Style Guide for Graduate Catalog Course Descriptions

The purpose of the *Graduate Catalog* is to provide current, concise, and accurate information about graduate policies and programs for the guidance of prospective and current students, members of the faculty and administrative staff, and officers of allied agencies. Consistent catalog style is important because it leads to efficient language and ease of use. This document is the style guide for course descriptions, which are the most common elements of the graduate catalog, and the elements most subject to variations in style.

Effective course catalog descriptions inform the reader of the most important course concepts in clear, concise language that can be understood by experts in the field and prospective students. As shown in the examples below, the preferred catalog style typically uses sentence fragments rather than complete sentences, present-tense verbs rather than the future tense, and lists course content rather than explains or defines it. A full sentence is used only when it's the clearest and most efficient way to communicate the meaning.

Example of Style Elements to Avoid (#1), with Revision (#1R)

1	**SPACELIFE 547 LUNAR LANDSCAPING (3-0-3)(F Odd years)** With an increasing number of full-time residents on the moon, lunar landscaping is becoming a psychological necessity. Lunar landscaping adapts earthly landscaping concepts to the moon's environment. This course explores key principles of landscape space and materials to achieve functional and aesthetic effects. Topics include lunar soils, effects of temperature, and Tranquil topography. Design challenges of selecting objects and securing them, employing mechanized features such as dust falls and rock slides, and designing paths for moonwalking in space suits. Students will develop computer simulations of a one-acre lunar garden conforming to legal specifications of UNSPACE.

The following revision addresses the style elements identified in Example #1:

1R	**SPACELIFE 547 LUNAR LANDSCAPING (3-0-3)(F Odd years)** Explores key principles of landscape space and materials to achieve functional and aesthetic effects. Includes lunar soils, effects of temperature, and Tranquil topography. Design challenges of selecting objects and securing them, employing mechanized features such as dust falls and rock slides, and designing paths for moonwalking in space suits. Students develop computer simulations of a one-acre lunar garden conforming to legal specifications of UNSPACE.

Examples of Preferred Catalog Style, #2-9

Examples 2-9 are taken from Boise State's *2014-2015 Graduate Catalog* and serve as exemplars of preferred catalog style. These eight examples include essential course content and include, if relevant, a central and/or somewhat unusual course requirement of students. In the catalog, full

sentences are sometimes used to state student requirements or outcomes, helping to distinguish this information from information related to concepts of course content.

Examples 2-4 show course descriptions that use sentence fragments starting with present-tense verbs. The course title is the understood subject of these verbs:

2	**BUSMBA 535 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS ALIGNMENT (4-0-4)(F/S/SU).** Examines the role of information technology in business process integration, strategic alignment, and business analytics. Includes application project in industry sector of student's choosing. PRE/COREQ: BUSMBA 501.

3	**SOCWRK 518 (REFUGEE 518) WORKING ACROSS CULTURES WITH REFUGEES (3-0-3)(F/S).** Provides a framework and skills practice for effective and competent cross-cultural practice with refugees in the human services. May be taken for credit in REFUGEE or SOCWRK but not both. PREREQ: Admission to MSW program or PERM/INST.

4	**NURS 512 ADVANCED NURSING LEADERSHIP IN HEALTH CARE (3-0-3)(F/S).** Focuses on individual character and leadership development and emphasizes the knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective nurse leader in a variety of academic or health care settings. Builds on the AACN Essentials and the AONE competencies for Nurse Executives. PREREQ: Admission to Graduate Program in Nursing or Master of Health Science Program or PERM/INST.

Examples 5-7 use sentence fragments starting with nouns:

5	**COUN 518 COUNSELING ISSUES WITH OLDER ADULTS (3-0-3)(S)(Odd years).** Focus on intervention strategies for common later life impairments. Application of theory, research, and practice to gerontological counseling and wellness.

6	**PUBADM 513 ECONOMICS OF PUBLIC POLICY (3-0-3)(F/S)(Alternate years).** Contributions of economic analysis to the justification, design, and implementation of economic policy, especially as it relates to the market economy and the benefits and costs associated with government intervention.

7	**CE 512 (GEOS 512) HYDROGEOLOGY (3-0-3)(S).** Introduction to the hydrologic cycle focusing on subsurface water and its relationship to surface water. Physics of flow through porous media, physical properties of aquifer systems, methods to determine aquifer characteristics, groundwater modeling and relationships between groundwater and streamflow. May be taken for CE or GEOS credit, but not both. PREREQ: CE 330 or ENGR 330 or ME 330 or MATH 175.

Example 8 uses both noun and verb fragments:

| 8 | **ENGL 563 THE THEORY AND TEACHING OF BASIC WRITING (3-0-3)(F/S).** A study of the theory and practice of teaching basic writing. Surveys the history and politics of basic writing and remediation while focusing on specific instructional strategies, writing assignments, and assessment. Prepares students to teach basic writing at the college level, in learning centers, and in other adult learning settings. PREREQ: ENGL 561 or PERM/INST. |

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Comment [9]: Student outcome

Example 9 uses a noun fragment for content, a full sentence for student requirement:

| 9 | **BIOL 565 ADVANCED TOPICS IN MOLECULAR BIOLOGY TECHNIQUES (1-0-1)(F).** Discussion of scientific literature with emphasis on modern molecular biology techniques. Students lead discussions and present articles from relevant primary literature. Previous enrollment in BIOL 465 or BIOL 565 recommended. May be repeated once for credit. PREREQ: BIOL 343 and PERM/INST. |

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Comment [10]: Student requirement stated in full sentence.