

OPERATIONS MANUAL

UNC Common Numbering System (CNS)

This Operations Manual is intended to be a guide for faculty, staff, and administrators at the University of North Carolina System institutions involved in the operation and maintenance of the UNC Common Course Numbering System (UNC CNS).

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Overview

Purpose

The University of North Carolina Common Numbering System (UNC CNS) is a cooperative effort among all UNC System institutions to facilitate transfer of lower-division undergraduate courses. The UNC CNS provides a shared, uniform set of course designations for students, faculty, and advisors to use in determining course equivalency of transfer credit on a System-wide basis. When a student completes a course with a corresponding UNC CNS course number, that course transfers to any UNC institution with the same UNC CNS designation. This

Operations Manual supports [UNC System Policy 400.1.5](#) and Regulation 400.1.5.1[R].

Goal

Specific objectives of the UNC CNS

- Clarify for students which lower-division undergraduate courses from UNC System institutions are transferable from sending to receiving institutions. (Transparency)
- Instill confidence in receiving institutions that the transfer course taken by a student at the sending institutions is high quality, academically rigorous, and reviewed by faculty at each institution. (Quality)
- Reduce the number of credits that do not directly satisfy degree requirements for students who plan to transfer. (Student Success)
- Contribute as many applicable transferable courses as possible when a student transfers, which may lead to a reduction in the time to degree completion, and with an increase in overall degree graduation rates. (Student Success)
- Provide a review and approval structure for adding and removing course numbering designations and addressing future course equivalencies across all institutions in the UNC System. (Engagement)

Why Course Equivalency Systems are Important

Policy makers, community college and university leadership, and faculty members agree the ease of transfer is vital to the success of today's students. In the 1980's and 1990's, discussions focused on course numbering, articulation, and unique transfer agreements. In recent years, national conversations have moved towards learning outcomes and course equivalencies. Course equivalencies describe how a specific course offered by a postsecondary institution relates to a course offered by another institution, based on the learning outcomes.

Definitions

- A. "Academic Discipline Committee." A group of UNC constituent institution faculty appointed as discipline content experts to assist with the

implementation and/or maintenance of the equivalencies contained in the UNC CNS.

- B. "Appeals Process." If a transfer student perceives that the terms of the UNC CNS policy or regulation have not been honored, they may follow the CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure. Each UNC institution will provide a link to the CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure on its website.
- C. "Appropriate Credit." A determined number of credit hours granted for a particular course or courses, aligned with the subject content and academic outcomes.
- D. "Bi-directional." The courses listed in the UNC CNS list transfer between institutions in both directions.
- E. "CNS Course List." The official list of UNC CNS courses approved by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at the UNC System Office.
- F. "CNS Course Number." The specific and unique identifier applied to all CNS courses. The schema for the classification system is outlined later in this document.
- G. "Common Numbering System Update Form." (See Appendix A) developed and maintained by the UNC System Office Division of Academic Affairs, must be completed for all additions, changes (course prefixes, numbers, titles, content, or credits), and deletions of undergraduate courses with an equivalency to a CNS Course.
- H. "Course Exemption." Rationales of sufficient evidentiary quality that an institution does not have an equivalent for a course listed in the UNC CNS, either because the institution does not offer the course, or the institution deems that there is no existing course with an 80% content equivalency. Requests should be submitted to an institution's chief academic officer (CAO) for consideration, and after receiving CAO approval, submitted to the UNC System Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs for approval.

