Special Studies program, the course needs to be reviewed with the aim of introducing more academic content.

Explanation: SSRC members agreed on two points—the valuable contribution of the Peer Tutoring Program to undergraduate students at Carolina and the relative lack of academic content in SPCL 390.006. In regard to the latter point, the course concentrates its academic content in the first two weeks of training; during the rest of the semester students serve as peer tutors, keep a journal about their experience, and receive feedback on their journals and on their performance from supervisory staff. The challenge of interpreting the significance of the relative lack of academic content in SPCL 390.006 generated considerable debate within the Committee. Some members believe that it is not appropriate to give academic credit for this course. They think that the peer tutors should be paid for their services, even though this approach would create a significant budgetary burden for the College. Other members point out that students in the School of Education receive credit for supervised practice teaching and that peer universities evidently have courses similar to SPCL 390.006. The Committee, however, has not conducted a systematic comparison of SPCL 390.006 with the practice teaching program in the School of Education or with peer tutoring courses at other universities. Finally, all members agree that the Peer Tutoring Program should continue in some form.

**April 2014 Update: The Peer Tutoring Program continues under the auspices of the School of Education, with instructors appointed and supervised by the School. Two sections are offered each semester, enrolling between 25 and 35 students per section. Total enrollments have decreased from just over 80 students per semester in 2010-2011 to just under 60 students per semester in 2013-2014.**



## 5) One Credit-Hour Graduation Course

The option (SPCL 390.003) through which students can in the last semester of their senior year gain one hour of credit toward graduation—usually a desperately needed credit for a student to graduate as planned—should be retained.

Explanation: This course fulfills a vital function in helping some undergraduates to graduate on schedule, and appropriate safeguards exist to ensure that students earn the credit that they receive. To ensure that latter point, the Committee suggests that the form which students must use to apply for the one hour of credit should require not only a signature from the instructor granting the extra hour of credit but also an explanation of the extra work in a course that the student will do in order to receive an extra hour of credit. Also, the “window” of time during a semester in which a student may register for this course should be clarified.

**April 2014 Update: SPCL 390.003 Advanced Projects was renumbered as SPCL 395, effective in spring 2010. A graded one-credit course, it became a Pass/Fail course in fall 2010. In spring 2011 SPCL 395 was made repeatable for credit to accommodate students who needed two credits in order to graduate and who could arrange extra work in their final semester with two different instructors. The course is housed in the Office of Undergraduate Education, and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Curricula is responsible for approving, for each student, a written learning contract and work plan that has been agreed to by the student and the supervising instructor. Each supervising instructor is assigned to a separate section of SPCL 395 and is responsible for submitting the student’s final grade. Approximately 15 students enroll in SPCL 395 annually.**

## 6) CSTART Courses

The Committee recommends no changes in the CSTART program, through which undergraduate students in their senior year teach, with faculty supervision, their own courses at UNC.

Explanation: An Ad Hoc Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences conducted a thorough review of the CSTART program during the past academic year, 2006-2007, and found no significant areas for improvement. Rising seniors must apply for the program with the support of a faculty adviser. Once accepted as an instructor, a student prepares to teach the course during the fall semester of the senior year by taking an independent study course with a faculty adviser. During the spring semester, as the student is teaching the course, the adviser is available for consultation, observes some sessions of the course, and must approve the final grades. Students taking a CSTART course receive one hour of P/F credit. Peer institutions have similar courses.

**April 2014 Update: The CSTART guidelines developed as a consequence of the 2006-2007 review of the program are attached to this update. Effective in**

**fall 2010, students began registering for the CSTART Program under SPCL 400. Originally a graded one-credit course, SPCL 400 became a Pass/Fail course in fall 2010. The CSTART Program is administered by Honors Carolina.**

#### 7) Modes of Inquiry Course

There is no reason to recommend any changes for SPCL 390.010, Modes of Inquiry, because the course in the future will be offered in the Interdisciplinary Studies curriculum.

