Guidelines for Writing a Catalog Course Description

1. Limit course descriptions to fifty words or fewer.

2. Begin the catalog description with the instruction format. For example, if this is a lecture course that will include three hours of lecture per week, begin the catalog description with “Three hours of lecture per week.” Here is an example from the 2006-2007 catalog:

   **EBF 327. Adirondack Flora (3)**
   Two hours of lecture, and eight hours of field work and discussion each day for two weeks. An integrated field and laboratory course in the identification of vascular plants and recognition of ecological characteristics of major plant species and communities of the Adirondack Mountain region. Satisfies elective field study requirement in Environmental and Forest Biology. Appropriate for upper and lower division undergraduate students seeking instruction in plant identification and ecology. Summer, Cranberry Lake Biological Station. Prerequisite: General botany or general biology.

3. Complete sentences or predication is not necessary. List the topics covered in brief descriptive phrases.
   For example:
   ...Introduction to water resources engineering. Hydraulics includes pipe flow, open-channel flow, flows within control structures, and flow through porous media. Hydrologic processes include scaling rainfall across time and space, computing the timing and magnitude of watershed runoff, and routing flood waves through detention basins and streams. Probability distributions assess the ability of a structure to withstand an uncertain future.

   Rather than the more cumbersome:
   ...Engineering Hydrology & Flow Controls is an introduction to the broad topic of water resources engineering. Water resource systems will be studied to identify and isolate the fundamental hydraulic and hydrologic processes controlling the system, often reduced to concepts of conservation of mass, momentum, or energy. The hydraulics explored in this course will include pipe flow, open-channel flow, flows within control structures, and flow through porous media. The hydrologic processes explored by the course will include scaling rainfall across time and space, computing the timing and magnitude of watershed runoff, and routing flood waves through detention basins and streams. A variety of probability distributions will also be explored to better assess the engineering challenges in designing a structure to withstand an uncertain future.

4. Avoid phrases such as “a study of” or “an examination of” since most courses analyze, examine, or study the subject matter. List topics covered in brief descriptive phrases. If a course has a graduate level number (600 or above), “graduate” is not needed in the title or description.
   For example:
...Introduction to Gantt, Activity on Node, Precedence Diagram, PERT and Linear schedules. Manual and computer schedules. Identify activities, perform duration analyses, update schedules, plan and assign resources, plan cost and schedule.

Rather than:
...Introduction to the following types of schedules: Gantt, Activity on Node, Precedence Diagram, PERT and Linear. Students will learn to identify activities and perform duration analyses of these activities. Updating of schedules, resource planning and assignment, cost planning and scheduling are all covered. Schedule development is performed both manually and with industry accepted software.

For example:
...Calculus based probability and statistical theory in engineering and environmental sciences. ....

Rather than:
...This course provides a rigorous introduction to calculus based probability and statistical theory, with applications primarily drawn from engineering and the environmental sciences. ....

5. The phrase "topics include" is useful if the course typically covers more than the topics named because (a) subjects vary from year to year, or (b) a list is too long to print. Otherwise, avoid the phrase. The phrase “with emphasis on” is appropriate if necessary to indicate that one or more among several topics is the primary focus of a course, in which case “emphasizing” is more concise. Separately naming the topic emphasized will usually accomplish the same thing.

6. If the first line of the description repeats the title, omit it and go on the next line. For example:
...The use of economic information and analytical tools to critically analyze managerial policies related to natural resources.

Rather than:
...FOR 333 is an introductory class addressing the question of how to use economic information to make business decisions with respect to managing environmental resources.

7. If a term such as “laboratory,” “seminar,” or “workshop” is used in the title, do not repeat the word in the description.

7. If the course number of title adequately indicates the relative sophistication of the course, do not use “introduction to” or “advanced study of” in the description. This guideline does not apply to a 500 or 600 level course that is an introduction to a subject and is not so indicated in the title.

9. Avoid the use of unnecessary articles and complicated language.
Note: Exceptions to the guidelines will occur because of the particular nature of the course.

Adopted by the ESF Faculty: 2002; Revised on 29 September 2006