Guidelines for New Course Proposals

A new undergraduate course proposal requires some knowledge of pedagogy. Most members of the CASNR curriculum committee are aware of and have expectations regarding core information that needs to be communicated to students as well behavioral objectives. An outline is available on the CASNR web page (see address below), however, I have found that there is more detail and unnecessary paperwork if you follow this path. In other words, a more streamlined proposal is just as likely to be approved provided it has the core elements. Following these notes is an example of a course proposal that can be used as a template.

Faculty new to teaching typically have trouble with the bulletin description, assessment and the “Measurable Behavioral Objectives.” The first is briefly mentioned here and additional information is in the document from Tony Schkade:

[http://snrs.unl.edu/information/documents/hintsbulletin.pdf](http://snrs.unl.edu/information/documents/hintsbulletin.pdf)

**Bulletin Description, prerequisites and Course number:**
The bulletin description represents the visible advertisement for a course that most students see. The description does not have to consist of complete sentences. Tony Schkade has the last say in the bulletin description and expectations today are different than 20 years ago (i.e., if you look to the bulletin for an example, it may be unacceptable today!). The description should be brief and about the content. The description should not include descriptions of activities or methods of teaching. The CASNR curriculum committee is fairly proactive in suggesting changes to improve the wording.

The preferred form for prerequisites should refer to a UNL course prefix and number. The phrase “or permission of instructor” will always be deleted because it is always implied. This is why referring to UNL courses for prerequisites is not a restriction on graduate students or transfer students. It is permissible to state “and permission of instructor”, this is useful when it is intended to suppress the “call number” in the schedule of classes.

Course numbers have been restricted for a variety of purposes. Most importantly, the software system (DARS) that checks students records to see if they have met graduation requirements may expect certain courses to have specific numbers or range of numbers. If the course is to be allowed for multiple credit (e.g., independent study) then it must have a 9 in the middle digit. Additional restrictions have been used by CASNR for internships. Older courses may be inconsistent.

Internships, Career Experiences 495, 395, 295
Independent Study 496, 396, 296
Senior Thesis 498, 499

It is sometimes desirable to add a letter to a course number: 213A, 213B. Several letters are reserved: C - continuing studies courses, H - honors.
Assessment:
The requirement for explicit assessment of a course has its basis in good pedagogy and in expectations of the CASNR curriculum committee. More recently, they appear to be adopted by the University Curriculum committee as follows: “Prospective syllabi must contain relevant details about (1) course objectives, (2) standards, (3) requirements, and (4) grading methods (grading scale, distribution of points, and so on); prospective syllabi will be subject to review on these issues by the University Curriculum Committee.”

The essential element is that students should know what level of achievement is needed to obtain a particular letter grade. Therefore, a grading scale should be included. Associated with the scale should be a clear indication of how the individual components of the grade (i.e., tests, quizzes, reports, lab work) are weighted and combined in the grading scale.

Measurable Behavioral Objectives:
This section includes a list of the expected behaviors of a student who successfully finishes the class. The starting point is a list of active verbs that describe the behavior. Typically, emotive verbs are seen as neither measurable nor behavioral (e.g., students should appreciate the subject). Disguising this with more active verbs is not helpful (e.g., demonstrate an appreciation for the subject). The issue is a concrete means of how “appreciation is shown.” More quantitative subjects usually do not as great a problem with this topic. The objectives can vary in depth. The example below has fairly low level objectives in part because the class is at a first year level. Higher level thinking is certainly fair (e.g., students should be able to present an oral report critiquing the advantages and disadvantages of competing theories of chemical transport in soils). Additional information and examples are available in:

"Preparing Instructional Objectives" by Robert F. Mager. LB1028.5 .M2 1984

CASNR Web Site:
http://casnr.unl.edu/facstaff/ccc.htm
Template for New Course Proposal:

SOIL 101 Soil and Society 2 cr

Description and classification of soils. Role of soils in food and fiber production, construction and waste treatment. Ecological functions of soil. Degradation of soils due to erosion, salinization or contamination. Historical failures in soil conservation.

Instructor:

Justification. This course provides an accessible introduction to the role of soils in our society as well in historical societies. The intended audience is the non-science student or the science student who would not normally take a soils course. This course is intended to provide a general knowledge that a literate individual should have about soils. This course is not intended to meet any requirement for most majors in Agriculture or Natural Resources. The only other course at a similar level is Introduction to Soils Resources (SOIL 153) a course intended to provide more detailed information about soils for agriculture and natural resource students.

Measurable Behavioral Objectives. Students should be able to:
1. List basic soil properties.
2. Describe the variation of soil properties with depth and across areas.
3. Describe the basic soil processes involving water, chemicals and organisms.
4. List historical civilizations that suffered due to degraded soils and describe the nature of the problem.
5. Describe use of soils for waste disposal and soil conditions that can result in failure of these systems.
6. Describe the factors involved in soil erosion and salinization.
7. Locate and report soils information available on the web from federal, state or international agencies.
8. Describe the relation of soils to construction sites, wetlands, urban soils and greenhouse gases.

Cross-listings. None

Term Offered: Variable depending on demand. Initially spring semester.

Prerequisites: None

Course Level and Rationale: This is an introductory course. A lack of prerequisites and the general level of this material makes this course available to all students.

Assessment Plan: Given with syllabus.

Methods: Lecture twice a week.
Expected student enrollment: Initially 15-20 students. Capped at 25 students per section.

References/Textbooks

Texts:

Supplementary References:

Syllabus

Topics by class period:

12  Exam 1 on Days 1-10.
15  Irrigated Crop Production.  Sprinkler, furrow and basin irrigation. Water harvesting, soils and infiltration, chemigation.
21,22  Soil Erosion and Subsidence.  Wind and water erosion. Detachment, suspension,

23. **Soil salinization and reclamation.** Saline seeps. Sodium, salts and irrigation. Experience with reclamation projects. Cultural values associated with altering land use (alternate perceptions of land as wasteland, future farms or sacred grounds).


27. **Oral Reports.**  
28. **Oral Reports.**


30. **Soils and heat transfer.** Ground loop heat pumps. Thermal insulation for buildings.

**Grading:**

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Total Points: 500

Two midterm exams plus a final. Each worth 100 points.
Quiz on soil properties 15 points
Data search and report (1-2 pages) 24 points.
Oral report (~ 5 minute presentation) and one page summary, worth 40 points (10 summary, 30 oral report).
Term paper worth 100 points (points distributed as follows: (10 for outline, 30 for rough draft and 60 for final report). Report must be 10-15 pages not counting title page, references or figures.
Seven ungraded writing exercises (in class impromptu writing) 3 pt each, total 21 points.

Late policy: Work is due on the date of the indicated class meeting. Work turned in up to one week later is subject to a 20% penalty. After one week and up to two weeks the penalty is 50% after which the grade is zero. In the case of a rough draft or outline, you may still turn it in after two weeks so as to obtain feedback from the instructor.

Specific guidelines on the oral report and term paper will be provided separately. This includes
expected practices on citing references and plagiarism.

Policy on Dishonesty. The Student Code of Conduct with regard to Academic Dishonesty will be followed (see UNL Bulletin). The first violation will result in a warning and a requirement that the work be resubmitted within ten days. The second violation will result in a grade of zero assigned to the activity in question. A third violation will result in a grade of F assigned to the class.

Relation to Other Courses.

No existing courses cover this material at a level suitable for non-science students or for science students outside Agriculture and Natural Resources. SOIL 153 is a science based introduction to soils with a laboratory. SOILS 153 meets specific requirements for the B.S. Natural Resources while this course is not intended to do so. SOIL 269 is the next level of course and has SOIL 153 as a prerequisite. Soil mechanics is offered in Engineering but is offered at a higher level and has prerequisites that restrict the accessibility of the course to engineering students.