



DeCal
democratic education @ cal

Starting a DeCal

A condensed guide for future facilitators

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Dear future DeCal Facilitators,

We are really glad that you are interested in starting a DeCal class. It is a great experience that you are sure to learn a lot from and enjoy. We've compiled this packet to answer some of your questions and assist you with starting your class. If you have any questions, suggestions and comments, don't hesitate to contact us by calling 510.642.9127 or emailing decalprogram@gmail.com. Good luck! - The folks at DeCal and UCFTR

Ok, so let's get started: What is DeCal?

What are DeCal classes?

What kinds of classes are there?

So, how is DeCal able to exist?

Ok, dumb question, so the students are teaching the class, right?

How can I prepare for facilitating a DeCal?

Um, can I get units for facilitating a DeCal? How much time does it take for doing a DeCal?

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Are there facilitating techniques that facilitators should know?

What's the deal with the faculty sponsor?

Love thy neighbor (Course Scheduler/Undergrad. Advisor/Student Affairs Officers, custodians, Technicians etc.)

Hey! Isn't it time for a shameless plug for DeCal?

Are there any University regulations I really should know about?

So, who is responsible for the class again?

Our Final Thought:

One more thing: I'm not sure if I'm ready to start a class next semester. What can I do to better prepare myself to start one in the future?

Ok, so let's get started: What is DeCal?

The program for Democratic Education at Cal (DeCal) is the largest student-run educational organization in the country. We promote a version of learning in which students take the initiative to create the structures and to explore an interested area in depth. DeCal program is run by a collection of experienced facilitators and student volunteers, the DeCal Board, which is here to provide a variety of support to our facilitators. With roots in the Free Speech Movement, a time when students fought to have a say in their education, DeCal celebrated its 25th anniversary in fall 2005! Today we work closely with a University office, the office of the Undergraduate Course Facilitator of Training and Resources (UCFTR) to ensure that student facilitators have the proper support, resources and services.

What are DeCal classes?

DeCals are for-credit (pass/not-pass) classes at UC Berkeley that are created and led by students. Uniquely student-centered, DeCal classes focused on topics relevant to students' experiences and are generally more relaxed and fun. Instead of concentrating on the amount of content gained, DeCal classes encourage students to be more engaged with and question the subjects in which they study.

“Every professor should have to teach a class under the conditions of a DeCal, where they have to motivate the students to learn the subject without the threat of grades.”

Nate Singer, DeCal Director 2004

Any student can start a DeCal. That said, in general we have noticed that those who start classes tend to be a self-selecting group. Most students who end up starting a DeCal are or eventually demonstrate themselves to be leaders in the campus community. Pulled strongly enough by their interests, they find it necessary to contribute to their own educational structures and community. We believe that these individuals are important members of the community and we are here to support them in their endeavors.

Each semester there are between 120-150 DeCal classes in a wide and diverse range of topics. Many of these are experimental topics or explore a specific area of study on which the facilitator has taken a keen interest. Please note that when some of these classes are offered for the first time, they may not run smoothly. However, we have found that in spite of the occasional disorganization, the students still learn an enormous amount.

What kinds of classes are there?

Here are some sample classes, just to give you an idea of what's out there. Feel free to be creative when you design your class!

Art and Culture - Selected Topics in Wine/ Batman as American Mythology
Ethnic/Cultural Studies – From Bombay Cinema to Bollywood/ /Italian Cooking
Community Service – Awareness: Children in the Developing World – UNICEF/ Jade Ribbon Campaign: the Fight Against Hepatitis B and Liver Cancer
Math and Science - Mathematical Techniques for Chemical Engineers/ L-Chem 101: Medicine and Life Systems

Social and political analysis – The West Wing and Public Policy/ South Park
Practical/ Preparatory – Intermediate Guide to Investment Banking: Mergers & Acquisitions/ Professional Etiquette

So, of course since there are around 150 classes each semester, we haven't really scratched the surface. But this should at least get you started with your Special Studies course proposal.

