CREATING A NEW COURSE

PURPOSE

Many times courses are designed by first choosing content and learning activities and then creating assessments. Such courses can wander from objectives and leave students and instructors struggling to cover all course content. In contrast to this approach, this tool describes a team approach for creating courses based on the Learning Model Process. Such an approach helps the course stay focused on priority objectives and feel less rushed.

DESCRIPTION

Courses at BYU-Idaho are generally developed by teams of four to five instructors. This approach encourages faculty members to council with one another and to seek inspiration throughout the development process.

The process steps of the BYU-Idaho Learning Model provide an approach for course creation based on five foundational questions:

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?

Starting with outcomes has been described as “developing the course backwards” (Wiggins, 1998). This process determines outcomes first, then assessment strategy, and finally the content and learning activities that support them.

The following steps outline how you might approach course development according to this process:

1. Define outcomes. (See Drafting Learning Outcomes) Meet with your team to determine 3-5 course outcomes that will be most beneficial to students. Break these down further into sub-outcomes to help with your unit and lesson design. Have them reviewed by your department.

2. Determine assessment strategy. (See Assessments) Choosing how and what you will assess is much easier after you have defined outcomes. Select activities that allow you to determine how well your outcomes have been met based on observable student behaviors.

3. Choose course architecture. (See Learning Model Architecture) Determine the rhythm of the course and how the processes of Prepare, Teach-One-Another, and Ponder/Prove might fit (i.e. daily, weekly, bi-weekly cycle). For each unit ask: What is our plan to prepare? What is our plan for teaching one another? What is our plan to ponder and prove?

4. Design first lesson. Design your first lesson by choosing the outcomes you desire to reach and then by designing the assessments, activities, rubrics, and content that will best achieve them. Write a detailed lesson plan. This will give instructors insight into the intent of the lesson as well as valuable resources for developing their lesson plans. Develop a template from this initial lesson to ease designing the remaining lessons or use one of the numerous templates available.

5. Develop course content. With clear direction and templates, it is now relatively easy to divide the lessons and have team members write the content. Work with the Faculty Technology Center to create the lesson structure in I-Learn and then collect and add the necessary documents and resources you would like to use.

6. Review the Course. Finally, you can ask a few colleagues and students to review the course. After you make any necessary revisions, someone in the team should teach it the first time and make notes along the way to help polish it.

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EXAMPLE

Jen was assigned to lead a team of two other instructors to develop a new physical science course. They began the process of developing the course by discussing what they would like to have students gain from the course. They distilled their ideas down to five major outcomes. Under each of these outcomes they listed 5-10 specific objectives. Jen then shared these initial ideas with her department chair, for feedback in relation to how this course would fit into the department’s course offerings.

After finalizing the outcomes, the team discussed how they might assess their outcomes. In addition to some regular examinations, they decided that portfolios would add an additional measurement of student achievement. They then made rubrics for self and peer evaluation of the portfolios.

In looking at the course material and assessments, the group decided that a weekly cycle of Prepare, Teach One Another, and Ponder/Prove would fit the rhythm of the course. Monday’s class time would be a preparation discussion for the rest of the week’s activities. On Wednesdays, students would work together in small project groups to complete activities based on their preparation. Fridays would be a chance to review the activities of the week and participate together in a teacher-led critical examination of a mainstream scientific article. Students would then have the opportunity to post their impressions of the week in a personal blog.

With the outcomes and assessments planned, Jen drafted an initial lesson plan. It included activity descriptions, assessment rubrics, and choices for the articles and media to be used. The group reviewed the plan and added several categories that could be used as a general template in the development of future lessons.

Assignments were made to each member of the team around developing materials and lesson plans for each week of the trimester.

With most of the course design completed, the team members found it easy to assemble the course in I-Learn, referring to the I-Learn Tutorials and calling the Faculty Technology Center as needed to get the grade book, discussion boards, articles, media, and library reference pages set up.

Finally the team used two students experienced in the department to review the lessons. They provided feedback and made some additional changes. Refinements continued as the course was taught.

Regular team meetings among the instructors allowed for an ongoing refinement and revision of the course material and also generated many ideas about engaged and engaging ways to help students learn the material.

TIPS

- **Spend time creating.** Spend extra time on creating your general and specific outcomes. This will make assessment creation and content selection much easier.

- **Use a regular schedule for each learning unit.** Students appreciate knowing what to expect each week and each day (e.g., Wednesdays are Teach One Another activities.)

PITFALLS

- **Avoid over packing content.** It is easy to fall in the “coverage trap,” where the amount of content that “must” be packed into a course becomes overwhelming. This can result in many concepts being touched on lightly, but none really being internalized by the students.

KEY ARTICLES


OTHER RESOURCES

- Learning Model Self-Assessment
- A Course Architecture Process

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