- I. "Discipline Coordinators." Serve as spokespersons for each of the disciplines covered in the UNC CNS and work closely with the UNC System Office to maintain representation and convene meetings as governed by the UNC CNS Regulation.
- J. "Inactive Course." A course that has not been taught for five (academic) years and is not anticipated to be offered in the future.
- K. "Institutional Points of Contact (POC)." Individuals appointed by institutional chief academic officers to coordinate with the UNC System Office. There is one POC for each institution.
- L. "The North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA)." A statewide agreement governing the transfer of credits between North Carolina Community Colleges (NCCC) and UNC System institutions for students who earn the Associate in Arts or Associate in Science degree.
- M. "UNC CNS Operations Manual." This document, maintained by the UNC System Office that contains instructions and additional directions regarding the operation of the UNC CNS.
- N. "Undergraduate Lower-Division Courses." Undergraduate lower-division courses are usually those with introductory and some intermediate content intended for first- or second-year undergraduate students. Typically, courses numbered at the 100/200 or 1000/2000 level are considered undergraduate lower-division courses.
- O. "UNC System Policy 400.1.5." Fostering Undergraduate Student Success. <https://www.northcarolina.edu/apps/policy/index.php?section=400.1.5>

CNS Classification System

The course prefixes and numbers for courses included in the CNS are as follows:

- For courses included in the CAA Course Transfer List, the three-digit prefix and three-digit course number used by the NCCCS will be used.¹
 - Each course will carry the “CNS” designation (e.g., ART 111 CNS – Art Appreciation)
- The UNC CNS allows for courses outside of the CAA to be included in the CNS, as approved by the appropriate discipline committees and the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs. Courses outside of the NCCCS CAA that become part of the CNS will contain the three-digit prefix and a four-digit course number (UNC System courses) in addition to the CNS suffix (e.g., GHY 1011 CNS – Global Climate Change).

Course Review Criteria/Process

UNC System constituent institution CNS courses are reviewed annually for inclusion in the CNS list. The criteria below describe CNS inclusion.

- A. For a course to be assigned a UNC CNS number, institutions that offer a course equivalency to the proposed course must agree that at least 80 percent of the course content is common. Institutions that do not offer a course equivalent must follow the procedure for requesting an exemption to the UNC CNS designation.
- B. Departments and faculty are not required to change or standardize courses to achieve a course equivalency, nor are they required to change course delivery methods.
- C. Each course shall have only one prefix and one number on the UNC CNS Course List. Courses should not be cross-listed or have multiple equivalents.

¹The UNC CNS adds a CNS suffix to a select set of existing NCCCS course numbers as a starting basis for its numbering system retaining the ability to add courses unique to the UNC System for several reasons:

- The NCCCS uses a common numbering system for all 58 campuses;
- The majority of lower-division, commonly transferred courses across the UNC System are also NCCCS courses within the CAA;
- The NCCCS course numbering system has been in existence for 25 years, and consequently these course titles and course numbers are recognizable across the UNC System institutions.

For example, institutions should list no more than one course equivalency for ART 111 CNS. Institutions will retain their internal course numbering systems for courses listed with UNC CNS designations.

- D. After the initial UNC CNS list is launched, future additions to the UNC CNS course list must have course descriptions and objectives considered for adoption into the equivalency list by the Academic Discipline Committees.
- E. The Common Numbering System Update Form (See Appendix A) developed and maintained by the UNC System Office Division of Academic Affairs, must be completed for all additions, changes (course prefixes, numbers, titles, content, or credits), and deletions of undergraduate courses with an equivalency to a CNS Course.
- F. Requests to add a new course to the UNC CNS, must include the following from the originating institution:
 - a. Completion of the Common Numbering System Update Form (Appendix A)
 - i. Course description and objectives
 - ii. Approval from originating institution CAO
- G. Discipline areas will have representation from constituent institutions on a central Academic Discipline Committee. Each discipline committee will elect a Discipline Coordinator who will be responsible for yearly review and oversight of any changes to course title, content alignment, credit hours, etc.

Procedures for Awarding Credit

- A. When a student transfers a course with a UNC CNS number with a grade of “C” or better, the receiving institution shall award academic credit that corresponds to the UNC CNS number.
- B. If the receiving institution determines that another institutional course offering would be more beneficial to a student’s degree path, the institution may award credit for another course in place of the UNC CNS credit.
- C. Courses without a UNC CNS number should continue to be accepted for transfer in a manner consistent with the institution’s current practice and/or transfer policies.

