

CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Planning Your Course: A Decision Guide

1. Where are you? Size up the situation.

- A. Which students enroll in this course? (number, prior knowledge and experience, motivation, etc.)
- B. What role does this course play in the overall educational experience of the students who take it? (GE, elective, required, majors-only, lower or upper division, prerequisite for other classes, etc.)
- C. In what kind of curriculum is this course embedded? (How does it relate to other courses? What courses does it build on? What courses follow it?)
- D. What external professional standards need to be met?
- E. What kind of learning space will you have? (Classroom, lab, or other? Fixed desks? Movable chairs? Media equipment?)

2. Identify 3-5 general outcomes for the course.

- A. What do you want students to be able to DO once the course is over?
- B. What would students have to KNOW in order to do the items listed in question "2.A" above?

3. Assessment of Learning:

- A. How would you know if the students achieved these outcomes? (How can you assess student learning/achievement?)

4. Determine how you will assess student learning and achievement.

- A. FOR EACH OUTCOME specified above, what information can you gather that shows how well the outcome was achieved for each student individually? For the class as a whole?
- B. For which outcomes are multiple-choice exams sufficient? Essay exams? Project assignments? Writing assignments? Other "products" or valid evidence of learning outcomes sought?

5. Determine the specific learning activities for the course. What are the students going to do?

A. FOR EACH OUTCOME listed in #2, what learning activities will generate the kind of learning you envision?

B. Is "hearing" sufficient? Or "reading"? Or "doing"? Or does the learning outcomes require some combination of activities?

6. Choose appropriate teaching strategies to achieve your outcomes:

A. How can you help your students achieve the outcomes you have set? (What general structure of learning activities will best assist the students in achieving the outcomes you have established?)

Example strategies:

A. Continuous series of lectures and reading assignments, periodically interrupted by 1 or 2 midterms.

("hear - read - test")

B. Sequence of reading, reflective writing, and whole class discussion (sequence repeated for each topic).

("read - write - talk")

(A variation is "read - talk - write")

C. Start with lab or field work observations, followed by readings, and whole class discussions.

("do/look - read - talk")

(Write-ups of lab/field work are sometimes included)

D. Present lectures, followed by field work or lab observations.

("hear - see/do")

E. Students do assigned readings, followed by mini-tests done individually and/or in small groups; then move on to group-based application projects.

("read-individual/group tests - DO")

F. Work through a series of developmental stages: build knowledge and/or skills (3-5 weeks); work on small application projects (3-5 weeks); and then work on larger, more complex projects (3-5 weeks).

("know/know-how - do - DO")

G. Contract for a grade: (for example; read text and pass exams = C, + do research paper = B, +extended project = A).

H. Other?

7. Develop a sequence of activities, a week-by-week schedule for the whole term. When are you going to do what?

- A. What activities need to come first?
- B. What activities do you want to conclude with?
- C. What activities do you need in the middle?

8. Identify Resources: Who/What can help? What resources do you need (and can you get) to support each of the outcomes listed in #2? (people, places, and things, including media)

9. How are you going to grade? Develop your grading system.

- A. Your system should reflect the full range of learning outcomes and activities. (Remember, NOT everything has to be graded.)
- B. The relative weight of each item on the course grade should reflect the relative importance of that activity.

10. De-bugging the design: What could go wrong? Analyze and assess this "first draft" of the course.

- A. What kinds of situations might arise as you implement this course? e.g., Will students be motivated to do the work? What if they're not?
- B. Does the design encourage student involvement?
- C. Will students get sufficient feedback on their performance?
- D. How can you prevent (or at least minimize) problems?
- E. Make the necessary modifications in the design.

11. Plan an evaluation of the course itself and your own teaching performance. How will you know how the course is going? How it went?

- A. What kinds of mid-term and end-of-term feedback will you need?
- B. What specific questions about the course do you have? How effective are the particular learning activities? To what degree are the outcomes for the course achieved? etc.
- C. What sources of information can help you answer these questions? audio/videotape, student feedback and interviews, questionnaires, peer observers, quality circles?

12. Write the syllabus.

Syllabus Checklist

Consider the following items as a foundation for a syllabus that helps students understand a teacher's expectations as well as basic course information. Including each item may not be necessary. Use this checklist as a guide for what might be included in a course syllabus.

_____ A brief statement of overall course outcomes that introduces students to what they should know and be able to do by the end of a course. Consider the personal tone set here as an important aspect of this statement.

_____ A few words about course format, so that students know what to expect about how the teacher will be using class time.

_____ A brief statement of expectations in terms of student responsibilities, clearly stating what the teacher expects (such as participation and the level of work).

_____ A statement of what assessment techniques will be used to evaluate students, including information on grading policies.

_____ A schedule of class dates and topics, along with week-by-week reading assignments.

_____ Due dates for papers, exams, projects, and so on, including any policies about late assignments.

_____ Any pertinent information about course policies and procedures (such as class attendance, making up assignments).

_____ Statements on university-wide policies (such as statements on academic integrity, accommodations for students with disabilities, and diversity and inclusion).

"Nuts-and-bolts" information:

_____ Course title, course number, and prerequisites.

_____ Building and room number.

_____ Instructor's name, phone numbers, e-mail address, and office hours.

_____ Text(s) and supplemental readings; course web site.

_____ Suggested bibliography.