College of Arts & Sciences Policy and Guidelines for Collaborative and Team Teaching

Note: Prospective co-instructors whose primary appointment is in another BU school or college should check the policies of that unit.

I. Collaborative and Team Teaching: Benefits and Challenges

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These days a large proportion of faculty is likely involved in some form of collaborative teaching. Faculty share syllabi, consult with each other on readings and pedagogical practices, and borrow each other’s materials. They tap into the wealth of online resources for ideas and examples, and use course materials that colleagues provide as they shape their own courses and pedagogies. They invite each other to do guest lectures in their courses. Many professional organizations sponsor websites, blogs, and other means to facilitate this collaboration. Especially because of the rise of interdisciplinary and other cross-field degree programs and courses, faculty are increasingly involved in – or want to be involved in – fully integrated team teaching.

Collaborative teaching takes a variety of forms on a continuum from one-off guest lecturing in colleagues’ courses to conventional, fully collaborative “team teaching,” where two or several instructors work together as full partners to develop and teach a course together as co-equal instructors for the entire semester. Collaborative teaching offers many opportunities and benefits for faculty and students, but it also poses challenges and raises important policy problems that can be stumbling blocks to success. This document offers some guidance and the current state of policy in CAS for collaborative and especially team teaching.

I. Collaborative and Team Teaching: Benefits and Challenges

Collaborative teaching benefits students and faculty in many ways when thoughtfully and skillfully done. There is little point in doing it unless the faculty who are involved have different, complementary expertise and skills. That makes full-blown team teaching one of the most obvious strategies for developing truly interdisciplinary courses, which incorporate expertise and skills that one person alone rarely possesses. Nevertheless, faculty considering engaging in collaborative teaching should be aware of the challenges and potential drawbacks and address them in the design of the course.

Benefits for Students: Collaborative and especially fully team teaching enables a broadening of expertise, content, and perspectives beyond what a single instructor could normally provide. Ideally, when instructors share a classroom, their interaction should also help students

- understand both the power and limitations of different approaches to the subject;
• witness and therefore learn to engage in respectful and constructive forms of
disagreement and consideration of alternative perspectives and approaches based on
scholarly inquiry;
• become experienced with models of collaboration among professionals;
• achieve higher than usual levels of synthesis and integration across different areas of
expertise that are usually presented in different courses;
• benefit from interaction with and mentoring from multiple faculty around a single
subject.

Challenges for Students: Team teaching, poses some real challenges for students, and can be a
less effective form of pedagogy than many faculty realize, as significant research and experience
shows. Most importantly, any team teaching strategy that does not actively create full
integration and coherence across the sessions and instructors of a course is likely to leave the
students confused, frustrated, dissatisfied, and perhaps resentful.

• Different faculty, especially from different disciplines, subdisciplines, or approaches,
tend to use somewhat different professional languages, terms, and definitions, and if
these differences are not actively engaged in the course, students will be confused.
• Relatively uncoordinated “variety show” approaches to team teaching (each instructor
is given a topic for “their” classes and left relatively independent in other ways) are
especially ineffective as learning experiences. These approaches leave the course
without a clear overarching framework or baseline for comparison or linkage, which
results in students’ experiencing the material as isolated lumps of information. If
assessment techniques (e.g., examinations) are also handled piecemeal, the lack of
coherence is reinforced. This hampers the overall learning experience and impact.
• Students already learn to adjust to different faculty expectations and styles, but with a
multiplicity of expectations and styles within one course, they may not know who to
turn to for help, and it is more difficult for them to develop relationships with each
instructor that support the likelihood of their seeking effective help and mentorship.
Students in team teaching situations sometimes express frustration about not knowing
how to please different professors at the same time.
• When students witness disagreement and contradiction among different professors’
approaches to the same subject and there is no resolution or clear strategy for
resolution, students are likely to conclude that these are simply differences of opinion
and don’t really matter.
• Because faculty in a team teaching situation may focus more on their particular “piece”
of the course than on the course as a whole, they may collectively demand much more
of students in terms of background and preparation than they would in a course they
taught on their own within a single discipline.
• Faculty often approach interdisciplinarity through their disciplines or as a critique of
them; the students, however, will not have a lot of background in the disciplines and
may not grasp the full import of what the faculty hope to achieve.

