Charting Your Learning-Centered Course:

Course Design Emphasizing Outcomes

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Chart Your Course

Objective: To assist faculty with planning and implementing a learning-centered course, with an eye towards assessment.

Workshop Learning Outcomes:
1. Identify the basics of syllabus construction
2. Write course learning outcomes
3. Align course learning outcomes with planned curricular activities/plan curricular activities that align with course learning outcomes
4. Begin the development of an original rubric for a curricular activity that aligns with course learning outcomes
5. Distinguish levels of assessment
6. Consider how your course fits the big picture
Constructing a well-designed and clear syllabus

- Contact information
- Course description
- Course learning outcomes
- Textbooks, readings, and other materials
- Overall structure of the course
- Course requirements
- Course policies
- Assessment and grading practices
- Course outline/schedule

(See template guidelines in syllabus handout)
Course Design: A Cyclical Process

- Course Revision
- Course Learning Outcomes
- Assessments (Evaluation Criteria)
- Activities, Assignments, Exams
Course Alignment: Connecting 3 Elements

Three simple questions:

1. **What do you want student to learn by taking your course?** (outcomes)

2. **What activities and assignments will you have them do so that they can achieve the course outcomes?** (student work or assignments)

3. **How will you evaluate whether they’ve achieved your outcomes?** (your evaluation criteria or assessment)
Did you know?

Our regional accreditors (WASC) now require faculty to include course learning outcomes on their syllabi.

So what’s a learning outcome?
Basic Terminology:

- **Outcomes**: faculty expectations for what they want students to learn by the end of a course or program. Often outcomes begin with the phrase “Students will be able to…” but they need not. *Ex.* Students will write in a clear and cogent arguments in their term papers.

- **Course objectives**: traditional focus on what the course covers or what the faculty intends to accomplish. *Ex.* This class provides an overview of the methods typically found throughout the discipline’s research literature.

- Be careful: there are many terms used interchangeably with “outcomes,” such “objectives,” and “goals.”
Useful outcomes:

1. Student-focused.
2. Manageable in number.
3. Measurable.
4. Focused on learning that endures.
5. Aligned with program-level outcomes.
6. Aligned with discipline expectations for knowledge and learning.
Types of Outcomes

• **Knowledge outcomes:**
  Ex: You will be able to identify and explain major social identity theories.

• **Skills outcomes: cognitive, interactive, creativity:**
  Ex: You will be able to construct and orally present a persuasive and well-organized thesis addressing a major issue in the field.

• **Attitudes outcomes:**
  Ex: You will be able to evaluate and reasonably defend your position relative to assumptions and implications of different ethical concepts and perspectives.
Learning Outcomes Are Developmental: Action Verbs

6. **Create**: assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, invent

5. **Evaluate**: appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

4. **Analyze**: appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

3. **Apply**: choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

2. **Understand**: classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

1. **Remembering**: define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
Course Alignment: Connecting 3 Elements

Three simple questions:

1. What do you want student to learn by taking your course? (outcomes)

2. What activities and assignments do you have them do so that they can achieve the course outcomes? (student work or assignments)

3. How will you evaluate whether they’ve achieved your outcomes? (your evaluation criteria or assessment)
• **Biology Outcome**: synthesize a cogent argument in the language of science

• **Biology Assignment**: lab reports written in style of scientific journal

• **Ethics Outcome**: identify and analyze real world ethical problems or dilemmas and identify those affected by the dilemma

• **Ethics Assignment**: essay assignment which demonstrates analysis of a real world problem and its consequences for various groups of people

• **Life Science Core Outcome**: identify the major ways that plants and plant products contribute to human life and how humans modify plants and the environment

• **Life Science Core Assignment**: research paper on a plant species
Course Alignment: Connecting 3 Elements

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Outcome Evaluation Criteria: Key Characteristics

- **Valid**: are criteria directly related to course outcome?
- **Reliable**: can they be applied consistently?
- **Flexible**: do they capture the different levels of student performance?
- **Fair**: reduces instructor bias generally
• **Outcome:** identify the major ways that plants and plant products contribute to human life and how humans modify plants and the environment

• **Assignment:** Choose a topic that interests you about a plant and how it impacts or relates to the lives of any group of people (food/beverage, material, medicinal, recreational, etc. Write a short research paper that includes a description, classification, natural history, cultivation, processing, uses/abuses, and how it impacts society. A minimum of 6 pages (plus literature cited), double spaced.

• **Evaluation Criteria:** ???
  - Biological content
  - Cultivation, use, impact
  - Sources
  - Communication
Course Disconnects

- Problems between outcomes and assignments
- Problems between assignments and evaluation criteria
- Problems between evaluation criteria and outcomes
What is a rubric? How are rubrics advantageous?

• Definition
  - a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment

• Potential Advantages
  - Increase grading efficiency
  - Clarify your expectations (criteria) and therefore grades
  - Allow for objective and consistent grading
  - Provide feedback for effectiveness of instruction
  - Help identify learning levels across departmental courses
  - Can be developed for virtually any learning task
Key characteristics of an ideal rubric

So, an ideal rubric is…

- **Valid**: contains evaluation criteria that are directly related to course learning outcome
- **Reliable**: can be applied consistently
- **Flexible**: captures the different levels of student performance
- **Fair**: helps ensure that the evaluation criteria stay the same for all students
Rubric Components

1. Course Learning Outcome

2. Task Description (assignment)

3. Scale (levels of achievement)

4. Dimensions (parts of the assignment, aka evaluation criteria)

5. Description of the Dimensions (learning behaviors by levels of achievement, evidence)
## Basic Rubric Matrix

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<th>Dimension 1</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
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Constructing Rubrics: Four Stages

1. Reflecting
2. Listing
3. Grouping and labeling
4. Application
For a cohesive learning environment, alignment occurs at many levels:

- Institutional mission, goals and learning outcomes (ILOs): curricular & co-curricular umbrella
- Program’s mission, goals, and learning outcomes (PLOs): department’s curricular umbrella
- Course purpose and learning outcomes (CLOs): umbrella structure for a course
USD Mission: academic excellence, diverse & inclusive community, ethical conduct, compassionate service.

Institutional Outcomes: Knowledge, intercultural competence, critical thinking, communication, ethical judgment and action, etc.

Biology PLOs and Core ILOs

Communication Studies PLOs and Core ILOs

Biology 1XX

Communication Studies 1XX or 2XX
Program Curricular Maps and Assessment Plans

- Curricular Maps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PLO1</th>
<th>PLO2</th>
<th>PLO3</th>
<th>PLO4</th>
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- Assessment Plans:
  - Outcomes
  - Activities/Assignments
  - Assessments
  - Improvements
Develop a big-picture understanding of your course

- Become aware of University Mission:
  [http://www.sandiego.edu/about/missiongoals/mission.php](http://www.sandiego.edu/about/missiongoals/mission.php)

- Become aware of Institutional Goals/Outcomes:
  [http://www.sandiego.edu/core/goals.php](http://www.sandiego.edu/core/goals.php)

- Become aware of Program’s goals/outcomes: posted on program’s website

- Consider how your course fits the big picture
Core Curriculum Re-Design

• Core Planning Committee: open meetings
• Core Action Plan: proposal and charter
• Timeline: three years
• Features under consideration: first year curriculum, thematic linked courses, fundamental competencies, community practice, capstones
Chart Your Course: Revisiting Our Workshop Outcomes

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