- D. There may be times when a UNC CNS course is taken at the sending institution, but the course is no longer an active course at the receiving institution. The receiving institution should apply the existing transfer policy that is currently used to award credit for inactive courses. The process for taking a course off the UNC CNS list is detailed in the next section.
- E. Students who receive a grade of “Pass” or other similar non-letter designation are not guaranteed transfer credit. The receiving institution may elect to award credit at their discretion.

Procedures for Changes to the CNS Course List

- A. The Common Numbering System Update Form must be completed for proposed additions to, changes to (e.g., course description, course title, course number, course prefix, course content, credit hours), and deletions to the UNC CNS Course List. Submissions for additions and changes must be complete and sent to the UNC System Office Division of Academic Affairs by February 15 of each year, to allow time for review prior to inclusion in the UNC CNS Course List. Deletions will be considered as an exemption and submitted by May 31 each year (See Procedures for Requesting an Exemption). See Appendix A for full description of updates that can be made.
- B. If all appropriate sections of the form have not been completed, the UNC CNS Coordinator will notify the contact person for the originating institution within 15 business days.
- C. If all appropriate sections of the form have been completed, the UNC CNS Coordinator and Discipline Coordinator will convene the Academic Discipline Committee to review each submission--except for institutional course catalog deletions, which do not require review by the discipline committee, but does require a request for exemption.
- D. In reviewing the change form and supporting materials, the UNC CNS Coordinator and Discipline Coordinator may request more information from an institution. If additional information is requested, an institution shall submit the information by the deadline set by the UNC System Office. If the additional information is not received by the deadline, consideration of the change form may be postponed to the following annual review cycle.

- E. The contact person listed on the form for each institution must be notified of the decision(s) within 30 business days of the submission deadline. If the contact person is not the registrar, the UNC CNS Coordinator will also notify the registrar at the institution and any other designee for whom an institution has requested notification.
- F. Institutions are encouraged to integrate the Common Numbering System Update Form into their existing course update process to ensure that any changes to UNC CNS equivalencies are captured.
- G. CNS Courses that have not been taught for five years and are not anticipated to be offered must be discontinued from the institution's course catalog and from the System-wide UNC CNS database. If needed, discontinued courses may be reactivated at any point in the future.
- H. All UNC CNS courses will be reviewed by Academic Discipline Committees on a rolling basis.
- I. If the requested change is approved, the UNC System CNS website and official list of UNC CNS courses will be updated. (cns.northcarolina.edu)

Procedures for Requesting an Exemption

- A. Course exemptions may be requested for the following reasons:
 - a. If an institution has no course equivalent, either because the institution does not offer a course or the institution deems that there is no existing course with an 80% content equivalency or
 - b. A current CNS course no longer meets the 80% equivalency or deletion of an institutional course.
- B. The CAO approval of the exemption along with the Common Numbering System Update Form (See Appendix A) must then be sent to the UNC CNS Coordinator by May 31 of each year. The submission should include a detailed explanation of why the CNS course does not have an equivalency at that institution.
- C. The UNC CNS Coordinator will review the submission to determine if all criteria have been met (i.e., the form is completed in full and appropriate signatures obtained).
- D. If all criteria for exemption **have not been** met, the contact person for the originating institution must be notified within 15 business days. The

institution will have an opportunity to respond by the deadline set by the UNC System Office.

- E. If all criteria for exemption **have been** met, the form will be forwarded to the UNC System SVP/AA for final approval.
- F. The contact person for the originating institution will be notified of the final decision on the exemption within 25 business days of the submission deadline.
- G. An exemption only needs to be requested one time either through the initial course review process or if the criteria for equivalency are no longer met following a course update.