**April 2014 Update: SPCL 390.010 Modes of Inquiry became IDST 195, effective in fall 2008. Originally a one-credit graded course, it became a Pass/Fail course in fall 2010 and was renumbered as IDST 194 in fall 2013 to conform to the Registrar's Standard Course Numbering System (UPM #4). IDST courses are housed in the Office of Undergraduate Education but are taught by faculty in various units of the College of Arts and Sciences.**

#### 8) APPLES Service Learning Courses

(APPLES is a service learning program on campus. The acronym means Assisting People in Planning Learning Experiences in Service.)

a) No recommendation is necessary for SPCL 390.009 ("APPLES Program") and SPCL 390.015 and SPCL 391.015 (APPLES Program Reflections Course, Pass/Fail and Graded, respectively), because these courses are no longer taught. These courses should therefore be deleted.

b) Ideally, an academic unit would sponsor two other courses sponsored by APPLES, SPCL 390.001 and 391.001 (Alternative Spring Break, one credit hour, Pass/Fail and Graded, respectively). For reference, SPCL 390.001 and 391.001 come in four separate versions. One version focuses on Civil Rights, one on Health Issues in New York, one on Hurricane Relief, and one on Latino Issues.

Explanation: As noted above, all other regularly offered undergraduate courses outside of Special Studies are sponsored by academic units. Perhaps the Department of Public Policy would be an appropriate unit.

**April 2014 Update: On September 9, 2009, the Administrative Boards approved incorporating all of the APPLES sections (SPCL 390.001, 390.009, 390.015, and 391.015) into one course: SPCL 391 APPLES Alternative Spring Break (effective in fall 2010). In spring 2012, Prof. Lynn Blanchard, Director of the Carolina Center for Public Service, offered Alternative Spring Break as HBHE 610 (now HBEH 610), and SPCL 391 was deleted, effective in fall 2013.**

c) If this type of course (Alternative Spring Break) continues to be offered through the Special Studies program, it should be only for one hour of Pass/Fail credit, and, if the Administrative Boards have not previously reviewed and approved this course, it should be submitted for approval to the Administrative Boards.

Explanation: One hour of Pass/Fail credit would better fit the academic requirements for the course.

**April 2014 Update: HBEH 610 Alternative Spring Break is currently a two-credit Pass/Fail course. It is housed in the Department of Health Behavior in the Gillings School of Global Public Health.**

9) SPCL 396.003 Student Philanthropy Projects (one credit hour, Pass/Fail).

a) Ideally, an academic unit would sponsor this course, which is organized by the Carolina Center for Public Service.

Explanation: As noted above, all other regularly offered undergraduate courses outside of Special Studies are sponsored by academic units. Perhaps the Department of Public Policy would be an appropriate unit.

**April 2014 Update: All sections of SPCL 396 were deleted, effective in December 2009. Prof. Lynn Blanchard, Director of the Carolina Center for Public Service and a faculty member in the Department of Health Behavior in the Gillings School of Global Public Health, developed a new three-credit graded course, Philanthropy as a Tool for Social Change, which was initially offered as a topics course, HBHE 699. The course was given a permanent number, HBHE 611 (now HBEH 611), effective in fall 2013. The course description is as follows: “In this course students learn about and experience the process of awarding grants to local agencies. In addition to participating in the grant-making process, students learn about the nonprofit sector and the philosophy and practice of philanthropy through readings, class exercises, and guest speakers.”**

b) If the course continues to be offered under the Special Studies program and if the Administrative Boards have not previously approved the course, it should be submitted to the Administrative Boards for review and approval.

**April 2014 Update: Philanthropy as a Tool for Social Change is no longer offered under Special Studies and is no longer under the jurisdiction of the College of Arts and Sciences. As HBEH 611, the course is the responsibility of the Department of Health Behavior in the Gillings School of Global Public Health.**