Charting Your Course: Instructional Design, Course Planning, and Developing the Syllabus

Danielle Mihram, Ph.D.
Faculty Fellow and Director
USC Center for Excellence in Teaching
dmihram@usc.edu

Originally presented on May 15, 2007 at
The AASCB Program: Developing Business Instructors
USC Marshall School, AACSB International, and
UC Irvine, The Paul Merage School of Business
Overview

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives and outcomes
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Overview

- **Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach**
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives and outcomes
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Instructional Design & Course Planning: A Systemic Approach

A systemic approach to course design and planning includes:

1. **Analyzing:**
   - The situational context of your course:
     - The conditions of your teaching situation
     - The characteristics of the students (both student organization and grouping)
     - The resources at your disposal

2. **Planning:**
   - The course content
   - The course syllabus
     - The course objectives (Formulating your course and what your students will learn)
     - The student learning outcomes
Instructional Design & Course Planning
A Systemic Approach

3. **Conducting:**
   - Selecting appropriate and effective teaching methods
   - Ongoing classroom assessment of your students’ learning

4. **Assessing:**
   1. The course at mid-term
   2. The course at the end of term

5. **Reflecting on your teaching**

Course design includes the following “Instructional Commonplaces”
   - Learner
   - Teacher
   - Subject matter
   - Social milieu (learning context)
   - Evaluation
Design and Planning: Analyzing

Conditions of your teaching situation:

– What official needs is the course to fulfill?
  – Meet the needs of the labor market?
  – Satisfy the requirements of a national accreditation organism?
  – Update old content and respond to important developments in a modern field?

– What is the course’s scope within the general program of study? (How does your course begin? Why does it begin and end where it does?)

– The requirements of subsequent courses
Design and Planning: Analyzing

The characteristics of your students:
– Diverse academic profiles? (the courses they have taken; the content and pedagogical organization of the previous courses)
– The degree of homogeneity of the enrolling students
– Their professional (and personal) expectations of the course
– Do the students know each other, and have they worked together previously?

What resources at your disposal:
– Technological support [IT support] for web-based teaching, for multimedia instruction, or for distance learning?
  • Use of “smart rooms”?
– Departmental support for field trips or out of class activities?
– Honoraria for guest speakers?
Course content

Questions to ask when determining course content:

- What are the core scholarly, or scientific, or field-specific findings and assumptions?

- What are the main points of arguments? What are the key bodies of evidence?

- What is the context of the course within the larger curriculum framework?
Design and Planning: Planning

The Course content:
– Established course or new?
– Level of course (1st year? Upper division? Graduate level?)
– Is the course required or elective?
– Based on textbook and/or course pack?
– Requires activities outside of class?
Overview

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- **Elements of a syllabus**
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
  - Learning objectives
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Charting Your Course: Elements of a Syllabus

A useful and effective syllabus ...

- Requires reflection and analysis *before* instruction begins
- Provides a plan that conveys the logic and organization of the course;
- Includes content, process, and product goals
- Provides students with a way to assess the whole course its rationale, activities, policies, and scheduling
- Clarifies instructional priorities
- Defines and discusses the mutual responsibilities for the instructor and the students in successfully meeting course goals
- Allows students to achieve high degrees of personal control over their learning
- Is much more than a practical document, it has conceptual and philosophical components
- Serves a *contract for learning*
Elements of a Syllabus: Course Content

• Be clear about what is most worth knowing (What do students need to know in order to derive maximum benefit from this educational experience?)
  – Describe the content that students will be required to know
  – Discuss the content that you will make available to support individual student inquiry or projects
  – Provide content that might be of interest to a student who wants to specialize in this area

• Develop a conceptual framework (theory, theme, controversial issue) to support major ideas and topics

• Decide what topics are appropriate to what types of student activities and assignments
Elements of a syllabus: Course materials

- Selecting pertinent course materials
  - What do you and your students do as the course unfolds?

- About what do you lecture or discuss, or present as case studies? What is left up to the students more generally?

- What are the key assignments or student evaluations?
Elements of a Syllabus: Developing Course Objectives

*General objectives* (represent the professor’s point of view):

- Determining the objectives is the most important aspect of course planning (Ask yourself, “What do students *need* to know in order to derive *maximum* benefit from this educational experience?).
- Plan backwards from where you want students to end in terms of their new knowledge, attitudes, and skills.
- List these as learning objectives (student learning outcomes) [“by the end of the course you will be able to…”].
- Design the course in a logical and scaffolded sequence of learning activities (reading assignments, lectures, quizzes, technology-mediated experiences, formative assessments...)
Elements of a Syllabus:
Learning Outcomes

What your students will learn within the content of a body of knowledge

– Each course objective should lead to an actionable learning outcome: A short statement, formulated from the professor’s point of view, beginning with a verb and providing actionable outcomes:

  • “Introduce students to ... so that”; “help student discover ... and then”; “develop the ability to ... so as to transfer ... to ...”; “give students a theoretical and practical overview ... to ...”.

The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)
Course objectives:
The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)

Found in:
Course Objectives: 
The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)

Purposes of the TGI:
- To help college teachers become more aware of what they want to accomplish in individual courses
- To help faculty locate classroom assessment techniques they can adapt and use to assess how well they are achieving their teaching and learning goals among colleagues
- To provide a starting point for discussion of teaching and learning goals among colleagues

See pp. 393-397 in:
Course Objectives: The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)

Includes considerations of six major components:

1. Higher order thinking skills
2. Basic academic success skills
3. Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
4. Liberal arts and academic values
5. Work and career preparation
6. Personal development
Course Objectives:
The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)

Group work:
Teaching Goals Inventory and Self-scorable worksheet
(Handout)

A. Each participant:
   1. Considers ONE course you are (or will) teach
   2. Responds (by circling in pencil) to each item on the TGI in relation to that particular course

B. Participants form small groups:
   Explain your responses to team members

C. General discussion: what have we learned?
Actual Examples of Goal Statements
(for you to evaluate)

Managerial Economics
The purpose of this Managerial Economics course is to contribute to your understanding of how markets work and explore the challenges and opportunities that markets pose for managers and firms.

Professional Development for Leaders
The purpose of this course is to help you develop as a professional, improving your ability to work with, communicate with, manage, and lead others—regardless of your position in an organization.
Actual Examples of Course Goal Statements (for you to evaluate)

**Corporate Finance**
This course provides an introduction to the modern theory and practice of corporate finance.

**Marketing Management**
The goals of this course are to introduce you to the substantive and procedural aspects of marketing management, and to sharpen your critical thinking skills.

**Strategy and Organization**
The primary objective of this course is to help you learn to diagnose management situations so that you will be able to transfer this skill to your work experience.
**Student Learning Outcomes - Specific Objectives**

*Specific objectives:* from the student’s point of view (Learning goals and outcomes)

What the student must be able to do or achieve during or at the end of a learning situation or section (in order to attain the general objectives).

These objectives are linked to each of the course’s themes and general objectives:

- Permits you to link a given subject and student performance
- Each objective must be linked to an *action or outcome*
Actual Examples of Learning Objectives
(for you to evaluate)

- Be able to compare and contrast earnings and cash flows as measures of performance.
- Identify and use three format techniques to increase the effectiveness of a written business communication.
- Understand the mechanics of the cash flow statement.
- Conduct independent research and write a publishable article for a newspaper or professional journal.
- Understand the implementation of SOX on US businesses and the resulting changes.
- Prepare and deliver a persuasive presentation using logical and emotional arguments.
Overview

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives
- **Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning**
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Developing the Syllabus: Instructional Strategies

The core question: How to develop a challenging and supportive course climate that builds on students’ interests, exemplifies the big topics in the field, teaches interpersonal and collaborative skills, and develops the capacity for lifelong learning (learning how to learn in the field).

