

**TO:** Ariel Setniker, Chair, Curriculum Committee  
Cynthia Trevisan, Chair, Department of S&M  
Kevin Mandernack, Professor, Department of S&M  
Alex Parker, Dean, School of Letters and Sciences  
Pat Harper, Analyst, School of Letters and Sciences

**FROM:** Sarah Senk, Chair, General Education Committee

**DATE:** 12/4/24

**SUBJECT: B3 Designation for Spring 2025 Section of OCN 195L (Special Topics) Course**

Proposed Course Subject: OCN 195L

Proposed Course Title: Special Topics Introduction to Oceanography Lab

Submitted by: Kevin Mandernack

Date Submitted: November 27, 2024

### **GE COMMITTEE SUMMARY**

The General Education Committee met on Tuesday, December 3, 2024, to review a proposal to tag a spring “Special Topics” lab course as an Area B3 GE course.

In attendance were voting committee members Sarah Senk (Chair), Laurie Borchard, Chris Chiego, Ariel Setniker, and Cynthia Trevisan, as well as nonvoting members, Mike Strange, Tom Oppenheim, Christine Isakson, and Shari Smiljanic-Villa. (Graham Benton, MT Department representative Elizabeth McNie, and Area A Representative Aparna Sinha were also unable to attend the meeting due to conflicts; Sinha contributed remotely.)

S&M Department Chair Trevisan explained that the addition of a Special Topics course at this late date was necessary to address an immediate gap in the spring semester curriculum for a specific cohort of ISS students. (These students require a physical science lab to meet their academic requirements, but no suitable options are currently available because the instructor who previously taught Physics for Future Leaders and its lab is now assigned to teach chemistry due to staffing constraints, leaving this Oceanography class as the *only* other lecture+lab on the books for Spring 2025 that *doesn't* require Math 100. (Students cannot enroll in other life science labs without taking the accompanying lecture, leaving no viable alternative since Physics 100 requires students to have completed Math 100, which many in this particular ISS cohort have not.) The corresponding Oceanography lecture for this lab was approved as a physical science by the GE Committee years ago, but a lab component was never developed. To resolve this issue, Professor Mandernack has been tasked with creating and teaching this “special topics” lab to ensure these students can fulfill their physical science lab requirement in the spring. This course represents a short-term solution to a staffing and scheduling challenge, ensuring students stay on track in their academic progress despite limited teaching resources.

**The General Education committee voted unanimously to support designating the Spring 2025 version of OCN 195L as an Area B3 GE course.**

## ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

- The committee noted that the course accords with the description of the subject area in EO1100 and satisfies GELO 4: “Apply scientific principles and the scientific method to data about both living and non-living systems.”
- Senk noted that before 2018 special topics courses in S&M and C&C were automatically tagged as GE courses, but this practice was corrected after the 2020 Program Review revealed that practice was inconsistent with policy. Since 2020, Special Topics courses typically pass through the GE Committee only, and only if the department chooses to make the course a permanent offering instead of a one-off will the course move onto the Curriculum Committee (after undergoing a second GE Committee review as a standalone course).
- Trevisan explained that the course is a hands-on component of the Oceanography lecture. The instructor is using lab exercises / experiments that require students to test out different theoretical principles they learn in the lecture. In particular, students will “develop and test hypotheses in various sub-disciplines of Oceanography,” “collect and synthesize scientific data,” and communicate those results in lab reports. Trevisan noted that they’ll be collecting samples from the SF Estuary and analyzing that data - typical practices in other B3 science labs. She also noted that as a physical lab the course focuses on collecting water samples and analyzing them (making it notably different from a biological science lab in OCN where students might be dissecting fish, etc.)
- Committee members asked Trevisan to clarify the difference between this Special Topics course and the OCN 200 Lab. Trevisan explained that while there are two OCN labs tagged as GE B3 courses, the content of those courses is much more in depth than the content of this survey-level course, which uses the concepts/principles from these labs, but at a survey-level for GE purposes, not for Oceanography majors. She noted: “This is a course of non-majors who may be curious about OCN scientific, but it’s survey-level; Labs required for OCN majors have prerequisites that non-majors can’t enroll in because they have non-GE prerequisites.”
- Area D Representative and ISS Department member Chris Chiego noted that most of the Spring advising has sent students to the Life Science lab offered this spring. Trevisan explained that the problem with the Life Science Lab is that if they haven’t taken the lecture, they may not be eligible to take the lab as a standalone thing. They’d need authorization from the instructor to take the lab without taking the concurrent Life Science lecture (since the lab requires info from that lecture).
- **Action Items: Trevisan will confirm advisors are aware about the requirements for the Life Science lab, and Chiego will notify ISS advisees and recommend they switch to OCN 195 if they are enrolled in the Life Science lab without the corresponding lecture.**