For team teaching to be effective, participating faculty have to devote considerable effort to
creating a clearly structured, coherent learning experience for their students. Faculty must
create strategies for coherence, not simply leave students to create it for themselves. In general,
the College of Arts & Sciences does not encourage the creation of “variety show” approaches to team teaching because of the drawbacks of this model for student learning.

**Benefits for Faculty:** Collaborative teaching fosters scholarly and pedagogical growth – these experiences are great learning opportunities for faculty. Collaborating faculty members’ teaching philosophies and repertoire of teaching techniques are enriched by the exploration, discussion, and deliberation that go into course planning and by the opportunity to observe each other’s pedagogical work during the course. Not only can a successful experience of collaborative teaching infuse new energy and ideas into faculty’s solo teaching, but it can also have ripple effects, advancing formal or informal research collaborations, contributing to the cross-pollination of enrollments, and raising the overall level of pedagogical innovation and conversation about teaching within and across academic programs. These courses often give faculty an opportunity to work with students who are different from those who generally populate their courses, and even to attract new students to their solo classes, labs, and fields.

**Challenges for Faculty:** In order to realize these benefits, collaborating instructors must address a number of significant challenges, all clearly exemplified by the conventional, fully collaborative “team teaching” model.

- Most faculty who have worked with others to create effective team-taught courses find that the time and effort they spend in the development process is much greater than the time and effort they spend on creating “solo” courses. This is because all parties must stretch well beyond their current stock of knowledge, their language and conceptual frameworks, pedagogical approaches, and assumptions about learning goals. The work they devote collectively to creating the framework and working out the details is considerable. Even with careful planning, during the course of teaching faculty are likely to continue to encounter places where their terminology and disciplinary assumptions diverge, and for the sake of the students they must create coherence.
- It is almost inevitable that tensions and some amount of conflict arises during both the course development and teaching phases for many reasons, including the need to create coherence and make consequential choices. Faculty who are used to the autonomy of their own classrooms may find the shift to collaborative processes and a joint product more challenging than they expected. Faculty must work with these tensions and conflicts in a way that is constructive and not distracting or confusing for the students. It is certainly unacceptable to put students in a position of needing to “choose sides.”
- The teamwork offers scope for great creativity, but the need for coordination and coherence can put boundaries on that creativity and spontaneity.
- Faculty may encounter challenges related to intellectual property questions: Whose work is this? What rights do the partners have to use or alter syllabi or materials for other purposes?
- Faculty team members may encounter and have to deal with issues related to divisions of labor and effort among themselves. Is everyone shouldering a fair share of the work? How should such issues be resolved constructively in order to avoid counterproductive ruptures?
- When a faculty team develops a course together, what commitments have they made implicitly or explicitly for the future? How many times and when will the same team
teach the same course again? How will revisions work? What thought has the team put into the possibility that particular faculty may leave or join the team – and when they do, what happens to the particulars of the course?

- From the point of view of departments and colleges: What commitments have been made implicitly or explicitly about the future? What if a team member is needed for another course?
- How does participation in a team-taught course “count” as part of a course load? How do faculty make sure they get appropriate credit for their efforts? What are the fairness and equity issues, and how can they be resolved?
- Given the challenges of course development, is there any special compensation or support for the development of team-taught courses?

Clearly, faculty should think carefully and have comprehensive conversations with their colleagues, chairs, and perhaps deans before embarking on team teaching. Listing these challenges is meant to warn faculty to go into these ventures in a clear-eyed way, but not to scare them off. Many faculty find that team taught courses are among the most exciting and satisfying teaching experiences they have.

II. Formats for Collaborative and Team Teaching

A. Occasional Guest Lecturing in Colleagues’ Courses

Guest lecturing, often implemented as a mutual one-for-one exchange, is frequent and flourishing in the College, and a normal part of faculty professional life.

