

Course Design: Steps 1-5

Step 1. Decide What You Want to Accomplish

- Identify appropriate Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Look at your list of teaching goals. *What is most important to you? What do you expect your students to know, do or produce as a result of taking the course? What do you want students to know/do in six months? One year? Five years? Why do students NEED to know this “stuff”?* Also identify non-content SLOs. *What attitudes will students bring to the course? How might these change?*
- Scale down your SLOs to a realistic list. *Are all of them observable and measurable? What are your preliminary plans for assessing each goal?*

Step 2. Define and Limit Course Content

- After you create a preliminary list of SLOs and topics, remove excess baggage by distinguishing between essential and optional material. Focus on core concepts, timeless issues, or the most enduring truths.
- Don't plan class time for things students can learn on their own. Many simple, yet basic, concepts can be “off loaded” to homework. You can design on-line modules or create scaffolded assignments, but only of information absolutely necessary for class success. Save class time for developing deeper understandings and/or students demonstrations of mastery.

Step 3. Structure the Course

- Give students a conceptual framework (i.e, Course Design Model) on which to hang major ideas and factual information, and then devise a logical arrangement for course content—chronologically, by topic or category, from concrete to abstract, from theory to application, by increasing level of complexity, etc. This can be accomplished by choosing a textbook and/or reading assignments that reflect your SLOs. When selecting readings, be conscious of workload.⁶⁸⁷⁺⁸
- Use “backward design” to ensure students are well prepared. Create activities and assignments that help students know how to succeed. Ditto for tests and quizzes.
- Create a chart with all class meetings—*see handout*. *What SLOs will you focus on in each class? What will students need to do before they come to class? What will students do in class? How will students demonstrate their learning?* Select appropriate instructional methods and CATs for each class meeting.

Step 4. Check for Alignment

- Make sure that SLOs, assignments, activities and assessments are aligned. *Is there an assignment, an activity and an assessment for every SLO? Are some SLOs addressed more frequently than others? Is this appropriate?* Critical SLOs need to be “revisited” often throughout the semester while others will require less emphasis.

Step 5. Prepare a Detailed Syllabus

- Decide what your policies will be on attendance, civility issues, late work, “extra credit” assignments, makeup work and exams, grading and cheating, etc.
- Include the SLOs and explain why they are important. Also include descriptions of major assignments and explain how each will be evaluated. Add a calendar or schedule that includes required readings, due dates for assignments, and dates on which tests and quizzes (unless they will be unannounced) will be given.

Based on: Davis, B.G. (2009). Tools for Teaching. 2nd Ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass