

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the
SCDMC Proposal on “Maintenance of Digital Course Files”**

September 11, 2017

1. Why is compiling Course Files needed?

The Academic Senate has mandated SCDMC to review all courses with certain suggested frequency for each type of courses (Core Courses each semester, Departmental Compulsory Courses annually, and electives every three year).

To do so one needs two pieces of basic information from the Instructor:

- a) First Course Handout which lays down the content and policies for conducting the course and evaluation,
- b) Recommendations from the Instructors and Tutors,

apart from other ancillary input that may be made available to the specific review team.

Other documents are either optional or produced by the office desk.

SCDMC is to co-ordinate the review effort and report to the Senate, and recommend any revision at least once (preferably in September/October).

The maintenance of a physical course file used to be a standard practice in most Departments, and continues to be so in some Departments. Digitization of such files with central support has its obvious advantages.

2. Why add to the extra effort for instructors, when teaching already takes a lot of our time?

The extra effort is miniscule (‘epsilon’) but its benefits can be truly significant.

Filling up the instructor’s feedback form should not take more than 10-15 minutes.

This is to be done immediately after you have submitted the grade.

As for uploading assignments, quizzes etc., the call is to be taken by the Deptt./Instructor. The students have expressed the desire that it should be done. In most cases, it is available in some student circles anyway. The instructor can choose to send them to SCDMC but not include it in the set of public documents. Uploading these documents merely means adding one extra email address while sending them to students and tutors.

3. SCDMC collecting these documents is too intrusive and seems like policing. Why is that needed?

One principle, that IITK Senate will not compromise on is the autonomy or freedom of the Instructor. However, with freedom comes responsibility, which includes certain duty towards the students and Institute bodies. The only aim of the exercise is to set norms or guidelines based on macro-trends emerging from the review exercise so that the courses become better both in content and the way they are conducted.

4. How will these documents be used?

For each course, a small committee of 3-4 members will be formed in consultation with Departments. The committee will preferably include at least one member from outside the Deptt. offering the course. They go through the documents and write a short report, and list certain recommendations. The exercise should not take more than 30-45 minutes of a single meeting, once the documents are made available.

5. Will it really change anything?

The hope is that SCDMC is now suitably empowered to influence decision making, and hence grievances either from instructors, tutors or students can be systematically addressed and considered in policy making, and urge executive/ Senate action wherever needed through a well-defined process.

One of the aims of the SCDMC is to collate the experience of innovations tried out in different courses, and deliberate on them and broadcast them in possible actionable forms to the larger community.

6. How does this help instructors?

In any given semester, the Institute offers about 570 non-thesis courses. There has been increasing instances of grievances from students and faculty about possible distortions. SCDMC seeks to provide guidelines to minimize such instances by providing advisories for courses to be on track as per expected norms. Developing and interpreting norms requires a fine balance between instructors' freedom and institutional or student expectations.

For far too long, the complex activity of instruction has been regrettably reduced often to a single number in the Students' Feedback form. The form on impressions and recommendations of instructors and tutors seeks to capture a bit more of the many facets of teaching that we are all engaged with on a regular basis.

Teaching is a creative and effort-intensive job. Sometimes I compare it with cooking in a well-furnished kitchen where a creative cook is aspiring to develop recipes for new dishes. For the kitchen, one minimum requirement is its sink and drain should be functional. The maintenance of digital files is one step towards keeping the accountability sink unclogged and clear.

(Views expressed above are personal but based on my discussion with the Committee).

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