

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Standard Guidelines for Determination of Course Levels for New Course Proposals College of Liberal Arts

In a college with undergraduate offerings as diverse and as rich as those in the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University, it is a daunting task to enumerate all criteria that each of our twelve departments and five programs can use to determine whether a course is defined as a lower or as an upper division course. Coursework and inquiry spans the arts, the humanities, and the social and behavioral sciences across forty-eight degrees and thirty-three minors. Despite the challenge, these guidelines are set to standardize the assignment of new course proposals to lower division or upper division, to assist with course planning, and especially to assist in distinguishing lower division courses from upper division courses.

This document outlines, first, the distinction between lower-level and upper-level courses and the characteristics, and then a breakdown of the two levels into specific sublevels.

I. General Characteristics of Upper and Lower-Level Courses

Lower-division courses (100–299) generally have one or more of the following characteristics.

- **Introductory material:** Lower-division courses are designed with freshmen and sophomores in mind and include skills development.
- **Breadth:** Students gain some understanding of the extent of a field or discipline or learn how one field fits into or relates to other fields.
- **Foundational knowledge:** Students become acquainted with principles, terms, methods, and perspectives of a discipline or professional field, as a basis for more advanced or specialized study. These are foundational courses that majors are expected to complete in their first two years of study in the subject.
- **General education:** Students develop essential skills, attitudes, and practices (e.g., basics of critical thinking, communication, problem solving) which are important in many different fields of higher education and in learning for a lifetime.
- **Preparation:** Lower-division courses may assume some basic entry-level knowledge, such as high school preparation in the field, and serve as a preparation themselves for advanced work.

Upper-division courses (300–400) generally have one or more of the following characteristics:

- **Depth/Focus:** Students make in-depth study of a discipline's theories and methods, developing an understanding of the applications and limitations of those theories. This may include skills mastery or initiation of advanced skill application.
- **Specialization:** Students develop specific intellectual and professional abilities that will enable them to succeed or progress in a particular field or professional practice.

- **Preparation:** These courses build upon lower-level foundational courses and presuppose several years of study in the field.
- **Refinement and Integration:** Students build upon the “general education” background noted above, applying these skills more discerningly or in more challenging contexts.

Upper-division courses have an integrative function. Because one of the primary goals of these courses is to integrate knowledge gained from earlier studies, these are necessarily offered at the upper-division level and typically limited to juniors and seniors or, in some cases, seniors only.

II. Breakdown of Courses into 100-, 200-, 300-, and 400-level

The college believes that the attached taxonomy should serve as a guide for faculty and departments when proposing new courses. After having determined whether a course should be at the lower- or the upper-level, the proposer of the course should answer the further question as to whether it should be 100- as opposed to 200-level, or 300- versus 400-level. The faculty member and the department should review student learning outcomes, course objectives, and content and readings to determine the appropriate level to be assigned.

The college curriculum committee will approve the proposed course level only after comparing the same outcomes, objectives, and course materials to the same taxonomy.

The college recommends the following course levels in conjunction with the Cognitive Process Dimensions in the attached taxonomy:

100-level designation:	Cognitive Process Dimensions 1 and 2
200-level designation:	Cognitive Process Dimensions 2 and 3
300-level designation:	Cognitive Process Dimensions 3 and 4
400-level designation:	Cognitive Process Dimensions 5 and 6

Attachment

Mapping Student Learning Outcomes (sources – A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing, Anderson & Krathwohl, and A Model for Learning Objectives, Iowa State University Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching)

		COGNITIVE PROCESS DIMENSION					
		1. REMEMBER Recall and retrieval of foundational disciplinary information.	2. UNDERSTAND Make meaning out of information.	3. APPLY Use information in a similar situation.	4. ANALYZE Take apart information and explore component connections.	5. EVALUATE Examine critically and judge.	6. CREATE Create something new.
KNOWLEDGE DIMENSION	A. FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE Foundational information in a discipline.	<i>List</i>	<i>Summarize</i>	<i>Respond</i>	<i>Select</i>	<i>Check</i>	<i>Generate</i>
	B. CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE Connection of foundational elements to overall structure and function.	<i>Recognize</i>	<i>Classify</i>	<i>Provide</i>	<i>Differentiate</i>	<i>Determine</i>	<i>Assemble</i>
	C. PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE Methods for investigating and acting.	<i>Recall</i>	<i>Clarify</i>	<i>Carry Out</i>	<i>Integrate</i>	<i>Judge</i>	<i>Design</i>
	D. META- COGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE Reflection on thinking in the discipline.	<i>Identify</i>	<i>Predict</i>	<i>Use</i>	<i>Deconstruct</i>	<i>Reflect</i>	<i>Create</i>