CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Center for Teaching Excellence

&

The Assessment Office

Present

Designing a Syllabus to Promote Student Learning

Tuesday
November 3, 2009
12:00 noon – 1:15 pm

Kuykendall 106 Events Room and Gallery

Designing a Syllabus to Promote Student Learning

with
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Both of the UH Manoa Assessment Office

A student's first impression of a course is often formed by looking at the course syllabus.

A well-designed syllabus can facilitate student learning by explaining:

- what you want students to learn;
- how the assignments will help them meet your expectations; and
- how they will be evaluated.

This workshop will help you design an effective, learning-centered syllabus that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.

The workshop leaders will recommend steps to create a syllabus and describe the elements of a successful syllabus. Participants will have time to interact and begin drafting/revising a syllabus. Bring a copy of a syllabus that you'd like to revise or a copy of a course description/outline.

Please register online at: http://www.cte.hawaii.edu/OnlineReg.html

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OFFICE OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT & ACADEMIC SUPPORT

BELOW ARE THE HANDOUTS THAT WERE DISTRIBUTED TO WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

II. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Apply advanced policy analysis skills to the task of defining a social problem within their concentration structured to assess policy options, solutions, and trade-offs (CT, VE);
2. Assemble evidence about the scope, severity, intensity and distribution of the problem in Hawai'i (CT, DIV);
3. Examine past and present policy approaches and strategies and assess their effectiveness (CT, DIV, TP);
4. Select policy options and alternatives and select evaluative criteria for assessing outcomes (CT, DIV, VE, TP)
5. Utilize both documentary sources and key informants to project outcomes of selected alternatives in terms of the selected criteria (CT, PS)

ASSIGNMENT ONE: Policy Analysis

In groups of about four students, teams will develop and complete a high level, advanced policy analysis related to a major social problem and policy issue in the student's concentration area. (60% total for this assignment)

Your analysis will follow Bardach's process and framework, as discussed in class and the Bardach text. It should include the following elements:

1) A statement of the nature of the problem and its background and scope—especially as it affects Hawaii's families and communities that are at risk and served or needing to be served by human services in your area of concentration. 5 points
2) Construction of alternatives and selection of criteria. 5 points
3) Projection of outcomes, with outcomes matrix. *To complete this section, groups will need to interview key informants in their policy area and should allow plenty of time to arrange and complete this task.* 10 points
4) Conclusions (decision) and recommendation. Submit as part of final draft, due Session #15.

Each team will complete its analysis in four steps, corresponding to the four elements listed above. Each element of the analysis will be submitted to the class Laulima site for feedback from the class and, except for the final section, the instructor. The instructor will provide feedback (to each group privately) via UH e-mail. A revised final draft of no more than 20 double-spaced pages is due site by Session 15. 40 points

Criteria for assessing this assignment are clarity and organization; relevance; quality of the analysis (logic, fairness, depth, fullness, and complexity); and correct grammar, spelling, and use of APA style. See the grading rubrics for each part of the assignment on the class Laulima site.

3. Critical Thinking

At the completion of classroom and field education, MSW students will be able to:

Apply critical thinking skills in professional contexts.

Upon completion of the foundation curriculum students will be able to:

- Understand the differences between verifiable facts and value claims, and the need to weigh knowledge claims against the evidence for them;
- Critically examine arguments and evidence and show openness in the evaluation of their own practice;
- Utilize research to inform and evaluate their practice.

Upon completion of the advanced curriculum students will be able to:

- Examine evidence, synthesize disparate information, see patterns, determine relevance of evidence, develop and defend a theoretically based, empirically grounded rationale in analyzing a problem and developing a strategy;
- Modify their practice as a result of weighing feedback from supervisor, clients, instructors, self, and other data;
- Use research as a basis for practice, accurately interpret evidence, evaluate and select among alternative approaches, and determine and increase the extent to which clients benefit from their practice.

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Design a Syllabus to Promote Student Learning

Steps

1. **Identify desired results. State them as *student learning outcomes* for the course.**

   Tips
   a. When generating the learning outcomes, think about what you want students to know, do, and value by the end of the course. Four to six outcomes are usually appropriate.
   b. Develop course-level outcomes that are related to the program's outcomes and/or to the knowledge and skills needed for a successful career or to pursue an advanced degree. Have the "big picture" in mind when you establish the course outcomes.
   c. Ask yourself if there is a conceptual framework that can be used as the course's organizational structure. A conceptual framework can help students focus on the big ideas and key information. Without an organizing structure, students see only massive amounts of unconnected information, and they do not see relationships among concepts, course outcomes, assignments, and requirements.

