

HOW TO ADAPT OR DEVELOP YOUR SYLLABUS FOR THE NEW CORE¹

This document is intended as a resource to faculty as you develop syllabi for the new Core curriculum. These steps can be used as a guide whether you are creating a new course or are modifying an existing course to meet the new Core. Course development is an iterative process; consideration of learning objectives before, during and after the identification of content, pedagogies and assessment techniques is often useful to ascertain whether the desired learning outcomes will be maximally achieved. General contemplation on these steps can be extended to any course development endeavor.

Read the Overall Learning Objectives for the Applicable Area of the Core

1. Learning objectives for each Core area can be found at <http://www.scu.edu/core2009/goals.cfm>.
2. Note the action verbs and phrases that suggest topics, activities and experiences that students should engage in during your course.
3. Cut and paste the Core area Learning Objectives on to your course syllabus.

Draft the Learning Objectives for Your Course

Here are some questions that may help you to identify and prioritize what you want students to learn about in your course:

1. What do I want the students to learn in my class?
2. What are the most important ideas, theories, principles, people, events, experiences that I want my students to learn about and understand?
3. What do the students need to be able to do (skills) in order to successfully complete this course?
4. How does this course related to the overarching learning goals and objectives of my department / program?

Here's a format for your learning objectives:

1. "Students will [be able to] . . ." + action verb (suggesting measurable activity – "identify," "classify," "design," etc.) + noun (e.g., the knowledge, skills or values that is thematically related to your course).
2. List the course learning objectives on your syllabus. When appropriate, list departmental / programmatic learning objectives as well.
3. Target both foundational knowledge and higher order thinking. Use Bloom's Taxonomy² as a tool for identifying measurable action verbs. A document with the six cognitive skills levels in Bloom's cognitive taxonomy is available from the Core2009 website at

¹ Thank you to Chad Rafael and the Civic Engagement Workshop 2008 attendees and presenters for developing the model for this document.

² In 1956, Benjamin Bloom headed a group of educational psychologists who developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. Bloom and colleagues identified six levels within the cognitive domain, from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order which is classified as evaluation.

<http://www.scu.edu/core2009/Resources.cfm>. This resource provides sample action verbs that can be used in statements of student learning objectives, sample question prompts and potential classroom activities or student work products.

4. When writing learning objectives, try to represent student learning at multiple levels of cognitive processing (as appropriate for your course).

Consider Your Teaching Strategies

Research suggests that active learning strategies are more successful than passive learning strategies in terms of students' retaining what they have learned and being able to transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts. How will you teach your course? Are there opportunities for students to actively engage in learning the information and practicing the skills you are teaching? Are students given opportunities to engage and collaborate with peers or with community members (if appropriate)?

Crafting the Assignments

- What will students do in your course to demonstrate that they have met the learning objectives? Do these assignments reflect optimal ways for students' to meet the learning objectives?
- Are there a variety of assignments that engage students along all levels of Bloom's taxonomy?
- Do the assignments map on to the action verbs and key phrases in the Core and course (or departmental / programmatic) learning objectives?

Draft Grading Criteria

As you write grading criteria for the class assignments look back over your learning objectives.

- Do the grading criteria for assignments permit you to evaluate whether students have achieved the learning objectives and expectations you have for them? Consider again the action verbs and key phrases in the Core, course and dept / program learning objectives.

Feedback to Students

What kinds of feedback will you give students throughout the course? Feedback might include: student self-assessments, instructor comments and grades, peer editing or critique, feedback from community partners, etc. As you give feedback, how can you maintain an open classroom climate where students are free to question all views on controversial issues, including the professor's views?

Draft Your Assessment Plan

This may sound intimidating at first but if you have reflected on the topics mentioned in this handout so far this last step may not be so worrisome. Essentially, it means identifying specific assignments that can be assessed to see how well students meet each learning objective for the Core Area and the course (and dept / program).

