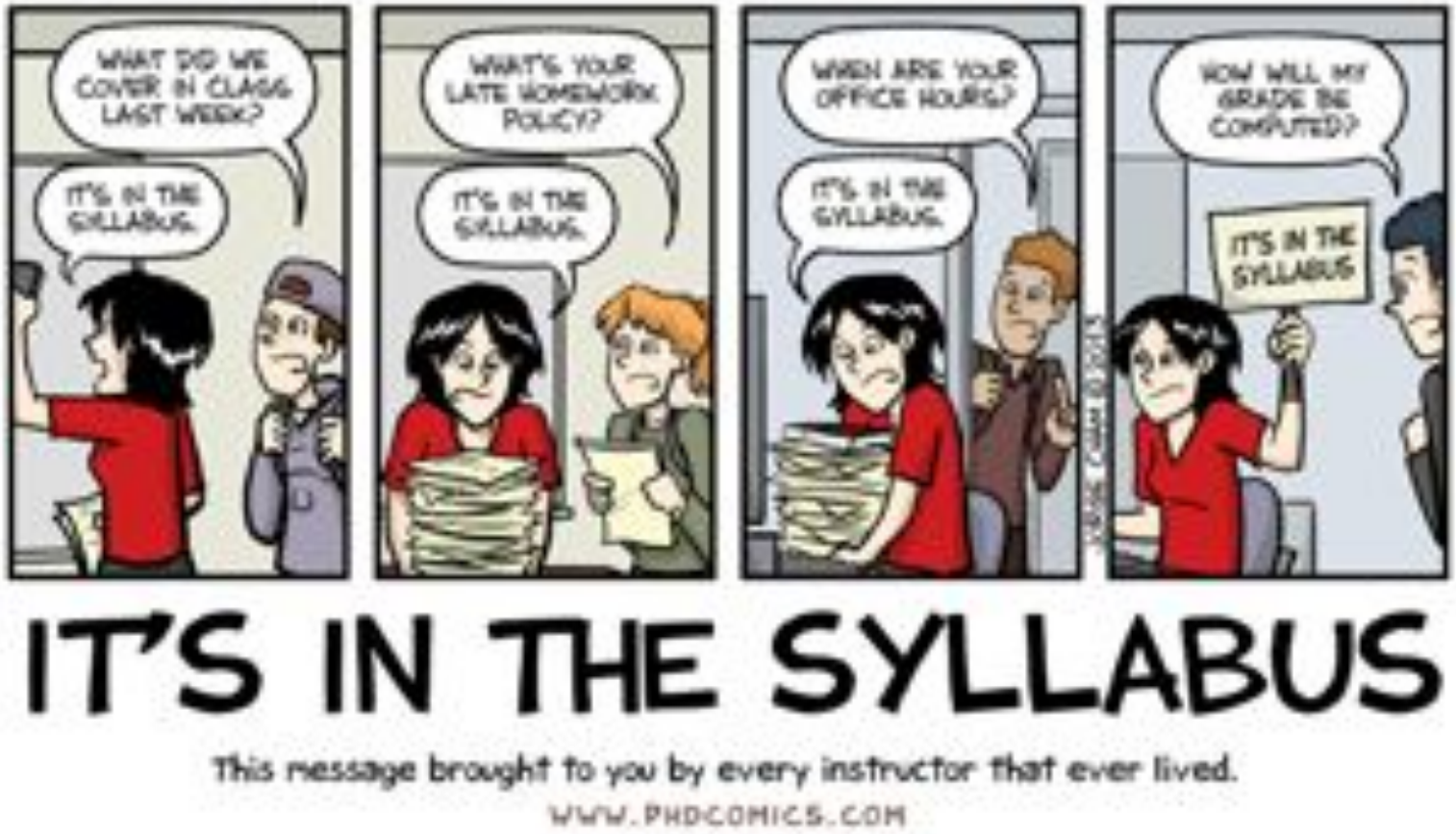
Philosophy TA Workshop:
Designing a Philosophy Course and Syllabus

with Melissa Jacquart

Feb 25, 2014



What's on the Syllabus?

What do you like about the sample syllabus you brought with you?

What do you consider to be interesting or exemplary in some way?