Some policy considerations:

- Under Boston University policy, BU employees, including faculty from other BU schools and colleges, cannot receive over-base compensation for guest lecturing in BU courses.
- Faculty members teaching undergraduate courses may apply to the CAS Academic Enhancement Fund (AEF) for modest honoraria (usually $200–400) to enable their hosting of guest academics and expert practitioners from outside BU.
- Invitations to guest lecturers should apprise them of overall course goals, relevant background that students will have accrued by that point in the semester, and general expectations for the visit. Instructors should also ensure that students have prepared to take full advantage of the interaction. Follow-up assignments can help weave the visit into the fabric of the course. Faculty giving guest lectures can make their contributions more effective by making sure they integrate their offering into the course framework.

Teaching credit and workload issues: The instructor of record for a course in which there are occasional guest lectures receives full teaching credit for the course. Faculty who offer guest lectures should document their contributions as part of their teaching and service beyond regularly scheduled courses in their Faculty Annual Report (FAR).

B. Magazine-style Courses: Lead Faculty with Supplemental Instructors

*Description:* In what are sometimes referred to as “magazine-style” courses, the (always present) lead instructor of record choreographs the overall course and lines up a series of guest faculty experts for an extensive part of the course. Each guest faculty expert teaches one or two
classes and/or acts as a support or resource instructor for targeted activities such as workshops or integrating forums, all on a voluntary basis.

This format should be used with caution and only when appropriate to the purpose and level of the course. It is probably most useful in graduate and undergraduate capstone courses (especially if guest experts are available to mentor student projects) and in professional development courses.

Most crucially, the lead faculty instructor must avoid allowing the course to degenerate into a “variety show” format. The instructor should create a carefully constructed overall framework and set of course goals, providing guest experts with sufficient guidance to help them successfully integrate their contributions into that framework. Especially at lower levels, lead instructors of courses in the magazine format should normally teach at least 50% of the time throughout the semester, and guest lectures should be spaced to allow for accruing integration and reflection. When reviewing proposed new courses for which a faculty member is to receive full teaching credit despite plans for more than a few guest lectures, CAS curriculum committees look for evidence of intellectual coherence and thoroughgoing pedagogical as well as logistical coordination.

Teaching credit and workload issues: The instructor of record in a magazine-style course should organize the course, generally teaches at least 50% of the classes, takes responsibility for assessing the students, and receives full teaching credit for the course. Faculty who offer guest lectures should document their contributions as part of their teaching and service beyond regularly scheduled courses in their Faculty Annual Report (FAR).

**C. Connected Courses**

*Description:* Two courses, each with its own instructor, are scheduled to meet at the same time and paired to the extent that they meet jointly with both instructors at intervals throughout the semester and/or share some assignments or projects.

Consider the example of two connected courses offered within the CAS Writing Program in 2014/15. In that case, the Writing Program paired and linked a course aimed at non-native English language (ESL) students with an identically themed non-ESL course to create team-teaching on a limited basis that involved (a) separate formal writing instruction appropriate to the different populations of students and (b) periodic combined group fieldwork and discussions that were intended to foster academically enriching cross-cultural interaction and peer learning.

Faculty considering whether to connect two courses should have a clear sense of what the pairing is intended to achieve, and specifically what the learning goals and plans are for the *separate* work of the two courses and what the learning goals and plans are for the *joint* work of the two courses. There must also be a plan for the space needs of the courses’ joint as well as separate meetings.

Another model used at some universities for connecting courses is to package a set of two or three courses in *different disciplines* that are linked by a *common theme* for offering in *different time slots in a single semester* to a *single student cohort*. In this example, the instructors of the connected courses team up to attract a common set of students, coordinate with each other to create sufficient coherence across the different courses, and provide some common integrating
experiences to highlight the cross-disciplinary connections, similarities, and differences. It is possible to create project assignments that would allow students to link what they are learning in the different courses. There is some evidence nationally that collaborative teaching of this sort improves student retention, accelerates cognitive development, and fosters civic contributions to the institution. Finding students to form the cohort and aligning their schedules can, however, be challenging without a pre-existing learning community such as the CAS Core Curriculum or a large interdisciplinary major on which to draw.

