



FAQ

- Q1.** What do Education Code and Title 5 say about faculty authority for curriculum? Where is the line between faculty authority for curriculum and local governing board rights or responsibilities for curricular offerings?
- Q2.** How is the composition of the curriculum committee determined? Can a curriculum committee include administrators?
- Q3.** What is the legal or official requirement regarding the review cycle for curriculum?
- Q4.** Who assigns courses to disciplines? Can a course be assigned to more than one discipline?
- Q5.** What are the requirements and process for establishing a prerequisite on a course? Where can I find information on best practices for establishing a prerequisite through content review?
- Q6.** Why do some colleges assign plus and minus grades while others do not? What are the requirements and process for establishing plus/minus grading at a community college?
- Q7.** Can an instructor assign a grade or points based on a student's attendance?
- Q8.** What formal requirements or guidelines exist for setting class size limits or enrollment caps? ^

- Q9.** How many times can a student repeat a credit course to replace a substandard grade?
- Q10.** What are the regulations or limits regarding the offering of two or more classes taught in the same place at the same time by the same instructor, such as multiple levels of a class sequence being combined?
- Q11.** Do pre-requisite courses that are required for enrollment in major courses need to be included in the sixty units for the AA-T and AS-T degrees?
- Q12.** What courses are classified as a distance education course? Are there any special procedures or considerations required when approving these courses?
- Q13.** What is a special topics course?
- Q14.** What is an Independent Study course?
- Q15.** What is supplemental learning assistance (“supplemental instruction”)?
- Q16.** Do instructors have to meet minimum qualifications to provide supplemental learning assistance?
- Q17.** How does supplemental learning assistance differ from tutoring?
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1. Education Code section 70902 (b) (7) states, “The governing board of each district shall establish procedures to ensure . . . the right of academic senates to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards.” **Title 5 section 53200** lists “curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines” as one of the “academic and professional matters” regarding which the academic senate shall makes recommendations to the administration of a college and the governing board of a district.

In addition, **Title 5 Section 55002** gives curriculum committees the responsibility for recommending to the governing board in areas regarding curriculum, including new or modified course approval, grading policies, prerequisites, and others. Title 5 Section 55002 states that the curriculum committee “shall be either a committee of the academic senate or a committee that includes faculty and is otherwise comprised in a way that is mutually agreeable to the college and/or district administration and the academic senate.”

All of these sections of Education Code and Title 5 support the voice and authority of faculty in making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and instruction. However, making recommendations is not the same as making final decisions; that authority rests with the l ^

governing board. Under the definition of collegial consultation in **Title 5 section 53203**, governing boards that have agreed to rely primarily on the judgment and advice of the academic senate will normally accept the recommendations of the senate, and “only in exceptional circumstances and for compelling reasons will the recommendations not be accepted.” When local agreements indicate that the governing board will mutually agree with the academic senate and “agreement has not been reached, existing policy shall remain in effect unless continuing with such policy exposes the district to legal liability or causes substantial fiscal hardship. In cases where there is no existing policy, or in cases where the exposure to legal liability or substantial fiscal hardship requires existing policy to be changed, the governing board may act, after a good faith effort to reach agreement, only for compelling legal, fiscal, or organizational reasons.”

When considered together, all of these excerpts from Education Code and Title 5 clearly leave the final authority for all decisions with the governing board, but they also clearly indicate that the recommendations of the academic senate in curricular matters should be respected and generally accepted by local governing boards and administrations.

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2. The composition of the curriculum committee is a local issue. **Title 5 Section 55002** states that the curriculum committee “shall be either a committee of the academic senate or a committee that includes faculty and is otherwise comprised in a way that is mutually agreeable to the college and/or district administration and the academic senate.” The curriculum committee must include faculty, but nothing in Title 5 prohibits the inclusion of administrators or mandates the relative proportion of faculty and administrative members. The important issue is that the academic senate has the right to agree to the composition of the curriculum committee when it is established and that, because Title 5 indicates that the composition of the committee is subject to mutual agreement with the academic senate, any changes to the committee’s composition should be subject to agreement with the academic senate or should follow college or district decision-making processes to which the senate has agreed.

