Writing Guidelines

This page is meant to help guide those who are planning on writing a new article or editing existing ones.

Content:

When adding an article, be sure to use our templates! These are filled with questions and advice which should tell be a good guide as to what goes in each section of the article.

Each course review is broken into six parts: Instructors, Prerequisites, When to Take It, Class Content, Work, and Life After. What goes under each part should generally be pretty obvious, but here are some additional tips:

- Do not bash any professors and don't give professors ratings. Also, don't post any negative comments about courses. If you dislike a course, tell us why. E.g. if you hated the course because of it was a lot of work, make sure to describe how heavy the workload is, and what types of work are involved.
- Be sure to mention whether the prerequisites are really necessary.
- For upper-level courses, mention if the course is offered every semester, or during the fall/spring only.
- The "Class Content" section should not just be a list of topics from the catalog description, try to go into more depth.
- Try to keep the information relevant to the course in general (i.e. if two professors teach a course slightly differently, it's not particularly important)
- When estimating the amount of work a class takes it is better to give a specific range of hours instead of 'light', 'moderate', or 'heavy.' Also, it is good to give a comparison to another class, e.g. "ECE 329's homework is comparable in time to ECE 210's."
- It can be hard to write content for the "Life After" section if the class is a senior level course and there isn't anything else after it. If this is the case then it is ok to give a bunch of related courses in the same area, or to mention related jobs. For instance, "students who like ECE 330 may enjoy other courses from the power/energy area: ECE 333, 464, 469, & 476."
- The "Prerequisites" and "When to Take It" sections can sometimes blur together. Generally you should try to focus the "Prerequisites" section on the official prerequisites and the topics you should know before coming into the course and the "When to Take It" section on the opinion related things, such as if the prerequisites are really necessary.

Style:

Many of these rules are meant for clarity's sake, and others because we wish to maintain a professional tone:

- Avoid ambiguity. If something is ambiguous, rewrite it in a way that it is clear what you mean.
- It is better to use active voice than passive voice. For instance, "This course covers x" (active) is preferably to "students are taught x" (passive) - in active form, the subject of the sentence is doing the action, but in passive form something is happening to the subject.
- First person ("I", "my", etc.) should almost never be used. Second person ("you") should be used sparingly. Generally, third person can be used instead of second person ("you" can almost always be replaced with "students").
- If you mention a class that has a DEN article about it already, please link to it! The format should be to give the subject (uppercase), course number, and in parenthesis, the title of the course. For example, MATH 221 (Calculus I) is what we want.

Grammar:

Please use proper grammar for all articles.

- The thing that is most commonly messed up is the tense of the verbs. Whatever you use, please be consistent - at times, past (most likely, imperfect), present, or future tense all make sense - but once you pick one, be sure to stick with it for the rest of the section.
- Of course, avoid other types of grammatical errors.

Tips for Revising:

Sometimes you need to read things fairly carefully to see if they make sense.

- Suppose someone writes: "The class covers topics such as Maxwell's laws, permittivity and permeability, transmission line theory, smith charts, etc." The problem with this is that "such as" implies that we are giving a bunch of examples - so the "etc" is incorrect - "etc" makes sense if the list is implied to be exhaustive, but here it is clearly not meant to be exhaustive.

If you have any questions please ask one of the course review editors: Paul Logsdon (logsdon4@illinois.edu) or Gang Yang (yang82@illinois.edu).