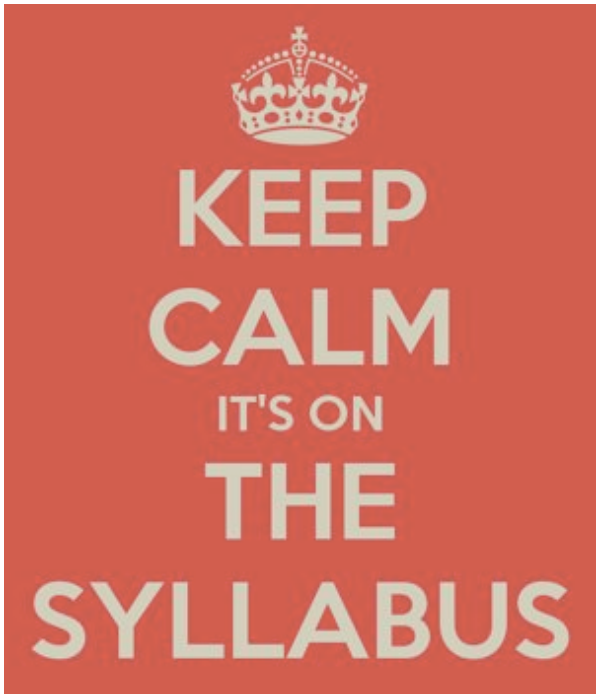


Image Credit: http://www.keepcalm-o-matic.co.uk/p/keep-calm-it-s-on-the-syllabus/

Note: nothing in this workshop should supplant an instructor's course-specific instructions or perspective on syllabi

Agenda

- Aspects of Course Design
- Course Design Activity
- Q&A
  - with Prof. Gillian Barker
- Feedback

Aspects of Course Design

Syllabus Anatomy

- ☐ Basic Information
- ☑ Course Description
- ☐ Materials
  - Texts, sites, equipment, etc
- ☑ Requirements
  - Assignments, papers, etc

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Undergraduate Course Outline

Philosophy 1200, 001: Critical Thinking (2012-13)

Lectures: W11:30-12:30, F11:30-12:30, in UCC 56

Fall instructor
David Bourget, office TBA
Office hours: M 2:30-3:30pm, W 2:30-3:30pm
519-661-2111 / teaching@dbourget.com

Winter instructor
Eric Desjardins, Stevenson Hall 2130
Office hours TBA
519-661-2111 x87769 / edesjar3@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to basic principles of critical thinking and is designed to enhance the student's ability to detect and analyze various forms of reasoning encountered in everyday life, academic and professional contexts. Topics to be covered include: argument identification and evaluation, fallacy detection, formal symbolization of arguments, deductive and inductive reasoning, the influence of social and psychological factors on our judgments, the structure of scientific reasoning, how to interpret statistics, theories of moral reasoning and how to assess claims put forward by the media and popular press.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who complete this course will have:

(a) acquired a basic set of concepts and technical tools
(b) learned how to use these concepts and tools to detect, represent and critically evaluate arguments as well as to construct and appraise their own arguments
(c) developed skills that will enable them to think more clearly and critically about various issues encountered in their personal, academic and professional lives.

TEXTS

Hughes, William & Jonathan Lavery. *Critical Thinking: An Introduction to the Basic Skills, Fifth Edition*. Broadview Press, 2008. (Used during the Fall term)

Kenyon, Tim. Clear Thinking in a Blurry World. Nelson Education, 2008. (Used during the Winter term, and for optional readings during the Fall term)

REQUIREMENTS

- Participation (4%)
- Assignments (36%)
  - Five applied assignments (20%)
    - Applied Assignment #1 (Group, Fall) (2%)
    - Applied Assignment #2 (Group, Fall) (3%)
    - Applied Assignment #3 (Group, Fall) (5%)
    - Applied Assignment #4 (Group, Winter) (2%)
    - Applied Assignment #5 (Individual, Winter) (8%)
  - Four theoretical assignments (16%)
    - Theoretical Assignment #1 (Fall) (4%)
    - Theoretical Assignment #2 (Fall) (4%)
    - Theoretical Assignment #3 (Winter) (4%)
    - Theoretical Assignment #4 (Winter) (4%)
- Midyear Examination (December) (30%)
- Final Examination (April) (30%)

Syllabus Anatomy

- ☐ Policies
  - Grading, late assignments, class rules, etc
  - University policies (e.g. academic integrity)
- ☐ Course Schedule
- ☐ Additional Resources
  - For the course
  - Academic support services
- ☐ Student Accommodations
  - Mental health, test accommodations, etc
- ☐ Rights
- ☐ Disclaimers