If you need help, besides contacting the DeCal Board, you can also consult UCFTR (Undergraduate Course Facilitator of Training and Resources) in 123 Cesar Chavez, 510.642.3075 at the Student Learning Center. UCFTR is there to help with all student-run classes and spends most of her time preparing students to start DeCal courses.

So, how is DeCal able to exist?

DeCal is based on the simple idea that students can and should learn to manage and direct their own learning so that they can be more engaged and pursue the questions that they find most intriguing and relevant. In order to understand the “what” of their classes, they need to answer their own questions of “why.”

DeCals are most commonly listed by departments as 97/197 or 98/198 courses. These numbers are officially known as Special Studies classes. In general, not all Special Studies classes are DeCals: some are unadvertised independent or small group studies; others are community service projects or internships that have not gone through the DeCal channels. In all cases, if a student wants to start a group studies course, they must get a faculty sponsor, who becomes responsible for overseeing the class but does not need to attend or instruct it. Any undergraduate facilitating a course can use the UCFTR as a resource.

Any student can fill out a Special Studies course proposal. However, if you want to start a DeCal course, open it up to other students and receive a variety of support and resources, you'll need to become a DeCal facilitator. We strongly recommend prospective DeCal facilitator to attend a brief and fun facilitation training session and other brief meetings throughout the semester. We actually do this for your benefit; you'll gain insight to the nature of the challenges ahead of you and get some advice on ways to meet them.

Ok, dumb question, so the students are teaching the class, right?

No! Students are facilitators. Their job is to lead the learning of others in ways they see fit. While starting your DeCal, you should not worry about being a mini-professor. Your strength is not necessarily in expertise, but the ability to understand your peers and explore the various angles to approach the topic of discussion. While some DeCals are lecture-based, most are more hands-on and fun for everyone involved.

As a facilitator, your job is to facilitate, NOT to teach. You do not need to have all the answers; your goal is to help create an environment that is conducive to the intensive study of something that you find really interesting. You get to study it, and or do it, with other students. This is relatively unique to Cal, and can be a lot of fun. Facilitation is one of the

best learning experiences you can have while you are here, and can prepare you to be an independent and a life-long learner.

How can I prepare for facilitating a DeCal?

At the beginning of the semester, DeCal and UCFTR hold a facilitation training. We will discuss the difference between traditional teaching and a facilitation model and tell you about resources available to you through the DeCal Program, the UCFTR, the University and more. DeCal facilitators also receive updates from the DeCal Board with support and resources, and are invited to participate in DeCal community events.

“We hardly ever spontaneously alter the formation of a problem that is presented to us in a reasonably clear and complete way.”

Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini, MIT

If you are unable to attend the training, you can go to Start-up Workshops during the semester. Schedule information for them can be found on the DeCal website: <www.decal.org> or the UCFTR website <<http://slc.berkeley.edu/ucftr/decalstartup.htm>>

Um, can I get units for facilitating a DeCal? How much time does doing a DeCal take?

Yes, you can get units. You will probably need to sign up for a 99 or 199 classes with your faculty sponsor. Ask your department. You can save yourself time by doing this at the same time that you are doing the paperwork for your class. *You cannot enroll in your own class!*

Doing a DeCal takes a lot of time! Don't underestimate the time commitment required to facilitate a good class! Plan to set aside about 10 hours (not 5) per week for your class, more at the beginning and the end.

Okay, what do I need to do to start a DeCal?

There are some paperwork, some meeting with people, and some bureaucratic bouncing around, but overall the process isn't so bad and is definitely worth it. The paperwork is mainly just your course syllabus and one form (usually a Special Studies 98/198 course proposal form, designed by us, the faculty and staff).

There are seven general steps to creating a DeCal class:

Important notice: The seven steps below usually meet most (not all) departments' regulations. DeCals belong to the departments in which the faculty sponsors teach and should abide by the departments' specific rules for student-run courses. For example, some departments may assign a faculty sponsor to the facilitator. Future facilitators should always consult prospective departments and their websites to get a good understanding of the different protocols as early as possible. It also wouldn't hurt to establish a rapport and good relation with the staff in charge of handling DeCal affairs.

