UNIVERSITY of MINNESOTA
Course Designator Guidelines

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a designator?

> A designator is a series of letters, e.g., HIST, used to identify courses in a particular area of study. (In PeopleSoft terminology the designator is the "subject.")

What functions does a designator serve?

- Indicates who has administrative oversight of the course (e.g., academic department withina college)
- Identifies groups of courses in the same area of study

Where are designators recorded in our systems?

> Designators are set up in data tables, which are mapped to an academic department, within a college structure, within a campus structure (e.g., MATH, mapped to the Math Department, within the College of Science and Engineering, within the Twin Cities campus).

When a new designator is created, changed, or discontinued what systems and processes are affected?

- Class lists
- Degree program requirements (PCAS)
- Student Rating of Teaching data
- Student transcripts
- Grad Planner
- APAS
- GPAS
- Class scheduling system
- Student registration
- Tuition attribution
- Catalogs

When can a designator be created, altered, or discontinued?

In most cases, a new designator is *not* needed

- To distinguish graduate-level courses from undergraduate-level courses (course numbering system of 1xxx, 3xxx, 5xxx, etc. does that)
- To indicate what courses do or do not apply to a particular major, minor, or certificate (create a list of the courses that do apply, and use the PCAS system)

- For ephemeral or experimental courses (use an existing designator and topics title)
- Solely because a department changed its name; if the existing designator is still appropriate to the field of study, there is no need to change the designator
- To indicate a subfield of study within an existing field (course title can do that)
- To move tuition around (departments and colleges can do this via the financial system)
- At the beginning stages of an emerging discipline (e.g., nanotechnology) for a limited number of courses; a topics titles using an existing designator would be more appropriate initially
- To use as a pass-through for specific courses we contract with another institution to provide (e.g., U of M doesn't offer Persian, so we would not set up a Persian designator; our students can enroll through CIC course-share), if we already have a general pass-through designator (e.g., FOST) to manage such courses
- To indicate the location (e.g., Toledo) of a study abroad program (course title could do that)
- To help students find courses in a particular topic (Google and course-search and other on-line tools, as well as departmental web sites can help students to find courses about the Holocaust or Korean film or women's nutrition in South America)
- For a very small number of courses (instead, use an existing designator with a descriptive title)

In general, implementing new designators *may be* appropriate when

- An emerging field has grown into a robust discipline of its own (e.g., Sustainability Studies)
- A new campus-wide (cross-collegiate) or college-wide program has emerged, and needs a campus-wide or college-wide designator, and no such designator exists (e.g., GCC).
- Cross-departmental courses within a college (e.g., CLA, could be offered under the CLA designator)
- Grouping courses to manage U of M student enrollment in particular programs offered elsewhere where the U of M contracts with other entities, but students register through the U of M and credit is transcripted as U of M credit (e.g., the CIC course-share, HECUA programs, FOST)

Departmental Use of Designators

When should a department have multiple designators?

- To differentiate between unrelated fields that fall under the same department. An example being, French and Italian, where two different designators makes sense for one department. Another example is Geography, which has GEOG and GIS

- Remember, courses can be differentiated via course number and descriptive course titles. There are 999 course numbers available for any single designator, at each level (1xxx, etc.).

Can a designator be shared among departments?

Yes, it is possible, although typically the relationship of designator to department is one to one, and all courses in one designator generally map to one department (DeptID in Peoplesoft). However, individual courses within a designator may be mapped to a different department, although this process is only used in special circumstances.

A designator generally denotes the unit/department where a course was developed, and signifies that this unit assumes authority over the administration and delivery of the course, as well as the responsibility for responding to student concerns about the course.

How is a new designator requested? How are designators retired or changed?

See the link to the form on the Provost's web site, at https://provost.umn.edu/academic-oversight/scope-oversight/course-designators

Key Facts about Designators

- Designators are campus-specific. ENGL, for example, exists on more than on U of M campus. Even if the designators are identical, the courses are unique to each campus. A student's U of M transcript clearly indicates the campus of enrollment for every course. When a student transfers from one U of M campus to another, e.g., from Crookston to Duluth, the courses from Crookston will be evaluated by the Duluth campus for their applicability to fulfilling requirements for the Duluth campus academic program to which the student has transferred.
- Designators have very long lives. Because the University is required to keep records of all students' enrollments since the University was founded, even if a designator is not currently being used to offer courses (e.g., ZOO for Zoology), that designator is not available for new courses now.
- A descriptive title conveysmore meaning than the designator, which may not mean the same thing at different institutions. Course titles are more useful to employers than course designators.