

Meta-Courses in Moodle: What are they?

You may have heard the term “meta-courses” come up during the discussion of Moodle and been wondering what they are. To put it simply, a meta-course is a combination of other courses. Here at Dickinson, we use meta-courses to simplify the management of cross listed courses. Here’s how:

Cross listed courses are those which appear in the Registrar’s database under multiple departments. An example of such a course may be one which satisfies requirements for majors in both American Studies and History. For our example, we’ll look at a course which has two separate listings. The Family in America, also known as AMST-301 and HIST-394 is one such course. Two students, Jacob and Susan, will enroll in the course which fits their major, American Studies and History, respectively, although they will both come to the same classes and be taught by the same professor, the Registrar will have them listed as taking two separate courses. The only way that their courses are different is based on record keeping.

Moodle gets its list of courses and enrolled students from Banner, so in our example, two courses, AMST-301 and HIST-394, will be created in the system. They will both have the same professor teaching them, but Jacob will be enrolled in AMST-301 and Susan will be enrolled in HIST-394. From a teaching point of view, it would be a lot of extra work to load the course materials in both of the Moodle courses, just like it would be a lot of extra time and work to teach the same class in two rooms at two different times. Moodle allows us to use meta-courses to simplify things. A new course, called XLIST: The Family in America, or AMST-301/HIST-394, is created which both Jacob and Susan will be enrolled in. Now, the professor can manage all of the students’ information, including grades, quizzes, etc. in one Moodle course, just like she would in a real classroom.

The most confusing aspect of this is that all three courses will appear when you view your list of courses in Moodle. If you are teaching a cross listed course, you’ll need to remember that all of the course materials need to be added to the XLIST course, and not to the individual department level courses.

Another bit of good news is that by default courses are hidden from students, so as long as you only make the XLIST course available to them, that’s all they should see in their list of courses.