The Assessment Plan can be expressed in a variety of formats:

- You may choose to list assignments (e.g., quizzes, final exam, paper, debate, etc) in parentheses after the learning objectives on your syllabus.

C&I Objective 1.2: Identify significant elements of the cultures examined. (Global Cultures, Arts and Humanities)³

Students will identify and analyze the significant elements in the construction of civilization and explain their history (reflective journal, quizzes, final exam)

- Alternatively, you could incorporate in parentheses the objective number (e.g., Objective #1) after each assignment as it appears on your syllabus.

Short written assignments⁴:

Learning Objectives: (C&I I: #2, #4; II: #1, #3)

Periodically you will be asked to do brief assignments in anticipation of class discussion of primary and secondary sources. These assignments will vary but can include exercises such as: 1-2 page reader responses; formulating a discussion question; selecting a quotation for discussion with justification of the choice.

- Or, you may decide to make a table that lists the objectives in a column on the left side and assignments in a column to the right.

C&I Objective 1.4⁵

Analyze and/or interpret significant objects, texts, ideas, issues and/or events in their historical contexts, using at least one disciplinary method.

Midterm and final exams; journals; class discussion/participation; end-of-term project

Use a strategy you feel is easiest to show how your course assignments map on to the Core objectives. In addition to this mapping activity, note how the overall success of the course itself will be evaluated (e.g., mid-quarter or end-of-quarter narrative evaluations, the Student Assessment of Learning Gains [SALG] instrument, or other approaches).

Consider Integrating the Course in a Pathway

Students will choose pathways through the Core, which are clusters of courses on a common theme. Although it is not required that every Core course fit in a pathway, you will probably attract more students to your class and help them integrate their learning if you qualify your course for a pathway. Take a look at the proposed pathway themes at <http://www.scu.edu/core2009/suggested-pathways.cfm> . If you see your course as fitting into one of them, contact the Pathway coordinator.

³ From Turley (2008-09 pilot Core course) “Civilizations and the Society”

⁴ From Lopez-Lazaro & Andrews (2008-09 pilot Core course) “Cultures and Ideas I & II: The Imperial West”

⁵ From Booth & Farnsworth (2008-09 pilot Core course) “Nature in the Imagination”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU PREPARE YOUR SYLLABUS

Have I provided opportunities for students to build some basic skills and dispositions needed for this course topic? We were trained to teach students knowledge. Have you included any learning objectives that involve skills? How about outcomes that foster a disposition (attitude or inclination) that you find important for your course or discipline? Are these among the most important objectives of all?

Are there additional opportunities for active learning I could incorporate that would be more effective than what I do now? If we let go of the idea that it is best to use class time to “cover” the material, or illustrate it with examples for the students, we can imagine what are often more effective pedagogies, such as working with students to dramatize, test, research, apply, debate, deliberate, or solve problems posed by the subject matter, rather than covering it.

Am I doing enough to connect the classroom with the world, including experiences and people who can help me to help students learn? Internships and community placements can be good ways to do this. But there are other meaningful and less time-consuming ways to bring students out into the world or to bring the world into the classroom: field trips (including to relevant places on campus or within walking distance of campus), guest speakers, mentors, videos, web sites, webcasts and videoconferences, etc. We should also think about how campus issues and student organizations could be a venue for extending learning outside the classroom.

Have I considered how to integrate opportunities for student research or creative work that dovetails with my research or creative work? If we have our students summarize literature, make contacts, gather data, or generate work that contributes to co-publications or co-creative work with them, then we are teaching and contributing to knowledge at the same time. That's a contribution to student learning and to our fields. That's the ultimate in being teaching scholars.

.....

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SYLLABUS

Send your syllabus and a Core Course Syllabus Approval Form (<http://www.scu.edu/core2009/>) to the Office of Undergraduate Studies. It will be reviewed by the appropriate Faculty Core Committee and the University Assessment Director. Questions about the syllabus development and assessment planning process can be sent to AssessmentOffice@scu.edu