2. **Determine the type of evidence that will demonstrate to you whether students have/have not achieved the outcomes at an acceptable level.**
   Common types of evidence: written assignments, oral presentations, lab experiments, answers on exams, performances, internship supervisor's evaluation

   Tips
   a. Include multiple techniques (i.e., don't limit to one or two high-stakes exams).
   b. Ask students to self-assess progress toward reaching learning outcomes.
   c. Consider alternatives to traditional evidence. For example, instead of assigning a 1-page summary, assign a "Dr. Science" response where students role-play a scientist who answers science-related questions for the local newspaper.

3. **Plan the learning opportunities—the sequence of teaching and learning experiences that will equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve the course outcomes.**

   Tips
   a. Research indicates that many "Millennials" prefer to learn by doing and trial and error; they are less interested in abstract knowledge.[1]
   b. Be intentional about the learning opportunities. Use them to encourage development and lead to student success.
   c. Help students understand how every class session and course requirement directly relate to the learning outcomes. Regularly remind them how lectures, activities, assignments, exams, etc., support their progress toward the course outcomes. Be explicit and students will likely be motivated.

4. **Draft the syllabus.**

[1] O'Brien, J.G., Millis, B.J., & Cohen, M.W. (2008). *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach* (2nd Ed.). Jossey-Bass.

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Syllabus Checklist

- ☐ Syllabus contains the recommended elements (see below)
- ☐ Every learning opportunity (lecture, activity, assignment) and all course requirements contribute to student achievement in relation to the learning outcomes.
- ☐ An adequate number of learning opportunities are provided so that students can develop the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to meet the expected level of achievement on the outcomes.

  Tip: Design complex requirements so that students have the building blocks needed to be successful.
- ☐ The professor informs students of his/her rationale for the course's assignments and requirements.
- ☐ The evidence gathered for evaluation
  - o is congruent with course activities and assignments; and
  - o sheds light on how well students have met the outcomes.
- ☐ The syllabus has been drafted, revised, edited, and proofread with the audience—the students—in mind.

Recommended Elements (they may not appear in this order)

1) Instructor information (Name, office location, contact information, etc)
2) Purpose of the course and course description
3) Course learning outcomes (sometimes called *objectives*, *standards*, *competencies*, or *abilities*)
4) Materials to purchase (e.g., books, course packs, art supplies, clickers)
5) Teaching method and learning opportunities
   a) Description of what will happen during class and the types of learning opportunities such as the following: lecture, lab, hands-on activities in class, clickers, impromptu quizzes, discussion, reading assignments, homework, oral presentations, group work, field trips, library research, guest speakers
   b) A one- or two-sentence rationale for your teaching method and choice of learning experiences; explicitly link to outcomes
6) Evaluation
   a) List the evidence (e.g., written reports, exam answers) that you will collect to determine how well students met the course's learning outcomes
   b) As an attachment or distributed later in the semester: materials that indicate the quality of work required to succeed in the course. For example:
      i) Scoring guides or rubrics
      ii) Examples of successful and unsuccessful student work (note: obtain student permission, remove names, and place on reserve in the library or on a restricted website)
7) Course calendar
8) Grading plan/procedures
   a) Explain any weighting
   b) Be explicit if ungraded course components are required to pass the course. Examples:
      i) *Students must complete at least 12 homework assignments by their due date to pass the course with a "C" or better.*
      ii) Students must submit a substantial rough draft of each written report to receive a "C" grade (i.e., 2.0 grade point) or better on the final written report.
9) How to succeed in the course
   a) Student responsibilities
   b) Resources such as the Writing Center, tools for studying and learning
10) Policies and expectations regarding course components: attendance, late papers, missed tests, late homework, coming to class unprepared, requests for an "Incomplete" grade
11) Policies and expectations regarding rules of conduct: class behaviors, civility, academic integrity, plagiarism, disability, access, etc.
12) Safety and emergency procedures: safety, evacuation procedures, first aid kit location, campus security number

Encourage Student Engagement

The three beginning-of-semester techniques listed below help students become intentional learners. Throughout the semester, make sure students see the syllabus as a central part of the course and the learning opportunities as central to achieving the learning outcomes.