1. **Print out the Special Studies 98/198 course proposal form.** This is your application form to start a student-initiated Special Studies 98/198 course. This form can be found at: http://education.berkeley.edu/specialstudies/spstudies_propfrm.pdf.
2. **Read the Special Studies student checklist.** It outlines everything you should know about facilitating a 98/198 course. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Special Studies course policies and regulations.
3. **Find a faculty sponsor.** DeCal suggests contacting potential sponsors via email/phone first and then visiting in person. Explain your class policies and give him or her a copy of your course syllabus, and have your sponsor sign the application form. Make sure your professor understands his or her responsibilities as sponsoring professor of a 98/198 course. It is the responsibility of the chair of each department (or equivalent), subject only to the authority of the Division, to ensure that only regularly appointed officers of instruction holding appropriate instructional titles may have substantial responsibility for the content and conduct of approved courses.
4. **Obtain the signature of the chair of the sponsoring professor's department.** The department chair is responsible for making the final decision of whether or not your course is appropriate for the Berkeley campus. Either drop by the chair's office, set up an appointment, or give the application to a representative of the chair's office. Include a copy of your course syllabus.
5. **Meet with the department's course scheduler to get a classroom and course control numbers.** The scheduler will require a copy of your completed Special Studies course proposal form. Before approaching the department scheduler (who is usually a very busy person), determine the days and times for your class and estimate the number of students you will have to obtain the appropriate sized room. It is to your advantage to come prepared with a list of specific rooms that you would like to have. Also consider any special requirements you may have such as video or audio equipment. Rooms obtained through the sponsoring department can be requested up to 8 months before the semester begins but must be requested no later than the end of the second week of instruction. This includes changes to current room assignments. Call Classroom Scheduling at (510) 642-0313 to find out who your scheduler is.
6. **Turn in the Special Studies application form to the Academic Senate.** The Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI), a division of the Academic Senate, requires your form for informational purposes. Turn in the original Special Studies course proposal form and your syllabus to the Academic Senate at 320 Stephens Hall (near the Campanile). Alternatively, you can request that your department scheduler turn in your form to the Academic Senate. Either way, make sure it gets there. Keep one copy of the application for your own records.
7. **To advertise your course on the DeCal website, turn in a copy of your Special Studies form and syllabus to the DeCal office.** We are located at 320 Eshelman Hall (near Bancroft & Telegraph). If no one is in the office, slip the papers under the door. When someone from the DeCal student group receives your form, we will e-mail you (using the address provided on the Special Studies form) a username and password for use with our database system. You will be able to update your schedule info online. If you do not receive

an e-mail within a few days, feel free to contact us. But please remember, we are students just like you. If you turn in an application near break time it may not be received for a while.

When is the deadline to start a DeCal?

There are two answers to this question. One, there is a campus-wide deadline and the other is a departmentally-imposed deadline (sometimes earlier than the campus one).

On the Course Proposal Form, which you have your faculty sponsor sign, says something to the effect that the form needs to be given to the Academic Senate by the department staffer "*by the end of the semester (or summer) BEFORE the one in which the class is to be offered.*" But so this could mean either the last day of classes OR the last day of the semester, and then the spring vs. summer policy is left optional, too.

The ambiguities of the form are intentional and lend flexibility to departments for determining their own preference, as their own administrative styles/demands/resources dictate.

Therefore, the safest bet is to consult the department staffer in the department that your faculty sponsor teaches in. That person (often referred to as the "course scheduler" or sometimes the "Undergraduate Advisor" or sometimes the "SAO"--Student Affairs Officer) will know their department's specific preferences & procedures.

What do I need to know about the Syllabus mentioned by the Special Studies student checklist?

The course syllabus is your primary tool for making sure that your class has a "map" to follow. It is also a very useful way to develop your vision for how the class will work. As the semester progresses, it is okay to deviate from the map, but it is good to have a plan! Your students also need to know what is going on and what will be expected of them. It is very important to have a clear understanding with your students.