Oct. 16, 2012	* Judith Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" † Rivka Weinberg, "The Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation" † Maggie Little, "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate"
Oct. 23, 2012	* Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double-effect" * Judith Thomson, "Turning the Trolley"
Oct. 30, 2012	* Peter van Inwagen, "An Argument for Incompatibilism" * David Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" † Helen Beebee, "Local Miracle Compatibilism"
Nov. 6, 2012	* P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" * Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" † Carolina Sartorio, "Actuality and Responsibility"
Nov. 13, 2012	* Stephen Yablo, "Mental Causation" † Karen Bennett, "Why the Exclusion Problem seems Intractable"
Nov. 20, 2012	* David Lewis, excerpts from *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 4.2 "Against Overlap" * Sally Haslanger, "Persistence, Change and Explanation"
Nov. 27, 2012	* G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" * James Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist"
Dec. 4, 2012	* Fred Dretske, "Epistemic Operators" * Gail Stine, "Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure" * Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions" † David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"

Complete Bibliography

1. Helen Beebee, "Local Miracle Compatibilism" 37 *Noûs* (2003): 258-277.
2. Karen Bennett, "Why the Exclusion Problem Seems Intractable and How, Just Maybe, to Tract It" 37 *Noûs* (2003): 471-497.
3. Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions" 52 *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1992): 913-929.
4. Fred Dretske, "Epistemic Operators" 67 *Journal of Philosophy* (1970): 1007-1023.
5. Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double-effect" 5 *Oxford Review* (1967). Reprinted in her *Virtues and Vices* (University of California Press, 1978), pp. 19-32.
6. Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" 68 *Journal of Philosophy* (1971): 5-20. Reprinted in G. Watson, ed., *Free Will* 2nd ed. (OUP, 2003).
7. Alan Gibbard, "Contingent Identity" 4 *Journal of Philosophical Logic* (1975): 187-221.
8. Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Harvard University Press).

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

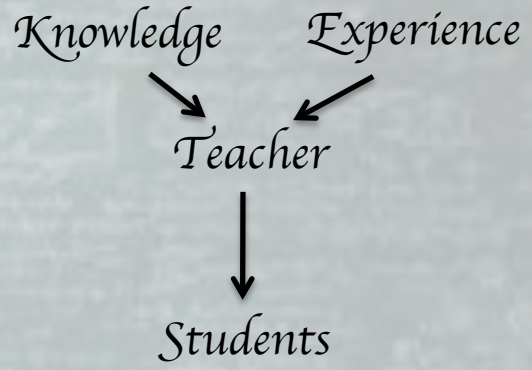
The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Course Design Theory

Image Credit: http://theburiedlife.tumblr.com/post/33811181290/a-professor-stood-before-his-philosophy-class-and

Teaching-Centered syllabus and course design



Learning-Centered syllabus and course design

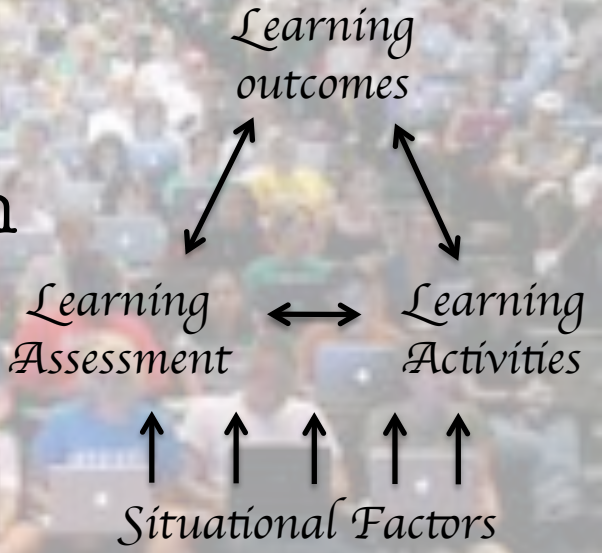


Image Credit: http://dianegottsman.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/laptop-classroom.jpg

Theory: Teaching-Centered

A "common approach" starts with…

- creation of a list of topics,
- followed by the development of a set of lectures to cover the progression of ideas falling under the scope of those topics.

- The topics are commonly chosen to …
  - reflect the material presented in a textbook,
  - prepare students for following courses,
  - reflect time-honored traditions,
  - Reflect the interests of the instructor.

- Topics limited by the number of such topics that will fit in the allotted meeting time for the course.