Goal Ranking

What is it? Students write personal, course-related learning goals and periodically review them.
Why do it? If students have personal learning goals related to the course, they are more likely to be motivated and fully engage with the course.
How is it done?

i. Students read the course title or course description.
ii. Students list 3-5 learning goals that they want to attain by the end of the course.
iii. Distribute syllabus.
iv. Students compare their learning goals with the course's purpose and outcomes and reflect on similarities and differences.
v. Students modify their personal learning goals if desired. Then they rank them in order of importance.
vi. Two to four times during the semester and at the end of the semester, the professor asks students to review their learning goals: students write several sentences on how well they are meeting their goals, challenges they face, and what is going well. Encourage students to use the review to guide their behavior: seek help if they need it; take pride in things that are going well.
vii. If you collect them, use this grading system: " + " " ✔ " or " – ".

ALTERNATE: Instead of students writing goals on a separate sheet of paper, **leave space on the syllabus for students to write their own goals**. Ask them to compare their goals to the course purpose and outcomes. During the semester ask them to return to the syllabus and reflect on how well they are meeting their personal goals and the course learning outcomes.

Signatures

What is it? Students sign a page indicating that they have read the syllabus and agree to its terms.
Why do it? A syllabus serves as an agreement between students and professors. Students' signatures indicating that they agree to the policies can prevent disputes later in the semester.
How is it done? Students sign and submit a statement verifying they have read the syllabus and agree to the policies. The statement is typically printed on the syllabus and on a separate sheet that students sign and return to the professor.

Examples:

I have read this syllabus and understand and agree to the course requirements and policies.
Printed name: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to abide by the policies outlined in this syllabus. I also agree to accept any penalties that may be imposed for not following the rules of this class.
Source: http://www.ehow.com/how_2305531_develop-course-syllabus-college-level.html

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand this syllabus, and I have been given a copy of my own to keep.
Source: http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/syllab-1.htm

I pledge that I will not give, receive, or tolerate unauthorized aid; I will not abuse academic resources while I am a member of this academic community.
Source: http://classes.kumc.edu/son/nursedu/nrsg870/syllabus.htm

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Syllabus Quiz

What is it? Students take a quiz on the contents of the syllabus.

Why do it? Students may not read the syllabus. By answering questions about important aspects of the syllabus, students are more likely to carefully read it and understand it.

How is it done? Create a quiz that asks students about the content of the syllabus. You can include things like these:

1. The name of this course's professor is
   a. Jennifer Gartman
   b. Jade Gnome
   c. Josephine Gartley
   d. Jenny Graft

2. The last day to withdraw from the course without penalty is
   a. January 23
   b. February 4

3. This is an oral communication ("O") course because students learn how to give an oral presentation and then practice by giving 3 oral presentations as part of this course.
   TRUE FALSE

4. To receive a passing grade in this course (C- or better), students must turn substantial rough drafts of writing assignments in conjunction with the final version.
   TRUE FALSE

5. Students in this course are responsible for (check all that apply)
   ☐Participating in 2 group projects
   ☐Locating, checking out, and reading appropriate books from the Hamilton library
   ☐Writing weekly journal entries
   ☐Coming to class with an "entry ticket" that summarizes the reading assignment(s)

6. Studying botany is important because understanding plant growth and the effects of plants on humans and the environment can help us feed the world, find new medicines, understand environmental changes.
   TRUE FALSE

7. Students who fully participate and engage with this course will likely achieve these student learning outcomes (check all that apply)
   ☐Students can define and describe the structural features of plants and explain the functional significance of those features.
   ☐Students can correctly interpret and evaluate plant-ecology papers from the primary literature.
   ☐Students can identify and provide examples of the major groups of plants and explain what unifies those groups.
   ☐Students can diagram and explain the genetic makeup of plants.
   ☐Students can explain the evolutionary process that is responsible for generating plant diversity.
   ☐Students can apply their knowledge of plant ecology to formulate hypotheses to explain patterns in the environment.