Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Designing a Course

The process of designing a course involves

- Asking questions about the students who will take the course,
- Determining (a) what you want students to learn and (b) how you will know they are learning it, and
- Designing a set of activities, assignments, and materials that will help you lead these students in their learning.

1) WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

Before class begins, find out as much as you can about the students. You have your own experience as a source of information, as well as that of fellow faculty and staff in your department.

- Are students new to the topic? New to the university?
- What are students' reasons for taking the course?
- What can I expect students to know before they come to the first class?
- What range of backgrounds and previous experience is typically represented among students in the class?
- What problems do students typically have with this material, at this level?

2(A) WHAT DO YOU WANT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO?

Considering who the students are, what should they be able to do at the end of the course that they couldn't necessarily do coming into it?

Answer this question as specifically as you can for your course. Try to use terms that emphasize student abilities you can measure or easily recognize.

For example, it is more difficult to measure abilities like "know" or "understand" than it is to measure abilities like *identify, differentiate, apply, or produce.*

2(B) HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHAT STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO DO?

Considering who the students are, and what you want them to be able to do, what will provide you with reliable evidence *during the course* that they are learning and, *at the end of the course*, that they have learned?

- Weekly quizzes?   - Original research?

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- Objective tests?   - Papers?
- Open-ended tests?   - Presentations?
- Group Projects?   - Performance?
- Individual Projects?   - Something else?

3) COURSE ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS, AND MATERIALS:

Design your course around activities that are most likely to lead students toward the goals you have defined.

Some goals can be achieved by listening to lectures or reading assigned texts. Others require more active experimentation, practice, or discussion. For example:

- Writing   - Individual Research
- Design Projects   - Service Learning
- On-line Discussion   - Problem Sets
- Field Work   - Small Group Collaboration

Which aspects of the course are likely to pose the greatest challenges for students, and how will you help them meet those challenges? For example,

Challenge = _____

Ways I can help students meet this challenge through …
- materials:
- assignments:
- activities:
- assessments:

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

CIDR works with faculty and TAs to help them improve the quality of teaching and learning in classes that they teach. When you are designing a course, CIDR can provide:

Individual consultation and print materials on:
- Course design and syllabus preparation
- Development of assignments, projects, class activities
- Classroom assessment of teaching and learning

On-line resources to help you with course design:
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/DesignTools.htm

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