- Decide on a mix of strategies to shape basic skills and procedures, present information, guide inquiry, monitor individual and group activities, and support and challenge critical reflection
- The chosen strategies must fit with the outcomes you hope to achieve
- Examples of general instructional strategies:
  - Training and coaching
  - Lecturing and explaining
  - Inquiry and discovery
  - Field work and community-based work
  - Experiential opportunities (such as internships) and reflection (portfolios)
Developing the Syllabus: Encourage Active Student Involvement and Lifelong Learning

• Are course topics related to content or process or both? What embedded activities will help students to learn the tools of the discipline or field?

• Activities and products that can involve students in sustained intensive work, both independently and with one another might include:
  – Group research projects
  – Reaction papers on one of several topics provided by the instructor or suggested by the student(s)
  – Challenging the students to “improve the syllabus” by adding or omitting a reading assignment or two (with a rationale for doing so)

• A learner-centered approach changes the students’ role by encouraging acceptance of personal responsibility for learning - “intentional learning” (this can be difficult for students who have been educated as passive learners).
Overview

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- **Issues of Assessment**
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Developing the Syllabus: Consider Issues of Assessment

(To be discussed at greater length in another session)

- Demonstrations of learning should include multiple ways to represent knowledge and skills

- Consider the role and rationale for individual and group assessment opportunities

- Provide worked examples and grading rubrics where possible so that all learners know what constitutes good (successful) work

- Consider using both formative and summative modes of assessment
Developing the Syllabus: Examples of Assessment Tools

- Products (essays, research reports, other projects)
- Performance assessments (music, dance, dramatic performance [e.g., role play], science experiments, demonstrations, debates....)
- Process-focused assessment (journals, learning logs, reflective statements, oral presentations)
- Assessment of recall and application at the highest cognitive level (Bloom’s et al. taxonomies)
- Examine the CET website for more helpful information on assessment:
  
Overview

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources
Developing the Syllabus: Identify and Assemble Resources

• Consider ways to include the full range of “knowledge nodes” (some of which may include alternative and conflicting perspectives). These would include:
  – Lectures, panel presentations, case studies, demonstrations, facilitation, discussion, online discussion boards
  – Books and readings, films, multimedia, maps, libraries, museums, theaters, studios, labs, databases, Internet sites, ....
• Involve outside individuals, communities, or officials for guest lectures and service learning opportunities where appropriate (For example: USC’s Joint Educational project [JEP].)
• Assign projects that will tap into students’ personal interpretations by challenging them to search for further information or new, even contradictory, points of view.
Overview

- **Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach**
- **Elements of a syllabus**
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives
- **Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning**
- **Issues of Assessment**
  - Examples of assessment tools
- **Identifying and assembling resources**
- **Syllabus checklist**
- **Useful resources**
Syllabus Checklist

- Course Identifiers
- Instructor Contact Information
- Purpose of Course
- Course Goal and Learning Objectives
- Course requirements, Prerequisites, Co-requisites
- Required, Recommended Materials
- Assignments and Exam Due Dates
- Evaluation specifics
- Grading criteria
- Policies, Expectations
  - Missed exams, quizzes
  - Attendance
  - Other, as required
- Detailed Schedule
- Reading list with reference
Useful Resources on Course Design and Syllabus Creation


Useful Resources on Course Design and Syllabus Creation

Teaching and Learning Resources on the website of the USC Center for Excellence in Teaching:
http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/

Syllabus and Course Design
http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/creating_syllabi/
Review

- Instructional design & Course planning: A systemic approach
- Elements of a syllabus
  - Course content
  - Course objectives
    - The Teaching Goals Inventory
      - Group work
    - Learning objectives
- Instructional strategies for student engagement and lifelong learning
- Issues of Assessment
  - Examples of assessment tools
- Identifying and assembling resources
- Syllabus checklist
- Useful resources