WHERE TO START WITH COURSE DESIGN

FOUNDATIONS OF COURSE DESIGN

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Where to start with course design

Course design is a continuous process and can guide decision making throughout a course lifecycle. All courses have similar course design elements yet where you start depends on the context and how the course fits into the program. Generally, course designs fit into the follow categories:

- a new course design:
    - often starts from scratch, and the main course elements (learning outcomes, assessment and instruction/activities) need to be developed.
- a redesign of an existing course:
    - could be the entire course or specific elements such as updating content or changing student assessments.
- an inherited course :
    - where the instructor must follow the course learning outcomes and assessments while having control over how the course is taught.

Key Concepts of course design

- Constructive alignment: The intentional alignment between course learning outcomes, assessments, activities and content and other course elements that support student-centred, outcome-based learning (Biggs, 1996; Loughlin et al., 2020).
- Course context: contextual factors include where the course fits in with the overall program, pre-requisites, number of students, year of study.
- Pedagogical approach: The theoretical teaching and learning approach that best fits the intended learning experience. Common approaches include authentic learning, inquiry-based, course-based undergraduate research (CURE), problem based, project based, self-study and more (link to a list).
- The student learning experience: Each student will experience the course in their own way based on their pre-existing knowledge, values, motivation and relevance.
- Inclusive course design: Integrates inclusivity strategies to help foster a learning environment and culture that values diverse perspectives, identities, and experiences of the students and a whole.

Course design in action

One place to start with any course design/redesign is to think about the overall desired learning experience is for students. Fink (2003) describes significant learning where students have meaningful and memorable learning experiences. By considering what the purpose and intent of the course is you can make design choices to foster such an experience.

- Reflect on your own teaching philosophy (https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/writing-a-teaching-philosophy-statement) and consider how your values, approaches and desired impact has on the course design and the student learning experience. Your philosophy can inform pedagogical approaches, assessment methods, interactions, relationships, and student engagement.
- Ask yourself 'In 10 years' time what do I hope students will remember about this course?'
- What are the big ideas or question(s) the course will pursue.?These big ideas or questions can stimulate curiosity and interest.
- Consider why students are taking this course, what their own learning goals are and the relevance to their lives.
- Identify the core needs required in a typical profession and how these skills, knowledge and abilities can be integrated into the course. Common skills include collaboration, leadership, and problem solving or meeting professional expectations.

Try this:

What is the meta or big question for the course? The big question is generally open-ended, thought provoking and closely related to the discipline. Use this question as the overarching umbrella to guide the design of the course.

For example, in a biology course the big question could be "What is life?", or in an environmental science course "How can we create change in modern water conservation?

Additional Reading:

Inclusive course design: https://er.educause.edu/articles/2022/3/inclusive-addie-initial-considerations-for-dei-pedagogy

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