EVALUATING MY COURSE

PURPOSE
Course evaluation is the practice of continuously improving a course through review and refining. As you evaluate your own courses you can learn from others as you also share what you are learning.

DESCRIPTION
The quality of a course has many variables. Some variables are not easily evaluated, however, there are several items that can be reviewed for the improvement of the class. Dividing the course evaluation into segments will allow you to perform this process over time, thus spreading the effort out instead of dedicating a significant chunk of time all at once.

As an overall process, you can first look at the course as a whole and then delve deeper into each lesson, one at a time. By working on the course in smaller pieces you can space out the time and effort. This strategy also promotes a consistent and regular approach to course evaluation, making it a routine part of your weekly tasks.

Consider the needs of both the students in the course and the instructor who teaches the course. When you consider both of these audiences and externalize the course, you can begin to view it more objectively and be more open to new ideas.

EXAMPLE
Begin with the Foundational Parts of a Course
At the most foundational level, start by reflecting on the Five Questions for BYU-Idaho Instruction:
1. What are the course learning outcomes?
2. How can the Learning Model strengthen the architecture of the course?
3. How will students prepare?
4. How will students teach one another?
5. How will students ponder/prove?
Start by identifying the learning outcomes for the course. These may already be written, if so, review them for any changes or updates. If the course outcomes are not written out, this is the first place to start. The course outcomes become the foundation upon which many of the other evaluation measures will rely on. As you write or review the course learning outcomes, make sure that they align with department or program outcomes. Also follow the guidelines in the outcomes tool of the Teaching and Learning website.

Other foundational items include the architecture and assessment strategies that you employ for the course. Questions you could ask at this point are:

- Is there a rhythm to how my course flows week to week?
- Do the course assessments measure the outcomes defined for the course?

Finally, review the topics (lessons and/or units) that you are covering in the course, and determine if they are the most appropriate topics to meet the course outcomes. Ask yourself if there are too many topics or too few? It is also helpful to identify which outcome(s) each topic is aligned with. This will give you a sense of which outcomes are being addressed and spot any that may be lacking.

Evaluate a Lesson or Unit
- **Objectives.** Write objectives for each lesson by starting with the end result in mind. What skills, abilities, feelings, or knowledge do you want the students to achieve at the completion of the learning experience for this lesson?

- **Activities.** The activities in a lesson are the things you have the students do before class, during class, or after class. Examples of activities are: reading an assignment, developing a group project, viewing a presentation, watching a video, participating in a discussion, teaching another person, etc.

- Consider whether each activity assists the students’ progress toward mastery of the objectives for the lesson. Is there a different activity that would be more current, efficient, or accurate? Find opportunities to diversify the type of activities you use in your lessons without being overzealous. Keep some consistency and stability, while catering to the needs of a diverse variety of...
Identify how each activity aligns with the three process steps in the Learning Model – Prepare, Teach One Another, and Ponder/Prove. Recognize any areas that are scarce or loaded. You may want to review some additional tools on this Learning and Teaching site that discuss specific applications of different types of activities for each area.

Rubrics. Begin this step by identifying the activities that have some bearing on a student’s grade in the class. Does each assessment activity have a clear rubric for the students to gauge themselves against? Do the assessments accurately measure a student’s performance in accomplishing a lesson objective?

Lesson Plan. A lesson plan is a collection of information that is important for the instructor to know about the lesson. Make sure a teaching plan is created for each lesson or unit in your courses. A teaching plan can include a timeline of events to guide the instructor through points of involvement in the lesson. It may also include an outline of the topics, discussion questions, or activities to work through during a class period. Writing a lesson plan for each lesson is a valuable tool for you as you evaluate your course. As you review each teaching plan, identify opportunities that the students have to interact with the instructor.

Content. Finally, it is always a good idea to perform a thorough review of all of the content in your course. In your I-Learn course, make sure all of the links work and that Grade Center is updated with your assessments. Post your syllabus with the course outcomes and lesson objectives to the I-Learn class.

Continuous Evaluation
Each time you teach a class, be open to ways to improve the lesson. Spend a few moments to record your thoughts and ideas on how the class went: What worked well and what did not? What was missing? What did you try that was new? How engaged were the students?

Another powerful opportunity to collect ideas for improving your classes is to visit a colleague’s class. Ask a trusted peer if you can attend one or more of their class periods with the intention on gleaning ideas for use in your own teaching. Make the invitation reciprocal by inviting them into your own class and, if desired, ask them for feedback, suggestions, or ideas.

TIPS
- Assess one key area at a time. Consider and make improvements and then move to the next.
- Reflect. Take 10 minutes after every class to note what worked well and make real time revisions.
- Invite peer review. Have a fellow instructor critique the course and look at a lesson or two.
- Visit other classes. Ask colleagues if you can visit their class to gather ideas for your own course.

PITFALLS
- Lack of time. Not setting aside time in your schedule to evaluate your course.
- Course reflection. An attitude that your courses do not need improvements.

CAMPUS PRACTITIONERS
Lynda Hawkes, Steve Hunsaker

KEY ARTICLES

OTHER RESOURCES
- Learning Model Self-Assessment
- Instruction Design Tips for Online Learning [pdf]
- Learning Outcome Tool

https://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools