

Arkansas State University Team Teaching Policy

[Adapted and condensed from Boston University's Policy on Team Teaching]

The challenges of the modern world are more complex and increasingly require more interdisciplinarity in order to achieve viable, lasting solutions. However, the structure of the university and its operations have not changed to accommodate this complexity. As a result, students are not being prepared in the best possible way for the challenges the modern world has in store for them. To begin addressing this issue— while being good stewards of financial resources— the following policy is put into place to encourage and give instructors a pathway to showcase and model solving problems in a more multidisciplinary manner.

This policy is not meant to be prescriptive or to force instructors to team-teach; rather it is meant to encourage collaboration among instructors, while offering viable pathways that bridge those collaborations to the classroom, all the while working diligently within given resource constraints. Here, instructor refers to anyone authorized by the University to teach a course. In addition, while the below references newly created courses, it should be noted that existing courses can also be team-taught and those would not need to go through any UCC/ Grad Council/Honors Council process. The other requirements in this policy still apply to existing courses.

Teaching collaboratively has many benefits for both students and instructors when fully collaborative team-teaching is implemented well. However, there are also several challenges that can occur— course design should be used to maximize the benefits and minimize the drawbacks. Below, some benefits and challenges are listed:

When two instructors from different disciplines and perspectives combine to teach in a fully collaborative manner, students may benefit as follows:

- a) by observing the benefits and drawbacks of different disciplinary approaches to a subject.
- b) by observing and internalizing how to work collaboratively, particularly when disagreement occurs.
- c) by working with multiple mentors.

Potential instructor benefits of team-teaching include:

- a) instructor teaching skills and philosophies can be enhanced by working together while developing and delivering the course and the related observations of the other team members teaching.
- b) instructors can advance existing or generate new collaborations and generate new pedagogical innovations.
- c) can give instructors an opportunity to work a different group of students and potentially attract new students to their fields.

Some potential drawbacks for students to be aware of:

- a) differences in terms and definitions between disciplines should be effectively addressed by instructors so that students are not confused by two different terms for the same concept.
- b) differences in assessment styles or methods (tests, essays, etc.). These should be mutually agreed upon so that the student experience is continuous and coherent. If the course-experiences are too disjointed, this will likely create student confusion and lead to lowered student learning gains and diminished course outcomes.
- c) student expectations for their instructors should also be unified, and which instructor students ought to refer to as regards particular topics should be explicitly established and discussed often. Ideally both instructors would be able to address most student concerns and course-content related questions.
- d) differences in instructor approaches to problem solving should also be addressed and resolved to model real-world resolution of differences among collaborators.
- e) instructors should be aware that the cognitive load for students in these types of courses is likely to be higher than a single-instructor course— students may need more support.

Challenges for instructor include:

a) the effort involved in a fully collaborative team-taught course is often more than anticipated. In addition, there are likely to be some course elements where instructors clash and it is imperative that students are not caught in the middle. Developing courses well ahead of time, particularly elements such as student assessment, is essential to avoid such challenges.

b) a balance will likely need to be struck between being creative and being coherent—it is much more fun to dream up new exciting assignments and pedagogy than it is to deal with the nuts and bolts of making sure the course runs smoothly, but in the end the course must be as accessible as possible to student engagement.

Fully Collaborative Team Teaching

For the purposes of this policy, fully collaborative team teaching is defined as follows: When two (or more) instructors, approaching the chosen course using different disciplines, frameworks or approaches, are full and joint instructors of the same course. The instructors are collaborating with each other and combining their work and course-content to create a coherent whole. The course is therefore collaboratively designed, taught, and graded, with both instructors attending and participating in virtually all class meetings.

Credit Policy

In addition to benefiting students and instructors, team teaching should cause minimal disruption to the course capacity of Arkansas State University, its colleges and departments, and must meet our curricular commitments without creating the need for hiring additional instructors to cover courses that are “lost” to team teaching. For example, if two instructors, each with a four class-section course load team teach a course, seven class sections are taught instead of eight. If a college were in a position that absolutely required eight sections to be taught, team teaching may not be an option for that semester. In addition, the team-taught course must be equitable and fair in accordance with the principles and relevant policies of the University.

Departments, programs, and instructors must ensure 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 University’s ability to enhance the educational experience, in particular by supporting interdisciplinary courses and curricula, departments and their instructor must make every effort to find ways to allow colleagues to participate in these courses whenever possible. College deans and the Provost’s office can help.

In the case of teaching across colleges, early discussions with each department chair and dean are critical to the success of the collaboration. In the case of team-taught course development wholly within a department, the issues regarding teaching commitments should be addressed internally, with chairs, deans or directors (whichever is most appropriate) as early in the process as possible. In addition, instructors should consider nominating the course to be a signature course through Red Wolf Works program.

Before instructors have devoted extensive time to planning a new team-taught course— and certainly before a full course proposal has been drafted for approval— they or the chair/director should consult the assessment office if they have any questions. At this stage the Provost’s office will focus on whether the envisioned collaboration will substantially advance the teaching mission of the University without placing inordinate stress on any department’s or program’s teaching resources or instructor workloads. It is important to note that, unlike some other additions to the curriculum, a new course in team-taught format should be planned for regular offering no more often than once a year— with or without rotation of instructors, so that the Provost’s office can also focus on the sustainability of the offering. In addition, “super courses” (3 or more instructors collaborating) can be taught once every 2 years.

Complete proposals for new courses to be offered in a team-taught format are submitted for approval through UCC, Grad Council, the Honors College, or other approval route (e.g. future professional schools) as for any other course. Existing courses (such as special topics, etc.) being team-taught also need to be approved for full credit by the Provost’s office.

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

- (1) each instructor who is asking for full teaching credit will attend and participate in each session of the course, and
- (2) Courses in non-team taught courses are covered appropriately.
- (3) Courses should apply toward degrees at least as electives as financial aid will not pay for extraneous courses.

After the second time a team has taught a course together, the course will be evaluated and a decision made to either apply for on-going status or disband the teaching team for that course. The rationale for this is to make sure the class is evaluated. The evaluation can be formal or informal and does not need to be documented. If the instructor team believes that it would be appropriate for each of them to continue to receive full teaching credit for subsequent offerings of a team-taught course, they will make a formal written application to their chair(s) by email. If the chair agrees, the chair forwards the application to the Dean's office for final on-going status and Provost notification. If the application is not made or is denied, the credit for the team-taught course will revert back to each instructor's department policy.

If a new instructor rotates into a fully collaborative team-taught course in whose initial design they 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 both inspire and require adjustments throughout the course. Instructors 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 not currently receiving full credit.

Different from the assignment of new instructors to discrete segments of a tag-team course, comings and goings of individual instructors 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. Instructors not receiving full 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.

Tag Team Courses

Tag team courses are generally structured so that each instructor teaches a portion of a course (e.g., weeks 4 to 8). The teaching credit for these courses is generally proportional to the percentage of the course taught by each instructor, with the 'organizing' instructor receiving a higher percentage of credit for administering the course.