In the syllabus, you should list any assignments and due dates. Your grading policy should be written as clearly as possible, as well as your attendance policy if you have one in detail. Tell students what they need to do to get a "P" in your course. You should have a description of the course. You should also have your contact information and a way that students can meet with you if they have questions or are especially interested in the topic (hint: for a good class, get your students to meet with your outside of class, it makes everything a lot more personal and interesting for all involved).

It is also possible to create a syllabus and a class that is both structured and flexible. For example, you can indicate that you and your students will decide ground rules for the class. Similarly, you may wish to leave time in your class schedule for student presentations, or for students to lead the class for a week. For more information, come to facilitator training.

Are there facilitating techniques that facilitators should know?

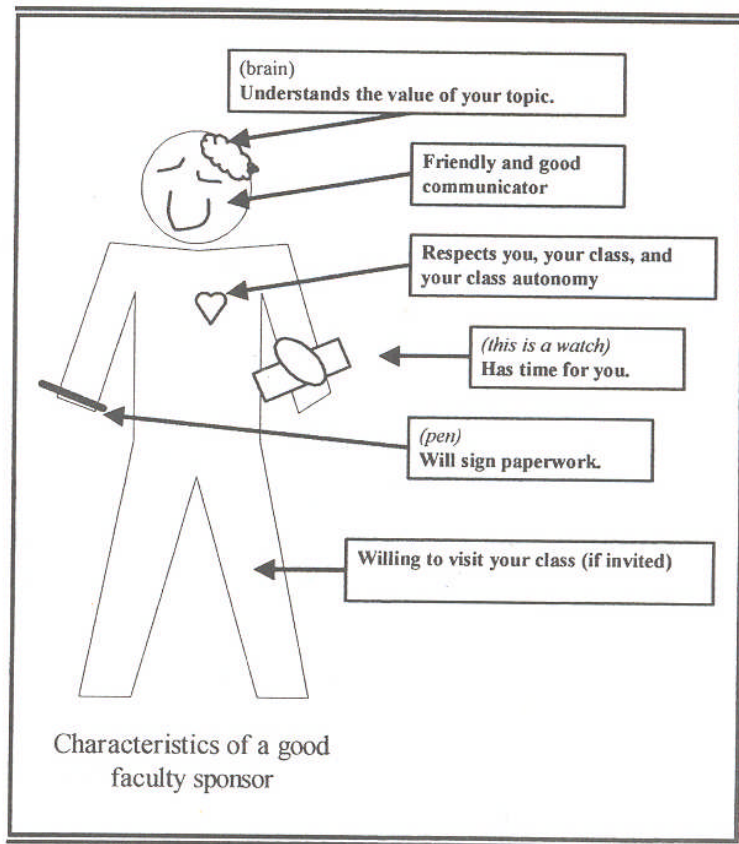
Talk to the Undergraduate Course Facilitator of Training and Resources UCFTR Coordinator by visiting 123 Caesar Chavez or calling 510.642.3075! The UCFTR works in concert with DeCal, the GSI Teaching and Resource Center, and the Office of Educational Development, along with other campus teaching resources. Services complement the core faculty mentor relationship around which student-initiated special studies courses revolve.

Check out downloadable teaching resources and publications at <http://slc.berkeley.edu/ucftr/>

What's the deal with the faculty sponsor?

Oftentimes, facilitators find faculty sponsors from whom they have taken a class previously. However, in our experience, the best faculty sponsors are those who have an interest in your topic and with whom you get along. This may take some research on your part. If you don't know where to start, feel free to ask your prospective departments to recommend faculty sponsors.

You will want to approach your faculty sponsor as early as possible, but not before you have a decent idea of what you'd like to do. It is always good to make an appointment ahead of time to talk with them so that they are prepared and have time to meet with you. It's not always so easy to find a sponsor, regardless of how good your idea is. Also, many facilitators, including some of us on the board, had many rejections before we found sponsors for our classes. Our best bet is to start Early!



