Chapter 10
Intentional Connection:
Learning-Based Course Design

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details how learning-based course design promotes meaningful student connections with course content, course goals, and connections with peers, faculty, and student self-awareness. No matter the modality, the learning-based course design model provides a pathway for faculty and instructional designers to use backward design to create courses that embrace significant learning, valuable practice, and feedback opportunities. With an emphasis on authentic activities that are aligned to learning outcomes, learning-based course design avoids busywork and reduces rote memorization of facts and figures. Educational technologies can strengthen the faculty and student course experience, provided that these are purposefully integrated into the course. Courses designed with close attention to student learning provide skill growth that strengthens students' professional lives. Course feedback data allows faculty to refine the course and programs and institutions to develop stronger alignment to their stated goals.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions, faculty, and students want courses to offer valuable learning experiences. However, what does this lofty goal look like in practice and how can institutions and faculty move in this direction? If learning is the acquisition of values, knowledge, or skills that students are able to apply in new contexts what factors contribute to a course providing a valuable learning experience? The value of a course comes from skills students gain as a result of the course and the potential application of these skills in students' professional lives, the continuous improvement of the course based on data from the course, and the alignment of the course with programmatic and institutional goals. From this perspective, the course does not simply deliver learning to the students, but is a site of learning for students, faculty, and

the institution. Conceptualizing the course in this manner heightens the importance of course design. In turn, the course must be located in a system that allows programs and institutions to refine their practices based on data from the course.

The foundational learning-based course design model the authors explored in this chapter blends the three stages of backward design (Isecke, 2011/2013; Wiggins & McTighe. 2021), Fink's taxonomy of significant learning (Fink, 2013), revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), and wise feedback (Yeager et al., 2014) as a model for designing and delivering a robust and engaging course. Learning-based course design promotes course outcomes alignment as a pathway to meaningful student connections with course content and skill development, valuable practice as a strategy for mastering the skills identified in the course outcomes, and feedback as actionable data about learning progress for the students, the faculty, the program, and the institution. The importance of feedback as each actor seeks to meet their defined outcomes, the focus on course-level design processes, and the corresponding implications for action at each level distinguish the learning-based course design model from a model focused on content delivery by faculty.

Learning-based course design requires faculty who are critically engaged with the following design processes at the course level:

- Designing for significance and application beyond the course.
- Replacing busywork with authentic practice opportunities.
- Offering frequent and multidimensional feedback.

This chapter offers a process-based view of the three phases of learning-based course design at the course level, as illustrated in Figure 1:

Phase 1: Ensuring a course consists of significant learning opportunities for students via the construction of course outcomes that will guide all other design choices. The goal of significant learning is to weave course learning into lifelong learning (Fink, 2013, p. 7-8). Thus, courses should be designed in a learner-centered delivery that promotes active learning, student engagement, and reflection so that skills practiced in the course become part of the student's approach to the larger world.

Phase 2: Crafting course activities that meaningfully advance student mastery of the course learning outcomes via valuable practice. Valuable practice is defined as course activities whose authentic dimension and future professional connection have been ensured via the alignment of these activities with significant course learning outcomes. In turn, these course activities will produce a collection of student, course, and faculty learning artifacts to meet course, program, college, and institutional assessment needs.

Phase 3: Designing feedback that is frequent and robust flows both ways between the instructor and the students and is used by programs and university administration in their respective efforts to deliver learning that reflects stated outcomes. Feedback is defined as information about how the present state (of learning and performance) relates to defined outcomes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 200). Learning-based course design requires attention to stated course outcomes and adjustment on the part of students, faculty, and administration as needed.

Courses sit within programs and institutions. Accordingly, faculty and programs typically seek to integrate larger student growth goals. These are elegantly expressed in the Association of American Colleges and Universities' VALUE rubrics (Rhodes, 2010). While the wording may vary slightly depending on the characteristics of the institution, these general student growth goals typically provide a strong

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