Curriculum Design

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Successful learning and teaching depend on curricula that are transparent and effective in terms of goals, learning activities and assessment of learning outcomes. The following approaches and frameworks provide a starting point for developing an effective course curriculum.

Constructive alignment
In constructive alignment, we start with the outcomes we intend students to learn, and align teaching and assessment to those outcomes. The outcome statements contain a learning activity, a verb, that students need to perform to best achieve the outcome, such as "apply expectancy-value theory of motivation", or "explain the concept of ... ". That verb says what the relevant learning activities are that the students need to undertake in order to attain the intended learning outcome. Learning is constructed by what activities the students carry out; learning is about what they do, not about what we teachers do. Likewise, assessment is about how well they achieve the intended outcomes, not about how well they report back to us what we have told them. (Biggs, 2007)

Approaches to learning - deep and surface
When students concentrate on memorizing facts, focus on the discrete elements of the reading, fail to differentiate between evidence and information, are unreflective and see the task as an external imposition, their approach is characterised as “surface” learning. When students focus on what the author means, relate new information to what they already know and have experienced, organize and structure the content and see the reading as an important source of learning, their approach is characterized the approach as “deep.” (Ramsden, 1992, Marton and Saljo,1976)

Five Key Curriculum Design Principles

1. Alignment / interdependence
   - all elements are in alignment, they are all inter-dependent, they form a system, together they send the same message

2. Strategy
   - teaching (and learning) is deliberate and purposeful, therefore it is strategic and directed – and that means, it is aligned with the rationale.

3. What’s driving the learning? ... the assessment!
   - Should be an integral part of your teaching strategy (it is a teaching method).
   - Should be seamlessly integrated with the rationale+aim+objectives.

4. Each assessment item:
   - Should map to specific objectives.
   - Should have a clear purpose.

5. Validity check the assessment
   - Did you assess something not specified in the aims? Why?
   - Did the aims specify something you did not assess? Why?
   - Do the assessments measure what they purport to? (I’ll return to this point)
Relational Curriculum Design

The Course Rationale or Description

- Provides reasons for the course
- Captures the whole point of the course
- Justifies the course
- States the real world need for the course (~the value this course has for society)
- Is the single most important aspect; and
- (partly) informs all your choices regarding the design and delivery of the course

A GOOD rationale

- Includes words like "need" or "requires".
- Takes the form:
  Professionals in this area do .......... Doing .................. well requires certain knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Leads directly to an aim of the form: 
  This course aims to meet the needs/requirements identified in the rationale
Aims and Desired Learning Outcomes (DLOs)

- Aims are not the same as desired learning outcomes
- ... aims should relate to the combined impact of the curriculum, the pedagogy and the assessment of the various elements ...
- ... desired learning outcomes, ... need to be student oriented, and should point to the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes of those students who successfully complete the course.
- DLOs are referred to in the Course Profile System as ‘Learning Objectives’.

Aims and Objectives

- So, aim statements are... broad and all encompassing. (The big vision stuff.
- While, ... desired learning outcomes are specific, behavioural, student- focussed statements.

An alternative angle on aims and desired learning outcomes/ objectives

- Aims are what you want to achieve
- desired learning outcomes are what your students should achieve
A Note about DLOs/ Learning Objectives

You should NUMBER them (in the course profiling systems the objectives are automatically numbered as you enter them into the profile). This will help you when you come to the assessment section because you should state which DLOs/ Learning Objectives each item of assessment relates to. You will need to map these in the new Course Profile System to the Graduate Attributes (for more information refer to http://www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/teaching-learning-curriculum/graduate-attributes).

Alignment: Ratiole ↔ Aim ↔ DLOs/ Learning Objectives

Your rationale should be directly aligned with your aim and your aim should be directly aligned with your DLOs/ Learning Objectives - each element should lead to or relate to the next - and to each other.

Graduate Attribute/ Generic Skills

The Griffith Graduate attributes as follows:

- Knowledgeable and Skilled in their Disciplines
- Effective Communicators and Team Members
- Innovative and Creative, with Critical Judgement
- Socially Responsible and Engaged in their Communities
- Competent in Culturally Diverse and International Environments

Example of DLOs

This course aims to provide you with opportunities to explore your own and others ideas about teaching and being a teacher, and to deepen your understanding of learning and teaching, particularly as interrelated activities. The nature and interdependence of learning, learners, learning contexts in universities, and effective instruction will be systematically addressed. You will be guided in the use of structured reflection, research, literature, and discussion to document and share developing understandings of theory, and of your own practices.

DLOs

1. Demonstrate an understanding of key theories and principles regarding teaching and learning in higher education.
2. Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the relationship between different teaching approaches, student learning approaches, and their respective impacts on learning outcomes.
3. Engage in reflective practice, and critically analyse your own teaching.
4. Apply teaching and learning theories and conceptions to your practice.