Ideally, choose someone with whom you'll have a good rapport and who seems that they might have time to devote to your class. The sponsors should have some respect for you and what you are trying to accomplish through your class. For many facilitators, finding a faculty sponsor is a very unique, if not a downright frustrating, experience. Don't be afraid to go to office hours. Make sure you are ready to present your class proposal, be knowledgeable about the issues you want to raise. This person might end up eventually writing you a letter of recommendation, be sure to choose wisely and represent them well, doing a DeCal is a commendable and challenging thing!

If you want specifics, we recommend the steps identified by the Haas Scholars Program (reprinted in its entirety in the following). The methods for finding a faculty mentor and sponsor are very similar.

<http://research.berkeley.edu/haas_scholars/documents/findmentor.html>

STEP #1: Identifying Potential Mentors

List faculty members with whom you have taken courses and whose work has inspired or influenced your intellectual interests.

Attend lectures on campus to familiarize yourself with other faculty members outside your courses. Check the Daily Cal and the Berkeleyan, visit the UC Calendar of Events website at <http://www.berkeley.edu/calendar/>, and check departmental postings for information on scheduled lectures and presentations.

Consider the interdisciplinary implications of your interests and identify all relevant departments--including professional schools--that may house potential mentors. Don't just be limited to your major department!

Check departmental websites for up-to-date information on faculty research interests and publications.

Visit departmental offices and request information from staff on faculty research interests and availability. The departmental graduate assistant can often be an especially good source of information.

Look at recent course listings -- both undergrad and grad -- in relevant departments to find out what faculty members are teaching. Many departments publish their own course listings.

Ask other faculty members which of their colleagues share your research interests.

Talk to fellow students, especially seniors involved in research and/or those active in the majors' association -- to find out which faculty members specialize in areas relevant to your proposed research project. T.A.s or G.S.I.s or other graduate students are an especially good source of information about faculty research interests.

Step #2: Approaching Potential Mentors

Find out when potential mentors hold office hours by consulting postings in the departments, on the web, or on faculty office doors. Avoid calling on the phone; let the faculty members manage their own time as they choose.

Do your homework before you go to office hours; inform yourself about the faculty member's research interests, areas of specialization and/or publications. Be able to state why you are seeking out this particular person's advice.

Before speaking with a faculty member, know what you wish to get out of the meeting: feedback on a research or creative project idea? Help defining the purpose or scope of a project? Suggestions for further background reading? Advice about designing a research instrument or plan? Information about laboratory facilities or equipment? You are running this meeting, so it's important to have an agenda, both to use time efficiently and to show that you are serious about your purpose.

Don't go in empty handed: have with you a paragraph summarizing your research project/interests, your transcript, your resume, and a list of specific questions/requests for guidance.

Before leaving the meeting, think about what kind of follow-up you would like to have with the faculty member. If you have established a good rapport and would like to develop an ongoing working relationship, ask if he/she would be willing to meet with you again to look at a draft of your research proposal, to answer additional questions about a topic you have discussed, or for some other specific purpose.

If there isn't a good match between your interests and those of the faculty member, ask him/her to suggest other colleagues you might approach. Even if this particular individual has been very helpful, it may be useful to ask for additional suggestions of people to speak with, since the more input you get in developing your proposal, the better.

Be confident and assertive about asking for help, but keep the length of your meeting within the established time limit (e.g. 15 minute or 10 minute "slots"). It's important to be considerate both of the faculty member, who faces many demands on his/her time, and your fellow students waiting outside the door.

Step #3: Popping the Question

Once you have identified a faculty member with whom you wish to work on your research or creative project, you will need to ask that person to make a commitment to serve as your faculty sponsor or advisor. Clearly communicate what kind of time commitment you are asking for and what tasks will be entailed for him/her. (If you are seeking a sponsor for the Haas Scholars Program, obtain the handout "Information for Haas Faculty Mentors" from the Haas Scholars Program.)

Give your sponsor a copy of your research proposal, if appropriate, as well as any forms she/he will need to fill out to establish a formal advising relationship. For letters of recommendation that must be submitted under separate cover, include a stamped, addressed envelope directed to the appropriate party as a courtesy to the faculty member. Be sure to allow plenty of lead time before deadlines and make sure your sponsor knows when forms are due. Arrange an agreed upon date to check back with the faculty member to verify that forms have been submitted.

If a faculty member declines to serve as your sponsor, don't be discouraged! A negative response likely says more about the professor's prior commitments than it does about the merits of your project. If you've done your homework and have a sound proposal, return to

Step #1 and begin the process again. With persistence, you will eventually succeed in finding a sponsor. If you're planning ahead now to do interesting research later, you are by definition the kind of highly motivated student that makes the work of being a university professor worthwhile.

Love thy neighbor (Course Scheduler/Undergrad. Advisor/Student Affairs Officers, custodians, Technicians etc.)

There are numerous people and groups of people you will interact with as a facilitator. Based on their personality and the nature of your interactions, they can either: (A) help you immensely or (B) make your life hell. Here are some suggestions based on our experiences. We already talked about the faculty sponsor; here are a couple of others. The course scheduler in your department is a very important person. Never refer to them as "secretary." Their good graces can quickly and painlessly get you a course control number, your desired meeting time, a room with windows and technology. Or, this same person, if approached last minute and rudely, can ensure that it takes three weeks to get your hole of a room on the wrong side of campus at a time they couldn't possibly work for you or anybody else for that matter. So, be organized, and be polite, and your course scheduler will help you.

Also, please be extra nice to the custodian of the buildings where you have your class. End your class on time and clean up your own mess! They work really hard, are under paid, and have to accommodate DeCals ending late at night. They really do appreciate the courtesy.

Hey! Isn't it time for a shameless plug for DeCal?

Please remember that we (the DeCal Board) are composed of students, like you. We are also experienced facilitators. And we are volunteers. We'll do our best to help you in whatever way we can, and as quickly as we can. If we are slow sometimes, it is either because (A) We have midterms too. Or (B) There are about 300 of you and 15 of us. Also, if you are interested in getting involved in the DeCal Board, we welcome both help and new ideas! You can become an intern now, or after you have facilitated for at least one semester, you can apply to be a board member by contacting us.

Are there any University regulations I really should know about?

Why yes, we are glad you asked. The book is about 10 inches thick. Here are a couple of regulations from the University that you should know about; for the rest, use your common sense or ask us.

- Don't Discriminate.
- Don't Sexually Harass Others.
- Do Respect the Religious Needs of Your Students.

We've also added a few things to the University's list that are important to us, too.

- Students have a right to be engaged by your class.
- Students have a right to drop your class.

Students have a right to have their opinions respected and heard.
 Students have a right to pass, and to not be made to speak.
 Students have a right to know what the expectations are in the class.

Check out the Ten Essential regulations every student course facilitator should know about at < <http://slc.berkeley.edu/ucftr/pdfs.htm>>

So, who is responsible for the class again?

As a facilitator, you are primarily responsible for what goes on in your class. You are the person that the DeCal program will hold accountable. But the University recognizes professors as teachers and students as learners, so they require both a faculty sponsor to create the Special Studies course and the Dean or Chair of the Department's signature. This means that your faculty sponsor is putting him or herself on the line for you. As long as you are responsible in your class, there will not be any problems.

Our Final Thought:

Facilitating a class is a great learning and leadership opportunity, which makes the DeCal Program so unique. Use this opportunity and use it wisely.

Create a class that has value to you, your students and your community. In some small ways, use your class to make the world a better place.

One more thing: I'm not sure if I'm ready to start a class next semester. What can I do to better prepare myself to start one in the future?

If this all seems like too much right now, there are classes that you can take that will help prepare you to be a great facilitator! You can learn about different models of education and prepare your syllabus in the UCFTR's Craft of Teaching (i.e. the Art of Facilitation).

If you'd like to start a DeCal, we welcome you! We'd be happy to answer any questions, just shoot them our way: decalprogram@gmail.com or 510.642.9127. In the meantime, have fun putting your class(es) together.

We look forward to meeting you!

Best of luck!

The folks at DeCal/UCFTR