- Allen & Tanner, p. 85

- Students "understand the material" is the tacit assumption underlying this approach, (Fink, 2003).

Recent Shift in Higher Education

	Teaching Focus	Learning Focus
Orienting Questions	What do I want to teach?	What do the students need to learn?
	How can I cover the designated course material?	How can we accomplish specific learning objectives?
Teacher's Role	Provide/deliver instruction	Produce learning
	Transfer knowledge to students	Elicit student discovery and construction of knowledge
	Classify and sort students	Develop each student's competencies and talents
Success Criteria	Teacher's performance	Student's performance
	Inputs, resources	Learning, student-success outcomes
Assumption about teaching	Any expert can teach	Teaching is complex and requires considerable training

Table I taken from Whetten p. 341

Theory Shift: Learner-Centered

Learning-Centered Syllabus
and
"Backward Design Model" for courses

"Backward" because it starts with a vision of the desired results.

Stage 1: Identify desired results

Stage 2: Determine acceptable evidence

Stage 3: Plan learning experiences and instruction

Stage 1: Learning Outcomes

Identifying desired results of a course is also referred to as "learning goals," "learning objectives," or "learning outcomes"

These learning outcomes are the first thing to establish, and should be provided on the course's syllabus

Why?: Instructors should specify what they expect their students to learn in a course

And, more specifically, what they should be able to *do* upon completion

Why are Learning Outcomes Important?

Learning outcomes will guide…

- Selection of course content,
- development of instructional strategy,
- develop and select instructional materials,
- construction tests and other tools of assessing and evaluating.

Different Frameworks for Learning Outcomes

Three approaches to writing LO:

1. Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives
2. Wiggins and McTighe's facets of understanding
3. Fink's taxonomy of significant learning

Writing Learning Outcome

Examples:

By the end of this course, students will be able to …

- **distinguish** *between deductive and inductive arguments.*
- **describe** and **analyze** different positions regarding free will.
- **evaluate** deductive arguments in terms of validity and soundness.
- **distinguish** joint support from independent support for a conclusion or subconclusion.
- **apply** truth tables to test for truth functional properties.
- **identify** perceptual, cognitive, and social factors that lead to false beliefs.

Well-written Learning Outcomes

Characteristics of well-written learning outcomes:

- The specified action by the students must be observable
- The specified action by the students must be measurable
- The specified action must be done by the students
- Use clear and direct language
- Use a variety of **Bloom's Taxonomy Levels**

Bloom's Taxonomy of LO

- Knowledge
- Comprehension
- Application
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Image Credit: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-eixtu_N6NuY/UEoUB1lDvAI/AAAAAAAACY8/3dIXSuP_72I/s1600/bloomwheel3.gif

Bloom's Taxonomy: Lower-Level

Knowledge

- To recall previously learned (or memorized) information such as facts, terminology, rules, etc.

Can be assessed by:

- direct questions. The object is to test the students' ability to recall facts, to identify and repeat the information provided.

Verbs

define, list, recall, identify, recognize ...

Bloom's Taxonomy: Lower-Level

Comprehension

- Ability to comprehend the meaning of material

Can be assessed by:

- having students' 1) restate material in their own words, 2) reorder or extrapolate ideas, predict or estimate. Assessments must provide evidence that the students have some understanding or comprehension of what they are saying.

Verbs

explain, summarize, distinguish between, restate, extrapolate, convert …

Bloom's Taxonomy: Higher-Level

Application

- Recognizing, identifying, or applying a concept or principle information in a new situation

Can be assessed by:

- presenting students with a unique situation (i.e. one not identical to that used during instruction) and have them apply their knowledge to solve the problem or execute the proper procedure.
- May require identifying or generating examples not found in assigned materials.

Verbs

relate, demonstrative, apply, generalize, prepare, explain, solve, adapt …

Bloom's Taxonomy: Higher-Level

Analysis

- To examine a concept and break it down into its parts and understand underlying structure

Can be assessed by:

- requiring students to compare and contrast or explain how an example illustrates a given concept or principle.
- requiring students to identify logical errors or to differentiate among facts, opinions, assumptions, hypotheses and conclusions.

Verbs

analyze, distinguish, differentiate, determine, compare, identify, infer …

Bloom's Taxonomy: Higher-Level

Synthesis

- Ability to combine parts to form a new whole; to synthesize a variety of elements into an original and significant whole.

