

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Memorandum

To: Members of the Faculty
From: Cristle Collins Judd
CC: CEP
Date: February 24, 2009
Re: Report on Team Teaching

I am writing to provide clarification on policies regarding team-teaching. CEP spent the fall semester evaluating team teaching, looking at the history of the practice at Bowdoin, focusing on those courses which have been, or presently are, team-taught, enrollment patterns, teaching credit, compensation mechanisms, and practices at peer institutions.

In 2003 and 2004, CEP called for proposals to create interdisciplinary, team-taught courses. At that time, it was envisaged that an initial offering of a team-taught course would count as a “whole course” in the teaching load of each faculty member participating, and that the courses “should appeal to a significant number of students” (*i.e.*, they were not to be “framed as a seminar for ten or fewer students”). It was further anticipated that subsequent offerings of the typical team-taught course would count for a half-course in the normal teaching load for each of the faculty members involved, with an alternation of who received “credit” for the course.

In the intervening years, several important changes have occurred at the College: the faculty has grown, especially with the provision of new lines in interdisciplinary programs; majors have been reshaped; and a new set of general requirements has been introduced to the curriculum, to name just a few examples. During this period of change, some team-taught courses have become regular parts of course rotations while others have been approved on an *ad hoc* basis for first time offerings, with a variety of understandings at the department and program level about how such courses should count in the teaching loads of individual faculty members for subsequent offerings of such courses. A consensus has also emerged that when done well, team-taught courses, while gratifying, are often more work than teaching a course individually.

While team-taught courses may take many forms, the most usual fall under the rubrics of a “tag-team” approach or a “collaborative” model. In the tag-team approach, one instructor usually teaches for the first half of the semester, at which point the second instructor takes over; each teaches within his or her own area of specialization. In the collaborative approach, all the involved faculty members take responsibility for aspects of the materials of the entire course. Both approaches have obvious strengths and challenges for both faculty and students, and an over-riding concern in the use of team-taught courses is that we consider carefully and assess on a regular basis the balance of the two.

Team-teaching offers rich possibilities for interdisciplinary learning both within and among departments and programs. In general, the recommendations that follow prioritize team-teaching by faculty from different academic departments, following the widespread understanding that the primary motivation for team teaching is to bring a greater breadth of expertise, particularly to courses in interdisciplinary programs.

Following input from Department Chairs and Directors of Programs, CEP has recommended, and I have approved, a regularization of our process with regard to approval and recognition of team-taught courses as follows:

1. Each faculty member responsible for a team-taught course receives full credit for the course in the semester in which it is offered. It is expected that an individual faculty member will offer no more than two courses in a team-taught format in any single academic year.
2. Team-taught courses are expected to meet certain criteria in terms of both enrollments and enrichment of the curriculum, as outlined below.
3. Team-taught courses offer great opportunities, but also challenges, for both faculty and students. Departments and Programs should regularly review team-taught courses, with a particular focus on the gains offered by a team-taught course versus that taught by an individual member of the faculty. Particular attention should be given to the experience of students taking these courses.

Criteria regarding team-taught courses:

I. Introductory or non-major courses with enrollments of at least 50 students

For introductory courses or non-major (*e.g.*, sub-100) courses with maximum enrollment caps greater than or equal to 50 students (and in which 50 or more students typically enroll), departments and programs may commit to team-taught courses under either the “tag-team” or “collaborative” model. Courses presently in the catalogue which fit this model include Bio109 and ES101. Courses approved for team teaching in this category must:

- Include at least one weekly session in which the class is divided into groups of 25 or fewer students (this may take the form of a lab or discussion section). Such sessions, while they may be led by a lab instructor, should involve active faculty participation and direction on a regular basis.
- Students should have a clearly defined relationship throughout the semester with one of the faculty members responsible for the course. Typically this will be the faculty member associated with the lab or discussion session to which the student is assigned.
- Faculty members are expected to meet in advance of the course and normally to meet weekly during the course for planning, adjustment to the schedules, discussion of assignments, etc.
- All faculty members who are listed as instructors of record for the course are expected to attend all large-group meetings scheduled for the course (usually lectures).
- Faculty should establish clear grading standards and share grading appropriately in order to uphold consistent expectations, which are communicated clearly to students.

- Courses in this category may be approved without regard to the involvement of specific individual members of the faculty, but with a designation of departmental or divisional affiliation.

II. Intermediate courses

Team-taught, intermediate courses (*e.g.*, courses with a pre-requisite and designed to be taken by students within a major) will normally be taught with the collaborative model and involve faculty from two or more departments, with course credit for students normally offered in one of the interdisciplinary programs (with or without cross-listing in one or more departments). It is expected that such courses will normally have an enrollment cap of 35-50 students; when such a course would normally have a limit of fewer than 35 students, course approval will be dependent on an extension of the enrollment cap, subject to appropriate facilities (*e.g.* lab space). Prior to the semester of offering such courses, the Chair of each department from which the faculty is drawn will confirm with the Dean's office that the Department can meet its teaching needs without replacement of additional courses. Approval of such courses is specifically tied to the expertise of faculty members listed on the course proposal. Intermediate courses within a single department or drawing faculty only from a single department will typically not be eligible for team teaching, and may only be approved as "one-time only" offerings.

III. Upper-level seminars

Team teaching of upper level seminars, while offering potential benefit to students and faculty, is not a practice the College can regularly support at this stage. Replacing courses "lost" by committing two or more faculty to a single seminar would simply stretch most programs and departments beyond available resources. For many capstone seminars, we recognize that departments, especially small departments, may wish to involve multiple members of the department collectively. This is best done by one faculty member "owning" the responsibility of a course, a position which passes in rotation among the department, and by other faculty members contributing on a regular but limited and voluntary basis.

While rewarding, team teaching presents challenges both for faculty and students. Differences in teaching style, instructor expectations, and evaluation standards can undermine the benefits of team teaching unless carefully addressed. Students need to know who to go to with a question or problem and they need to have confidence that they will receive consistent answers. Faculty members must also guard against creating a conversation between the instructors that inadvertently leaves students on the outside or overwhelmed by the expertise in the room. For the success of a team-taught course, students need to understand the ways in which the different perspectives being brought to bear add coherence to the course materials. This is especially important at the introductory level. Thus it is expected that faculty in all team-taught courses will avail themselves of information on best practices in team teaching. The Dean's Office will also undertake to facilitate regular workshops for faculty who team-teach.