Course Descriptions

Descriptions must be relatively short so that readers can skim them quickly. Ideally, the course description should run from three to five lines in the YCPS, a length that may not be able to do a course full justice. But within the necessary limits, a well-written course description can provide a pithy introduction for students trying to identify the courses they might like to take. The primary audience of the YCPS is the currently enrolled students, who are trying to shape their programs. They may be able to learn more about courses by referring to online syllabi at the outset of a term and then by narrowing down or confirming their choices in the course selection period; but their attention is drawn to a course, and their first round of selections made, on the basis of the description in the YCPS.

Thus the course description ought to be as informative as space will allow. It should indicate the scope and nature of the course, a representative sampling of the topics it will cover, the approach it will pursue, and any special background it presumes. In the necessarily brief space allotted to each description, information about papers or examinations cannot be included; information about the actual mechanics of a course is best conveyed in the syllabus and during the first class meeting. But any unusual feature of a course that students should be aware of, either in its format or in the background it requires, ought to be included, e.g., prerequisites, auditions, and field trips (http://catalog.yale.edu/dus/dus-department/field-trips).

In addition to its currently enrolled student audience, the YCPS has a diverse set of non-Yale readers with entirely different interests. High school students who are interested in Yale use the YCPS to form an impression of the curriculum, as do high school counselors. Potential employers use the YCPS to evaluate the credentials of Yale graduates; former students validate or complete their transcript records by reference to the YCPS for the years in which they were enrolled; teachers in other institutions work out norms for courses or programs of their own from information they find in the YCPS. These additional functions make it important that every course in the YCPS be described, though briefly, and that the descriptions be as concrete and meaningful as possible.

Course descriptions and titles are routinely edited for brevity and cogency. In keeping with YCPS style, questions are rephrased into statements; future tense is changed into present tense; and jargon is removed. If the editor queries the meaning or tone of a course description or title, the query is addressed directly to the DUS rather than to the instructor. The DUS is encouraged to remind instructors to keep course descriptions brief.

See also Course Titles and Descriptions under Proposals for New Courses and for Changes in Existing Courses (http://catalog.yale.edu/dus/course-study-committee-majors/proposals-new-changes-existing-courses).