

*Grading Policies (with expected processes for determining the final grade)*

Many students want to know the elements that go into a course grade and any formulae for computing that grade. From one perspective, such detail may emphasize grades excessively and encourage nit picking. However, grading policies also send messages about what is important in a course and guide students about how to organize their time. Ideally, students would devote full attention to every aspect of every course. Realistically, however, students take multiple courses, have job or family commitments, and address such mundane matters as lodging, cleaning, and food. The articulation of grading policies and schedules can help students make reasonable choices when real events conflict.

*Setting the Tone for a Course*

Statements and policies on a syllabus give students an initial perspective on a course. For example, at one campus, I recently read a syllabus that stated that an average between 80.00% and 89.99% corresponded to a B and that no rounding would be done; a score of 89.99% would yield a B, not an A. This raises a philosophical question about grading accuracy, because science and statistical methodology requires that care be taken to ensure that data and results are presented within the level of accuracy of an experiment. Thus, the above course policy likely sends at least two messages:

1. Every point is vital; students should argue about every partial score on every exercise and test.
2. Experimental error and instructor variability never occur in grading.

*Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*

Schools often have established procedures, so that accommodations in assignments, lab work, or tests can be made for students with disabilities. However, introductory students may not know these procedures, and established students may be embarrassed to ask. A section on the syllabus reminding students of school practices helps resolve such problems.

**Conclusion**

In summary, a course syllabus can place a course within a curricular or programmatic context. Further, since a course exists within a culture and collection of expectations, a syllabus can clarify assumptions for that culture rather than hoping that “everyone understands that ...”. Finally, a syllabus can clarify details, so that students understand how a course will proceed and can plan their work accordingly.

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*Community College Corner*

**Forthcoming Activities in the Two-Year College Setting**

**Robert D. Campbell**

The ACM Two-Year College Education Committee (ACM TYCEC) is actively seeking individuals to participate in several forthcoming initiatives. The following details these activities.

- The ACM and IEEE-CS have recently released a joint curriculum report in the discipline of Computer Engineering [1]. This report details baccalaureate program considerations, knowledge units, sample courses and various implementation strategies. The ACM TYCEC is undertaking to produce for associate-degree granting institutions a complementary report that will provide curriculum recommendations that facilitate transfer into the upper division of a baccalaureate computer engineering program based on the new guidelines.
- Closely aligned with the project above, the ACM TYCEC is also interested in existing associate-degree programs that address career-oriented (non-transfer) curricula in computer engineering and closely related fields. At many institutions, such programs have evolved from traditional electronics degrees, or have been established as hardware-oriented counterparts to more software-oriented (programming) curricula in computer science.
- At the 2005 SIGCSE conference in St. Louis, there was interest among some participants in formulating a collection of activities at the 2006 conference in Houston specific to the two-year college setting and audience. We would like to gauge the interest in such an undertaking and determine the most effective manner in which something of this nature might develop for future years.
- We are very interested in identifying individuals in the two-year college setting in the United States who have experience with, knowledge of, or contacts in similar educational settings outside the U.S. In conjunction with an increased emphasis by the ACM Education Board on internationalization, we are particularly interested in opportunities to expand our two-year college curriculum development work to applicable settings abroad.
- In 2000, we produced the Guidelines for Associate Degree Programs to Support Computing in a Networked

Environment. These Guidelines addressed three programs in what today we would commonly call “Information Technology”; these programs were User Support Services, Networking Services, and Internet/Web Services. As with any curricula of this nature, these are due for updating and revision to keep them current.

- We have now posted relatively recent versions of curricular guidelines in Computer Science, Information Systems, and Software Engineering, and as noted above, we are initiating work in Computer Engineering. It occurs to us that use of these reports would be greatly facilitated by an understanding of the interconnectedness of these fields and the associated curricula. To that end, we are examining a variety of approaches to detail similarities and distinctions between the various disciplines and their associated knowledge units at the two-year college level.

I invite anyone interested in any of these pursuits to visit our website [2] and to contact us. We look forward to hearing from you and engaging you in our activities!

#### References

- [1] <http://www.acm.org/education/CE-Final%20Report.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.acmtyc.org/>

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## *Upsilon Pi Epsilon*

### Recognizing Outstanding Achievement

**Jeffrey Popyack**

**G**reetings! There has been much good news this year for Upsilon Pi Epsilon, and I am only too eager to report it. We distributed \$44,950 in student awards directly this year, plus an additional \$2700 in contributions to IEEE-CS and CCSC awards. This was enabled through a high level of membership and growth in chapters. It’s amazing that last year was the first year we reached the \$30,000 mark.

Thirteen new chapters were established in 2004-5, including the installation of the first chapter in New Mexico. The remaining US states in which no UPE chapters reside are Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska,

Rhode Island, Utah, and Wyoming. As always, we still look forward to establishing a chapter in Canada!

The International Collegiate Programming Contest World Finals expanded once again in 2005, reaching 78 teams – more than three times the participation in the “old days” of the contest. In those days, each of the ACM’s twelve regions sent two teams, with ten of those regions situated in the US, an eleventh for Canada and Mexico, and a twelfth for Europe. This year, UPE increased its award amounts for participating teams, for the first time since moving to our current two-tiered award system (in which schools with UPE chapters receive a higher amount than other schools). With this, UPE’s continuing support of the contest resulted in distributions of \$25,200 – a healthy \$8,500 increase from last year’s previous record high.

#### Student Awards

Reviewing scholarship applications from our spirited members and deciding on awards is always an invigorating activity. As I write these words, Council has just completed evaluation of another round of outstanding scholarship applications. Awards include UPE Scholarships, including the Dan Drew and Jim Nolen Scholarships, and UPE/ACM Student Chapter Scholarship Awards. Please join me in congratulating this year’s awardees (shown below).

##### *UPE Dan Drew Scholarship* (\$1000)

- Adam Marcus (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, undergraduate student)

Adam has been chair of the Corporate Sponsorship Committee for RPI’s rejuvenated chapter. He has launched his research career with an internship in collaborative computing at IBM’s T.J. Watson Research Center and as a research assistant at RPI in the area of data mining.

##### *UPE Jim Nolen Scholarship* (\$1000)

- Georgiana Lucia Hamza-Lup (University of Central Florida, graduate student)

Ms. Hamza-Lup did her undergraduate work in Romania, and she has served as secretary and vice-president of her UCF chapter. Her research in Intelligent Transportation Systems has earned her the Graduate Student of the Year Award from the Intelligent Transportation Society of Florida.

##### *Upsilon Pi Epsilon Scholarships* (\$1000 each)

###### Undergraduate

- Niranchana Sunil Anantharaman (DePaul University)
- Michael David Brooks (Mesa State University)
- Federico Emmanuel Gomez Suarez (Universidad de las Americas-Puebla)
- Sanel Kergo (Columbia College)
- Thorben C. Primke (University of South Carolina)