Teaching credit and workload issues: Faculty who teach paired full courses that meet together ≤ 30% of the time receive full credit for the course they are scheduled to teach.

Faculty interested in developing ad hoc course clusters should discuss their vision with the associate dean for undergraduate education.

D. “Tag-team” Teaching

Description: Only one instructor is present at a time. Each of two (or several) instructors in turn teaches a half (or corresponding fraction) of the course.

Faculty must coordinate their content to ensure that it is cohesive and not redundant, but they do not actually share the teaching or grading. While ideally this model allows students to learn each successive aspect of the course from an expert, it inevitably misses out on the benefits of give and take between instructors. Unless instructor-to-instructor transitions are carefully managed, tag-team teaching, like magazine-style approaches, can result in distracting and counter-productive problems of incoherence and mid-course adjustment.

The CAS Department of Biology uses the tag-team format to cover a broad range of topic areas expertly in the lecture component of the introductory BI 107/108 sequence. Importantly, as lead lecturers come and go, the semester-long laboratory component of those courses helps reinforces continuity of instruction.

Whenever a department is considering tag-team teaching either for a new course or as a change in format for an existing course, the chair should consult the appropriate associate dean for undergraduate or graduate education.

Teaching Credit and Workload Issues: This model requires careful and complex accounting of teaching workload and credit because nearly all faculty teaching assignments in CAS comprise some whole number (2–6) of courses per year, whereas in a tag team-taught course individual faculty members receive teaching credit only for the fraction of the course for which they were responsible; for example, 0.5 (half credit) when a course is equally divided between two instructors. In the Biology example above, the same lead lecturers tag-teach multiple lecture sections of BI 107 in a given semester, with teaching credit for each team member multiplied accordingly.

E. Dispersed Team Teaching

Description: Some number of weekly class meetings of all faculty and students in the course are combined with discussion sections led by each member of the faculty teaching team for a subset of the students.
This model incorporates sustained interaction with the discussion leader and other advantages of a small class environment, but at some loss of opportunities for students to hear multiple faculty perspectives on the same topic. This tradeoff can be mitigated to the extent that faculty-to-faculty dialogue persists outside of class.

Examples of dispersed team teaching within CAS include the interdisciplinary WS 101/102 sequence in Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, and MA/CS 109: The Art and Science of Quantitative Reasoning.

Teaching Credit and Workload Issues: These are discussed below in Section III of this document.

F. Fully Integrated Team Teaching

Description: Two (or more) instructors, most often coming together to their shared topic from different disciplines, are fully joint instructors of the same course, collaborating with each other and integrating their work throughout the entire course. The course is collaboratively designed, taught, and graded, and both instructors attend and participate in nearly all class meetings.

This is perhaps the most challenging form of collaborative teaching for the reasons listed earlier in this document, but it also offers the most scope for an innovative and integrative teaching and learning experience in which faculty as well as students have an opportunity to grow and learn in ways that are less likely in the conventional “solo” course.

In recent years, a competition co-sponsored by the Office of the Provost and BU Center for Excellence & Innovation in Teaching has supported faculty team-teaching initiatives that “cross department, program, and school/college boundaries” with Interdisciplinary Course Development (ICD) grants. The College of Arts & Sciences may also offer support for the development of team-taught courses where the course would serve critical high priority curricular needs in CAS.

Teaching Credit and Workload Issues: These are discussed in the next section of this document.

III. Teaching Credit for Fully Collaborative and Dispersed Team Teaching

In addition to benefiting students and faculty, team teaching must be compatible with the capacity of CAS and its departments to meet our full set of curricular commitments without creating the need for hiring additional faculty to cover courses that are “lost” to team teaching; and it must also conform to principles of workload fairness and equity across faculty.