Responsibilities of Constituent Institutions

- A. Institutions are expected to either map their appropriate courses to each of the courses listed in the Common Numbering System or request an exemption as described above. The updated list of UNC CNS courses will reside on the UNC CNS website: cns.northcarolina.edu
- B. At minimum, institutions are expected to maintain transfer course articulation rules in their Student Information (SIS) or Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems for all courses in the Common Numbering System for which they do not have an exemption. The rules will establish the default transfer of credit from a sending institution within the UNC System. The course transfer details shall be reviewed annually and updated in the ERP system.
- C. If a student transfers a course that is included in the UNC CNS list of courses, the receiving institution shall award credit in a manner consistent with an institution's approved procedures for awarding transfer credit. See the section on Procedures for Awarding Credit above.
- D. Constituent institutions must develop and publicize their own policies or practices regarding UNC CNS courses and the award of credit as specified by the System Office.
- E. In coordination with the UNC System Office, institutions must develop their own procedures for implementation of the UNC CNS (e.g., marketing/communication, admissions staff/advisor training, etc.).

- F. Institutions are encouraged to include information about the CNS in course catalogs, student handbooks, and/or online resources for undergraduate students and faculty advisors.
- G. After implementation, institutions must establish their own procedures for reviewing new courses; proposed changes to courses, course number, prefix, or credits; and proposed deletion of courses that align with the System Office procedures for CNS updates. Institutions are encouraged to integrate the Common Numbering System Update Form into their existing course update process to ensure that any changes to UNC CNS equivalencies are captured.
- H. Institutions may be asked to appoint a representative from each discipline listed in the UNC CNS to serve on a System-wide Academic Discipline Committee.
- I. Each UNC institution will provide a link to the CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure on its website.

Responsibilities of UNC System Office

- A. Create and maintain a searchable database for approved UNC CNS courses that are transferable between all UNC System institutions.
- B. Shall be responsible for yearly updates to the CNS Course List. UNC System Office Division of Academic Affairs shall conduct regular maintenance and upkeep of the CNS Course List to ensure that it accurately reflects course offerings.
- C. Maintain and publish the UNC CNS Operations Manual, which provides guidance on implementation and maintenance of the UNC CNS.
- D. Maintain a Common Numbering System Update Form for additions, changes, and deletions. (See Appendix A)
- E. Provide oversight and maintenance of the UNC CNS that includes:
 - a. Compliance with the UNC CNS Course List
 - b. Updates to UNC CNS website
 - c. Yearly review of UNC CNS related data
- F. Yearly review of CAA courses included on the UNC CNS Course List to identify updates that may impact course equivalencies.
- G. The UNC System Office will convene and coordinate Academic Discipline Committees as needed.

Compliance & Reporting

- A. Beginning July 1 of each year, the UNC System Office will begin conducting an annual audit and review of the prior academic year's UNC CNS-related actions, approvals, and activities. This report will include reviewing UNC CNS course credit awarded and related information. The report will be presented annually to the President of the University and the North Carolina Board of Governors.

UNC CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure

If a transfer student perceives that the terms of the UNC CNS policy or regulation have not been honored, they may follow the Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure. Each UNC institution will provide a link to the CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure on its website. The Transfer Credit Appeals procedure can also be found on the CNS website. (cns.northcarolina.edu)

- A. Step #1: By the last day of classes of the first semester for which admission is offered, the student must submit a CNS Transfer Credit Appeal Form along with any supporting documentation to the director of admission at the UNC institution to which the student has been admitted. Students first enrolling in a summer session must submit their appeal by the end of the subsequent fall semester. The director of admission shall provide a written response (email or letter) to the student appeal within 15 business days.
- B. Step #2: If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the director of admission, they may appeal on the same form to the Chief Academic Officer (Provost) or CAO's designee of their institution within 15 days of written notice of the director's decision. The CAO or CAO's designee will review the appeal and respond in writing (email or letter) to the student within 15 business days of receiving the student's appeal.
- C. Step # 3: If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the CAO, they may appeal to the UNC CNS Coordinator to review the decision. The student must submit the appeal to the UNC CNS Coordinator within 15 days of receipt of the CAO's decision.