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3. Neither Title 5 nor Education Code specify an exact review cycle for all courses. The fourth edition of the Program and Course Approval Handbook (PCAH) states, “Colleges are required to periodically review curriculum in a process called ‘program review’ during which the faculty and administrators review the program requirements and course content in consultation with advisory groups” (**page 18**). The PCAH continues to say, “At present there is no standard model(s) officially recommended for conducting program review in the California Commu ^
Colleges system. There is an imperative, however, that every college must conduct an effective

review of its instructional programs on a regular basis” (page 28). However, several separate requirements from Title 5, the Accreditation Standards, and other sources help to establish the most reasonable periodic course review cycle.

Title 5 section 55003 states that “at least once each six years all prerequisites and corequisites established by the district shall be reviewed, except that prerequisites and corequisites for vocational courses or programs shall be reviewed every two years.” This statement applies only to the review of prerequisites, not to the entire course or course outline. However, because prerequisite review is most likely to be a feature of the overall review of the course, many colleges apply this six-year maximum review rule not only to prerequisites but also to course review in general.

Standard IIA.2(e) of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges states, “The institution evaluates all courses and programs through an on-going systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans.” This language does not specify a length for the on-going review cycle. However, because the cycle for the overall accreditation process is six years, and one can safely assume that a college that had not reviewed its curriculum between accreditation processes would not be seen as compliant, a curriculum review cycle of six years or less would be necessary to meet Accreditation Standard IIA.2(e).

The review cycle can also impact the transferability and articulation of courses. The University of California’s “Policy on Course Transferability, Directions for Revising the UC Transferable Course Agreements and Special Regulations for Courses in Specific Subject Areas” states that for UC transferable course agreements, “Outlines should be current (not more than seven years old).” The CSU system also demands currency of course outlines in order to articulate the courses.

Finally, the C-ID (Course Identification Numbering System) requires that course outlines submitted for C-ID designation be no more than five years old. Outlines that have not been reviewed within five years therefore cannot be assigned a C-ID designator.

For all of these reasons, even though Title 5 does not specify a specific length for the overall curriculum review cycle, a periodic review process of not more than six years and preferably of five years seems most advisable. The final determination of the curriculum review cycle is a local decision made primarily by the Curriculum Committee, but relevant administrators and curriculum support staff should also be consulted in making this decision.

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4. Title 5 gives local academic senates the authority of assigning courses to disciplines as p
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Title 5 § 53200 (b) states that “Academic senate,” “faculty council,” and “faculty senate” mean an organization formed in accordance with the provisions of this Subchapter whose primary function, as the representative of the faculty, is to make recommendations to the administration of a college and to the governing board of a district with respect to academic and professional matters. For purposes of this Subchapter, reference to the term “academic senate” also constitutes reference to “faculty council” or “faculty senate.”

(c) “Academic and professional matters” means the following policy development and implementation matters:

(1) curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines;

More often than not, assigning courses to disciplines falls under the duties performed by local curriculum committees in consultation with discipline faculty. A process should be in place to facilitate the decisions of the committee. Courses may be assigned to more than one discipline if deemed appropriate by the discipline faculty and the curriculum committee. It should be noted that once a course is placed into a discipline, all faculty who meet minimum qualifications in that discipline may be assigned to teach the course.

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5. Since the Board of governors approved a change to **Title 5 § 55003** in March 2011, two important documents regarding the establishment of prerequisites have been published. The Chancellor’s Office has created **Guidelines for Title 5 Regulations Section 55003**, which provides definitions and explanations of all of the aspects of the process for establishing prerequisites and also includes a collection of frequently asked questions on this topic. The Academic Senate has also published the paper **Implementing Content Review for Communication and Computation Prerequisites**, which both discusses requirements and offers advice on creating practices for establishing prerequisites.

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6. **Title 5 section 55023** gives each district’s governing board the right to choose whether that district will or will not employ plus and minus grading. However, under this same section of Title 5, a grade of C- is not allowed under any circumstances. In addition, the highest grade point value allowed is 4.0; therefore, while a grade of A+ is not prohibited, it does not count differently from an A in determining the student’s grade point average. The decision to employ plus and minus grading is clearly an academic matter, and thus a governing board should work with the local academic senate and curriculum committee in making any decision to move to or from plus/minus grading. Likewise, because students also have a right to be consulted on matters that impact them, local student leadership should also be involved in such discussions.


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7. **Title 5 section 55002.a.2.A** states, “Grading Policy. The course provides for measurement of student performance in terms of the stated course objectives and culminates in a formal, permanently recorded grade based upon uniform standards in accordance with **section 55023**. The grade is based on demonstrated proficiency in subject matter and the ability to demonstrate that proficiency, at least in part, by means of essays, or, in courses where the curriculum committee deems them to be appropriate, by problem solving exercises or skills demonstrations by students.” Students must be assessed on their ability to demonstrate proficiency in meeting the course objectives. Attendance is not part of a course subject matter or a discipline-specific skill and therefore may not be separately assessed as part of the course curriculum.

However, Title 5 section 55002.a.2.B. states, “The course grants units of credit based upon a relationship specified by the governing board between the number of units assigned to the course and the number of lecture and/or laboratory hours or performance criteria specified in the course outline.” Since college credit units are calculated in part based on a given number of hours spent in class, students who miss an excessive amount of class time cannot be said to have fulfilled the course requirements and may be dropped from the course. The manner and criteria by which excessive absences are calculated is not stated in Title 5 and is therefore generally determined by local policy.

In addition, because class participation is one of the ways in which students demonstrate their proficiency with class material, and students who have not attended class have therefore not participated in class discussion, many instructors include “attendance and participation” as a factor in determining a course grade. This aspect of the grading criteria cannot be used to override all others, but it can be factored into a grade, especially if the participation is in part demonstrated by students through the completion of specific in-class activities, assignments, and quizzes.

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8. The establishment of course enrollment limits is a local decision. Class size is a curricular issue and therefore falls under the purview of the academic senate, but local senates often choose to delegate this responsibility to the curriculum committee. The process for setting course enrollment limits generally includes discipline faculty, curriculum committees, administration, and the local bargaining unit. In many cases class sizes are specified in the local bargaining agreement. Additional guidelines, advice on best practices, and examples of local processes can be found in the Academic Senate paper **Setting Course Enrollment Maximums: Process, Roles, and Principles**. 

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9. **Section 55042** of Title 5 allows a student to repeat a class two times to alleviate a substandard grade, including a “D,” “F,” “FW,” “NP” or “NC,” or if the student withdraw and receives a “W” grade. Note that the inclusion of the W grade in allowable number of enrollments is a recent change to Title 5. Local districts can permit a student an additional enrollment on a petition basis but cannot claim apportionment for that additional enrollment. More detailed information on repetition of courses are outlined in the Chancellor’s Office publication **California Community Colleges Guidelines for Title 5 Regulations Chapter 6**.

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10. Title 5 and Education Code do not specifically offer any guidance regarding courses being combined in this manner. The most important factor to consider in offering classes in such combinations is that all statewide and local curricular standards must be met for all of the courses included. For example, the total enrollment for the combined courses should not exceed the enrollment maximum set for any of the courses when they are offered separately. The objectives outlined in the Course Outline of Record for each class must also be met to avoid any lowering of instructional quality. Likewise, the instructor must meet minimum qualifications for all of the courses being offered together. Although the courses are being taught in the same place and by one person, the standards and expectations set by the college and instructor qualifications determined by the state for each individual class must still be respected.

In addition to these requirements, colleges should consider carefully the logic of combining the instruction of the specific courses. In some cases, joining multiple levels of a course sequence may make perfect sense, and indeed those students enrolled in lower levels might benefit from exposure to more experienced students. In other cases, however, the education of the more advanced students might be inhibited if too much time is occupied with students working at significantly lower levels. Likewise, if the courses being offered concurrently are too diverse in their content, the workload of the instructor may be unfairly increased and the quality of the instruction therefore could be compromised. Thus, while offering courses concurrently may be a logical and even beneficial option in some cases, it could in other instances be detrimental to the experience of the students, and faculty should therefore weigh these factors carefully before deciding to combine instruction in this manner.

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11. Prerequisites for courses in AA-T and AS-T degrees can be handled in two ways, depending on whether students have another means of fulfilling the prerequisite. If the prerequisite can be met through the college’s placement exam or through other alternatives to enrolling in and

passing the class, then the prerequisite does not need to be included in the required 60 units for the AA-T or AS-T. In contrast, if the prerequisite course cannot be met through any means other than taking and passing the course, then the course must be included in the 60 units for the degree.

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12. A distance education course is defined in **Title 5 section 55200** as a course with “instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology “. **Section 55206** requires that any distance education course “shall be separately reviewed and approved according to the district’s adopted course approval procedures.” Therefore, there are two separate approvals that are required, one for the course and one to offer it through distance education. When reviewing courses submitted for distance education approval, curriculum committees must ensure that instructors have a plan to satisfy section 55202, which requires that these courses meet the “same standards of course quality” as face to face classes, and section 55204, which requires that all distance education courses “includes regular effective contact between instructor and students.”

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13. A special topics course is defined in the PCAH as “one which employs a consistent disciplinary framework, but for which the specific focus may change from term to term.” In other words, everything on the Course Outline of Record—the course objectives, student learning outcomes, methods of instruction and methods of evaluation—is consistent from quarter to quarter with the exception of the focus area and context. Such courses have a stable, well-defined purpose within the college’s overall curricular offerings. One example of a special topics course might be a course in English Literature. The COR would specify that the course objectives include such areas as skill in critical analysis and writing and that each quarter the students will have a particular amount of reading and writing assignments and must write a research paper. The only component varying from one term to the next is the author of the works studied; for example, in one term the course would focus on works by Mark Twain to learn critical analysis and writing, and the next it might focus on works by Ernest Hemmingway.

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14. The ASCCC paper **Good Practices for Course Approval Processes** (1998) states, “Independent study courses are intended for one-on-one or small group instruction, research, or activities beyond the scope of currently offered courses.” These courses are typically use ^ allow an individual student the opportunity to explore a particular area of interest not already

offered elsewhere in the curriculum. The expectation is that, rather than following a set schedule as in a traditional class, the student will interact directly with the instructor on an individual basis. Title 5 §55232 requires independent study courses to have the same standards as traditional courses (i.e. instructor meets minimum qualifications, level of course rigor, adequate student-instructor contact, appropriate assessment/evaluation methods, etc). The PCAH stresses the difference between independent study courses and the **Title 5 mandate (§55002)** that students be required to study independently outside of class.

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15. At this time, the best resource for understanding supplemental learning assistance is the 2006 document, “**California Community Colleges Supplemental Learning Assistance and Tutoring Regulations and Guidelines.**” In it the Chancellor’s Office clarified Title 5 language and defined supplemental learning assistance (SLA) as assistance that is offered in learning labs or similar venues and is linked to a primary/parent course with the intention of increasing student success in that primary/parent course. The SLA course may be offered for credit in support of a credit parent course or may be noncredit in support of a noncredit parent course. At this time, there are limited situations in which a noncredit SLA course could be offered in support of a credit parent course, such as when the SLA course is a noncredit ESL or basic skills course in support of a credit parent course.

All SLA courses must meet course approval standards on their own merit as specified in **Title 5 §55002**. The course outline of record for the SLA course must explicitly identify the parent course or courses to which it is linked and is expected to address the specific skills, concepts, or objectives from the parent course or courses it supports.

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16. Yes. Supplemental learning assistance courses must be approvable on their own merit, and all courses must be assigned to a discipline from the official “Disciplines List” (**Minimum Qualifications for Faculty and Administrators in the California Community Colleges**). Therefore, the instructor for a supplemental learning assistance course must meet the minimum qualifications for the assigned discipline.

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17. The distinguishing characteristic between tutoring and supplemental learning assistance is the person providing the instruction. For colleges to claim apportionment for a supplemental learning assistance course, the instructor of record must meet minimum qualifications. In contrast, **Title 5 §58168** states that tutoring “is considered a method of instruction involving student tutor who has been successful in a particular subject or discipline, or who has demonstrated a particular skill, and who has received specific training in tutoring methods

and who assists one or more students in need of special supplemental instruction in the subject or skill.”

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