Departments, programs, and faculty must use the annual academic planning exercise to assure that proposed team teaching will not reduce a department’s ability to cover required curriculum and will not result in new instructional costs (replacement teaching or overload). However, because there are circumstances under which team teaching advances the College’s ability to fulfill its educational goals, especially by supporting interdisciplinary courses and curricula, departments and their faculty must make every effort to find ways to allow colleagues to participate in these courses. The Dean’s Office can help.

The idea for a team-taught course is most likely to develop first through curricular planning within an interdisciplinary program or in a department that has diverse subfields. In the former
In any case, before faculty have devoted extensive time to planning a team-taught course – and certainly before a full course proposal has been drafted for submission to the College for approval – they or the chair/director should consult the CAS associate dean for undergraduate or graduate education to determine whether the team teaching aspect of the course will be approved. At this stage the associate dean will focus on whether the envisioned collaboration will substantially advance the teaching mission of the College and appropriate CAS units without placing inordinate stress on any department’s or program’s teaching resources or on faculty workloads. It is important to note that, like any addition to the curriculum, a new course in team-taught format should be planned for regular offering no less often than once every three years—with or without rotation of faculty, so the associate dean will also focus on the sustainability of the offering.

With encouragement from the chair(s) and associate dean, the faculty members then must develop a detailed syllabus and complete a “New Course Proposal” form (available here under “Curriculum Review & Modification”), where the collaborative aspect of the course is fully described and justified in the sections entitled “Need for the Course” and “Staffing.”

Complete proposals for new courses to be offered in a team-taught format are submitted in the usual way for curriculum committee, full faculty, and budgetary review at the department and College levels.

It is CAS policy that the first two times a course is team-taught by two or more faculty members, each of them receives a full teaching credit for the course, provided the following two conditions are met:

1. Each faculty member who is asking for full teaching credit will attend and participate in each session of the course, and
2. The enrollment for the course is at least \( n \) times greater than the minimum enrollment for courses at that level, where \( n \) = the number of proposed faculty teachers. We will also take account of the typical enrollments in the courses participating faculty otherwise usually teach in order to avoid reducing the College’s ability to serve its students.

After the second time a team has taught a course together, the participants may be given partial course-load credit for the course. If the faculty team believes that it would be appropriate for each of them to continue to receive full teaching credit for the third or subsequent offerings of a team-taught course, they must make a formal written application to their chair(s) in the context
of the Annual Academic Planning Exercise. **If the chair concurs, the chair forwards the application to the dean’s office, via Senior Academic Administrator Peter Law (pgl@bu.edu), for review by the relevant curriculum committee(s) and final approval by the Dean.**

No request for continuing full teaching credit beyond the second offering will be approved that fails to meet conditions (1) and (2) above. For requests that do satisfy those conditions, special consideration will be given to courses

- That are taught by faculty from different departments, and so have a substantial interdisciplinary aspect,
- That have (anticipated) enrollments far greater than the minimal enrollment described in (2) above,
- That have special intellectual or pedagogical reasons for requiring a team-taught format, and
- Where the team-teaching format demonstrably improves the quality of students’ learning

Faculty members who would like to continue to team teach a course with the same instructors but are content to receive partial credit (divided over the number of instructors) after the second time do not need to submit an application.

When a new faculty member rotates into a fully collaborative or dispersed team-taught course in whose initial design s/he did not participate, all members of the team share responsibility for integrating the new member’s participation in order to maintain high levels of coherence and student learning. In some cases, the new member’s particular expertise and fresh perspectives provide an opportunity, without fundamentally altering course goals, to introduce material and emphases that inspire and require adjustments throughout the course. Different from the assignment of new faculty to discrete segments of a tag-team course, comings and goings of individual faculty members in fully team taught courses may require significant additional in- and out-of-class effort on the part of continuing as well as new team members.

**CAS faculty rotating into fully collaborative or dispersed team-taught courses thus receive full teaching credit the first time they co-teach the course, even if their co-teachers are currently receiving partial credit. Co-teachers receiving partial credit are encouraged to submit an application for one-time return to full teaching credit if they believe that would be warranted by their extra work of integrating and taking full advantage of a new team member’s participation.**