Volume 1
Issue 6
June
2009

Lander University's

White Board

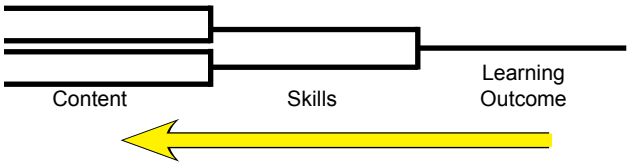
Article submissions encouraged.
Send articles to: sgrund@lander.edu

Become An Effective Teacher & Save Your Valuable Teaching Time and Energy

Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

Designing Courses Backwards

A "Forward-Looking" Approach to Effective Teaching!



YOU'VE GOT YOUR CALENDAR in one hand and your content in the other… you are ready to design your course! *"What will I cover?"*
But wait…that is forward thinking… and the most successful courses are designed backward. *"What should they learn?"* Or even more boldly, what should they remember next quarter, or next year?

Step 1: Consider your own rationale for teaching this class. What is important to you about the material? About the way you plan to teach the material? About how the students interact with the content?

Step 2: Skip directly to the end of the course. Distill five (or fewer!) major learning outcomes. (If this number is too small for comfort, you can add more later if you really must… but stick with 5 or less now… this is the way to get to the underlying, often unifying, themes of your course.) Think broadly about these outcomes… content or foundational knowledge is but one broad category in which you might have specific goals.

Step 3: Work Backwards. What skills will demonstrate achievement of the learning goals? What content is required to support those skills?

Why bother? Some of the best payoffs include:

- The outcome goals will be threaded throughout the course. They provide unifying themes and context for the material you cover.
- These choices define the skills embedded in homework, projects, exams, etc. Students who have met the learning goals will be able to do what? Student work becomes more obviously relevant to the topic, exam questions or projects become more authentic.
- This process helps distill the huge content "problem." Cutting content is always painful, but we know we have to do it… working backwards establishes priorities.

Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University, 2008, ctl.stanford.edu, [http://ctl.stanford.edu/Faculty/CD_DesigningCoursesBackwards.pdf], April 30, 2009

Course Design Worksheet

Thinking about Your Course Goals

The following questions will help you figure out what you want your students to know and be able to do at the end of your course.

1. What are the most important concepts (ideas, methods, theories, approaches, perspectives, and other broad themes of your field, etc.) that students should be able to understand, identify, or define at the end of your course? What would constitute a firm understanding, a good identification, etc., and how would you assess this?
   - What lower-level facts or information would students need to have mastered and retained as part of their larger conceptual structure of the material?
   - What questions should your students be able to answer at the end of the course?

2. What are the most important skills that students should develop and be able to apply in and after your course (quantitative analyses, problem-solving, close reading, analytical writing, critical thinking, asking questions, knowing how to learn, etc.)? How will you help the students build these skills and how will you help them test their mastery of these skills?

3. Do you have any affective goals for the course, such as students developing a love for the field?

Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University, 2008, ctl.stanford.edu,[http://ctl.stanford.edu/Faculty/CD_LearningObjectives.pdf], April 30, 2009

LANDER FACULTY NEWS

Young Faculty Member Awards

Dr. Kevin Witherspoon - 2009 Young Faculty Scholar Award.
Dr. Lillian Craton - 2009 Young Faculty Teaching Award

Distinguished Professor Award

Dr. Dava O'Connor - 2009 Distinguished Professor Award

Dr. Jennifer Maze and Dr. Deborah Natvig
elected to membership on
Lander's Tenure & Promotion Committee

Lander's Faculty Senate newest members:
Karie Barbour, David Melson, Leslie Myers, and Nancy Niles

WHITE BOARD

2009 Publication Dates
First Monday of the Month

January 5	July 6
February 2	August 3
March 2	September 7
April 6	October 5
May 4	November 2
June 1	December 1

Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching
Grier Student Center, 3rd floor, Room 368.
Phone: 388-8426

Great Beginnings: Things to do early on in your class

First Impressions
- Arrive early and put information on the board
- Start class on time
- Hand out an informative and user-friendly syllabus (if it's your own class)
- Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject

Building Community
- Greet students at the door and chat with students as they arrive
- Introduce yourself and your interest in the class
- Tell about your current research interests and your own beginnings in the discipline
- Take attendance to learn names
- Use an icebreaker to help students learn each others' names
- Make collaborative assignments for several students to work on together

Course Logistics
- Tell students what will be expected of them with regard to attendance, grading, participation, assignments, and late work policies
- Tell students what they can expect of you with regard to office hours, reading drafts, calling on students, accessibility at home
- Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty
- Organize your class and provide structure by posting the day's "menu" on the board or overhead

Challenging Students
- Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning
- Hit the ground running on the first class with substantial content
- Relate course material to students' interests and experience
- Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast
- Have students apply subject matter to solve real problems
- Ask students to fill in an index card telling you something about their backgrounds

Encouraging Active Learning
- Have students write their questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class
- Encourage group work and active discussion to accomplish specific objectives
- Put students into pairs or "learning cells" to quiz each other over material for the day
- Move around your classroom
- Give students a take-home problem relating to the day's material

Remember the Golden Rules of Teaching:
- **Be prepared**
- **Be honest**
- **Be creative**

Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University, August 2002, ctl.stanford.edu, [http://ctl.stanford.edu/handouts/PDF/great_beginnings.pdf], April 30, 2009

Designing Effective Writing Assignments

Work Backwards:
Decide which skill you want the assignment to develop, and start from there to design an assignment that will require students to go through all of the necessary steps towards building that skill.

Define the Task:
Use active, specific verbs when describing the assignment; avoid vague verbs such as discuss, tell, and explore. Even analyse can be vague if you have not already specified what counts as an analysis in your discipline.

Create Realistic Writing Situations:
Ask your students to write for a real audience that has a genuine need for information. Especially if you are working in a problem-based learning class format with the students broken up into teams, each student is then responsible for providing a certain amount or kind of information to their team members. In this scenario the stakes are particularly high, and the audience is well-defined.

De-Mystify the Assignment:
Tell your students what the skills are that you want them to develop while completing the assignment, as well as what the steps are that you think they will have to take in order to develop this skill. This will help the students stay on track, and will keep them confident as they learn a new discipline.

Explain your Grading Guidelines:
Avoid student bafflement and resentment when you return their papers by handing out a clear set of guidelines for how you will be grading their assignments, either with the syllabus on day one, or with each assignment if you will be using a different set of guidelines and specifications for each one. Which qualities are you looking for? How will they break down in terms of percentages?

Target Accessible Topics:
Try not to send an entire class in search of the same information; unless, of course, you have the info posted on the web where everyone will have equal access to it. Once again, a team format ensures that a variety of topics will be researched and that you will have a various, instead of monotonous, reading experience!

(And finally…)
Do yourself and the students a favor! Specify a Style Manual for your class.

Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University, August 2002, ctl.stanford.edu, [http://ctl.stanford.edu/handouts/PDF/Master_assignment_design.pdf], April 30 2009

CREATIVITY & PASSION

Hamilton, ON. February 5, 2009
Carolyn Eyles, professor of geography in the Faculty of Science is one of two McMaster University professors who have been named recipients of this year's 3M National Teaching Fellowships for bringing inspirational power to university teaching.

Eyles, whose teaching includes an introductory course on Earth Sciences and one on glaciers, attributes her passion for teaching to her students and to her willingness to take risks.

"I depend greatly on my students," she says. "I listen to them and incorporate their ideas into my teaching. For instance, students mentioned about how their essays and projects were handed in, marked and then lost forever. So we created a wiki to build an inventory of Canadian glaciers, and it just instilled such pride in the students. They saw that their contribution mattered."

She will formally receive her award on June 18 at the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education conference in New Brunswick. The 3M Fellowships are the most prestigious recognition of excellence and leadership in Canadian university teaching.

Office of Public Relations, McMaster.ca, February 2009,[http://www.mcmaster.ca/opr/html/opr/media/main/NewsReleases/3Mteachingaward.html], April 30, 2009