Charting Your Learning-Centered Course:

Course Design Emphasizing Outcomes

January 18,2012

Sue Lowery

Carole Huston

Marcelle Darby

Chart Your Course

University of San Diego

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

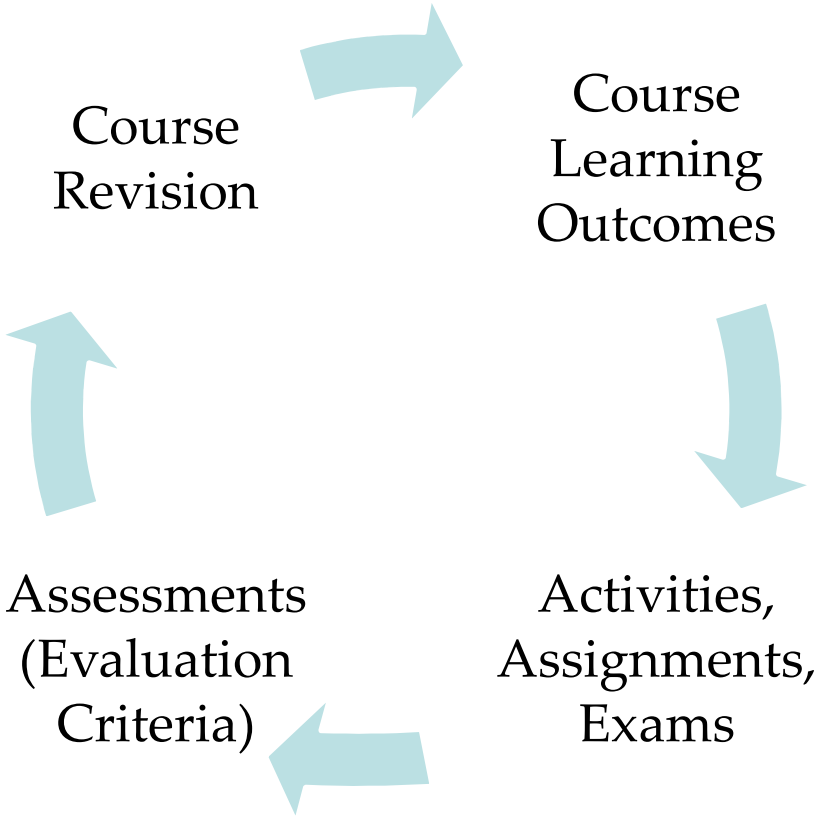
University of San Diego

- 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

University of San Diego



Course Alignment: Connecting 3 Elements

University of San Diego

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?

University of San Diego

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

So what's a learning outcome?

Clarification of Terms

University of San Diego

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."

Outcome characteristics

University of San Diego

Useful outcomes:

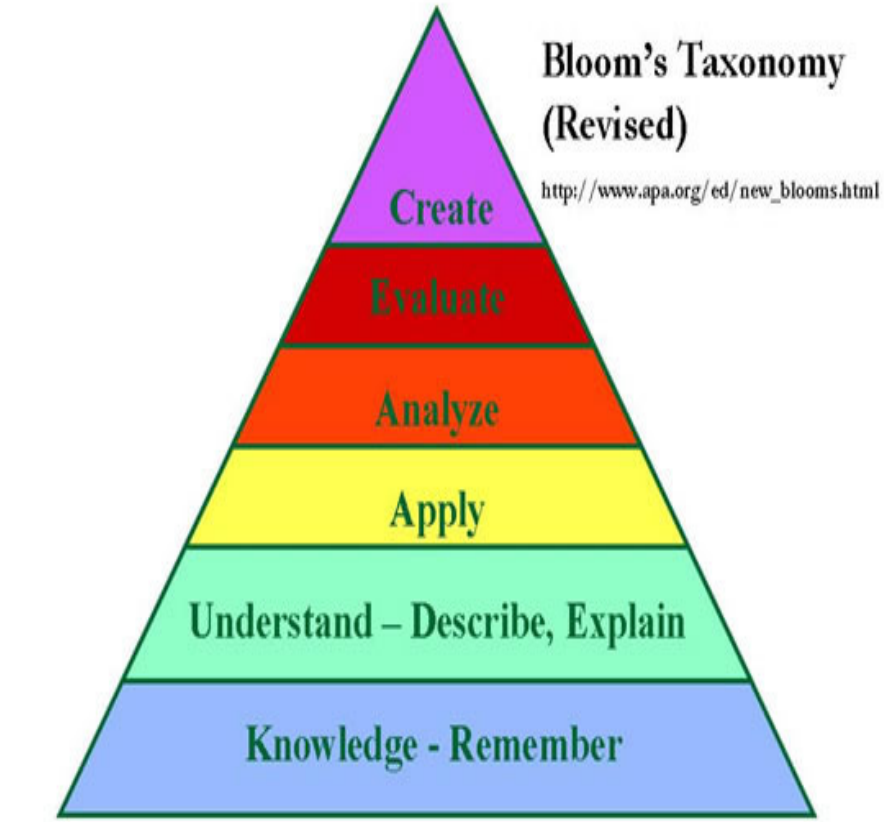
1. Student-focused.
2. Manageable in number.
3. Measurable.
4. Focused on learning that endures.
5. Aligned with program-level outcomes.
6. Aligned with discipline expectations for knowledge and learning.

Types of Outcomes

University of San Diego

- **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



Based on an APA adaptation of Anderson, L.W. & Krathwohl, D.R. (Eds.) (2001)

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

University of San Diego

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)

Outcome and Student Work Examples

University of San Diego

- **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

University of San Diego

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)

Outcome Evaluation Criteria: Key Characteristics

University of San Diego

- **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

Example

- **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

University of San Diego

- **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?

University of San Diego

- **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

University of San Diego

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

University of San Diego

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

University of San Diego

	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Dimension 1				
Dimension 2				
Dimension 3				
Dimension 4				

Constructing Rubrics: Four Stages

University of San Diego

1. Reflecting
2. Listing
3. Grouping and labeling
4. Application

Straightening out assessment levels: The bigger picture

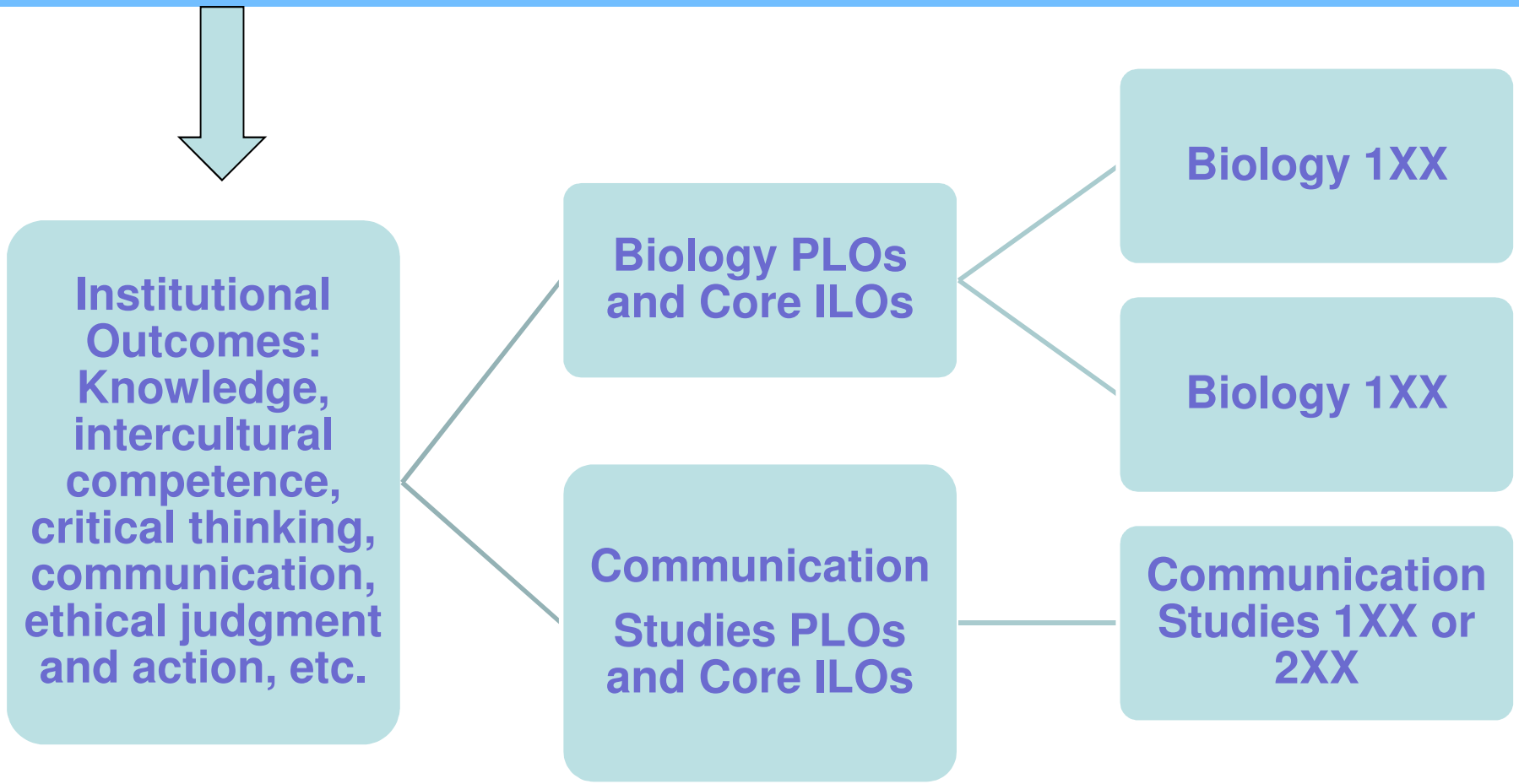
University of San Diego

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.

University of San Diego



Program Curricular Maps and Assessment Plans

University of San Diego

- Curricular Maps:

	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
Comm 101	X		X	
Comm 130	X	X		

- Assessment Plans:
  - Outcomes
  - Activities/Assignments
  - Assessments
  - Improvements

Develop a big-picture understanding of your course

University of San Diego

- Become aware of University Mission:
  http://www.sandiego.edu/about/missiongoals/mission.php
- Become aware of Institutional Goals/Outcomes:
  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

University of San Diego

- 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

University of San Diego

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