Course Design Practices: Quick Checklist

Within Each Course

Here is a checklist of steps you can take to translate a collection of subject matter into a successful course.

Begin with the End in Mind

Learning goals

What are the high-level, basic concepts you wish students to learn in your course?

What is it you hope students can do, after they successfully complete your course?

From these you will derive course objectives, or subheadings underneath the basics, that describe in greater detail the learning goals of the course. You might do this right away, but often it's practical to do this in an iterative process, as you move through the following steps.

Sketch the Outline

With a semester or session calendar handy, lay out the learning objectives into modules, units, or timeframes. For example, weeks are a common unit of time in courses (Week one we learn this, week two we learn that, and so on) but there are many ways to organize a course. As you describe the objectives, begin roughing in lessons. How will you convey content to students? How will they explore and apply concepts, ideas, controversies, or processes? How can they learn in dialog with you, and with each other? In this phase, consider the following:

Routine and Documentation

As far as possible, craft a repetitive structure. By week 3 or 4, students should be able to roughly but helpfully predict the workload, rigor, deadlines, and course procedure each subsequent week.

Provide plenty of direction through clear, consistent messaging. Have information such as course content and procedures (such as deadlines) in consistent places each week. Provide plenty of advanced warning for special activities and assessments outside course routine.

Choose a few methods for communication and content delivery. For example, use the news tool in D2L, email, or both, to post or send weekly summaries and reminder lists. You may use D2L's quiz tool or perhaps Google Forms for short reading comprehension quizzes. But whichever tools you choose, consistently use them throughout the semester so students know where to look to participate. You may use various toolsets within or outside D2L, but limit these to a sensible variety. Unless your course specifically has students exploring a variety of different web technologies (such as an educational or business technology course), you want to avoid students becoming confused when there are seemingly different tools, each requiring their own login credentials, each week.

Three Forms of Interaction

Great college courses typically have three ways that students encounter, interact, and learn within the class:

- Instructor - Student
- Student - Content
- Student - Student

Lots of Low-Stakes Assessments

Give students plenty of opportunities to influence their future, final grade. Incorporate small, frequent assignments or assessments such as quizzes, short reflection writing exercises, graded problem-solving activities, discussion posts, explainer videos, and so on. These compel students to engage with the course content while reducing stress that might otherwise be caused by big exams or projects that, by themselves, make or break a student's grade. You'll need to balance this practice, though, so you aren't overwhelmed with grading. For example, short, low-stakes, multiple-choice quizzes, are a great choice since D2L can auto-grade these.

A Goal

Ideally, an instructor should feel comfortable - excited? - to explain the rationale for each and every part of a course to students. This means that every week, every lesson or assessment is crafted to help students engage with and apply the concepts, ideas and perspectives that make the course worthwhile for their life and professional activities.
But let's be honest: most faculty are not 100% happy with their courses. We generally feel that some of our lessons, activities, or assessments are more effective than others, and we often struggle to teach toward certain learning objectives or goals. That's okay; so long as we continue to try new things, we are probably improving our courses and our students' experiences.

Thinking on a bigger scale, consider the following:

**General Design Practices**

Iterative process.

- Expect failures large and small.
- Journal it: have a log of decisions, results. Make changes based on experience
- Change courses gradually
- Baby steps: don’t get overwhelmed when iterating.

Continually explore possibilities: content delivery, active learning, students teaching each other.

- General Business Apps - What you use in service, what they use in the future.
- Get them creating
- Seek rugged, reliable, accessible with small or medium effort, data easily in and out.

Faculty teaching faculty

- consult with colleagues
- attend on-campus development
- Off-campus conferences
- consult resources in field, related fields