Can be assessed by:

- Produce something unique or original
- Solve some unfamiliar problem in a unique way

Verbs

combine, create, construct, write, formulate, produce, propose, theorize…

Bloom's Taxonomy: Higher-Level

Evaluation

- Ability to evaluate a total situation, to judge the value of material for a certain purpose, combining elements of all the other categories and also value judgments based on defined, fixed criteria.

Can be assessed by:

- presenting the students with a situation which includes both a problem and a solution to the problem and have them justify or critique the solution.
- having students present a justification and rationale for a specific conclusion.

Verbs

evaluate, assess, verify, judge, appraise…

Bloom's Taxonomy: Examples

Poorly-written Outcome

By the end of this course, students will have added to their understanding of the complete research process.

Well-written Outcome

- By the end of this course, students will be able to:
  - **describe** the research process in social interventions
  - **evaluate** critically the quality of research by others
  - **formulate** research questions designed to test, refine, and build theories
  - **identify** and **demonstrate** facility in research designs and data collection strategies that are most appropriate to a particular research project
  - **interpret** research findings and draw appropriate conclusions

Example from: http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/topics/coursedesign/learning-outcomes/examples.htm

Bloom's Taxonomy: Examples

Poorly-written Outcome

By the end of this course, students will have a deeper appreciation of philosophy and philosophical movements in general.

Well-written Outcome

- By the end of this course, students will be able to:
  - **identify** and **describe** the major philosophical movements of the 20th century
  - **perform** close readings of literary texts
  - **evaluate** a philosophical argument based on selected and articulated standards

Stage 1: Identify desired results

Stage 2: Determine acceptable evidence

Stage 2: Learning Assessment

Next, we consider how students will demonstrate competency and understanding,

- What will constitute as ***evidence*** of competency for each of the learning outcomes?
- What are valid developmental ***assessments*** of student learning?

Why? "Possibly the greatest impact we have as teachers on student learning involves our choice of assessments … In the minds of our students, what we test and how we test says more about our educational goals, values, and philosophy than anything else we do or say during the term"

(Whetten, p.349)

Learning Assessment

Determine **how** you are going to assess what students have learned **before** introducing the subject.

Then, focus the in-class and out-of-class learning activities on preparing students to do well on the assessments.

Decisions about how to assess student learning should precede decisions about how to help students learn

(Whetten, 2007)

Types of Learning Assessment

- **Criterion-referenced assessments**
  - – The familiar exams, quizzes, writing, etc.
  - + administered on a reiterative basis so that progress toward development of understandings can be monitored.
- **Unprompted assessment and self-assessment**
  - – observations of students working together, journals, portfolios, dialogues, class discussions, etc.
- **Performance tasks**
  - – concrete demonstrations of ability to perform a procedure, design and implement projects and experiments, etc.

- Allen & Tanner, p. 87

Types of Learning Assessment

Stage 1: "What is our intended destination?"

Stage 2: "How will we know if we arrive?"

We are now ready to address the all important question of "How are we going to get there?" (Stage 3).

(Whetten, 2007)

Stage 1: Identify desired results

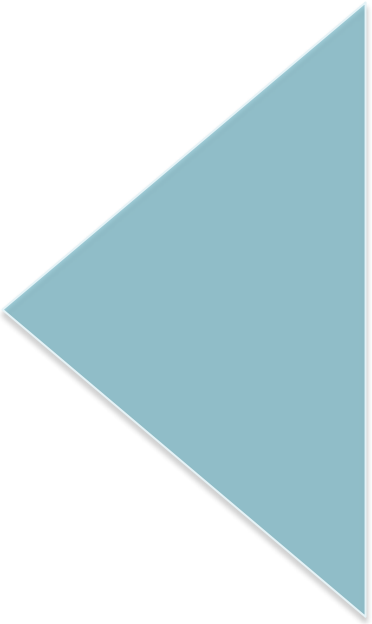
Stage 2: Determine acceptable evidence

Stage 3: Plan learning experiences and instruction

Stage 3: Learning Activities

This stage involves thinking more on the day-to-day running of the course.

You want to plan learning experiences and instruction and select course activities that foster active, engaged learning.



Stage 3: Learning Activities

Examples:

- Active learning activities!

- Encourage direct application of the course material, and report the results to the class.

- Assign time for reflection, including minute papers at the end of a class period and/or the ongoing use of learning portfolios or journals.

- Facilitate student interaction with the teacher and with classmates through class discussions, team projects, small group work, presentations, and peer feedback.

(Whetten, 2007)

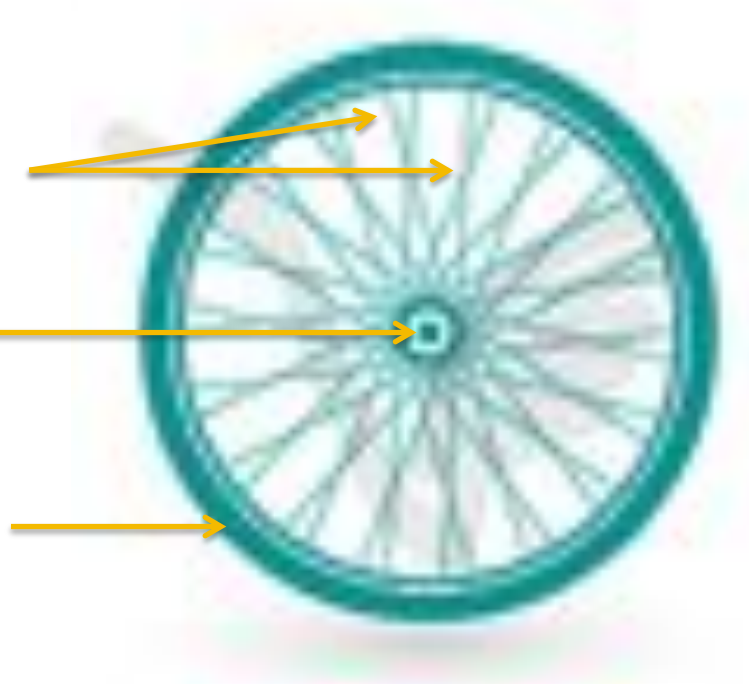
Post-Design: Alignment throughout

Systematically and continuously align your course design elements!

Spokes: Learning Activities

Hub: Learning Objectives

Rim: Learning Assessments



Learning activities help students understand what we mean by a particular learning objective.

(Whetten, 2007)

Image Credit: http://images.vector-images.com/clp1/196419/clp672578.jpg

Post-Design: Alignment throughout

Example:

A course objective is to get students apply certain principles of a moral/ethical theory to a particular situation.

To achieve alignment between this stated objective and the course activities and assessments,

- use the word apply to introduce test questions and assignments
- as well as in grading rubrics for written papers.

By consistently using the same verb in the learning objectives, activities, and assessments, students can see how related parts of a course reinforce each other.

Course Design Activity

Image generated with Wordle from Western's 2012-2013 Critical Thinking Syllabus.
For more info on Wordle, be sure to come to the next workshop on the Digital Humanities!

Activity: Syllabus Design

With your table pod, you will discuss designing a syllabus for one of these types of philosophy courses:

Group 1: A first-year "Introduction to Western Philosophy" course.

+ Enrollment is 300 students. Lectures + tutorial. You have TAs.

Group 2: A second-year required survey course for philosophy majors (choose one: Contemporary Moral Issues, Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy).

+ Enrollment is 75 students. Lectures + tutorial. You have TAs.

Group 3: An elective philosophy course, targeted at non-philosophy majors, 2nd years and up.

+ Enrollment is 75 students. Lectures. You have Graders.

Group 4: An upper-year (3rd & 4th years) philosophy course for philosophy majors.

+ Enrollment is 25 students. Lectures.

Activity: Syllabus Design

Components to think about:

- Learning Outcomes
  - "By the end of this course, students will…"
  - Try to write a learning outcome for each of the 6 levels in Bloom's Taxonomy

- Learning Assessment
  - Identify how the assessment related back to a learning outcome

- Learning Activities
  - Start to think of how day-to-day operation might run.
  - Again, think back to connecting it up with Bloom's taxonomy, and your learning objectives

Q & A with Panelist

Prof. Gillian Barker, Philosophy Department

Additional Resources

Recommended References

Cited papers:

Allen, D. and Tanner, K. (2007). Putting the horse back in front of the cart: Using visions and decisions about high-quality learning experiences to drive course design. *Life Sciences Education*, *6*, 85-89.

Arreola, R., & Aleamoni, L.M. (1998). Writing learning objectives. *Assessing student learning outcomes: A Workshop Resource Document*. Memphis: The University of Tennessee.

Whetten, D. A. (2007). Principles of effective course design: What I wish I had known about learning-centered teaching 30 years ago. *Journal of Management Education*, *31*(3), 339-357.

Recommended References

Bloom, B. S. (ed.) (1956). Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain, New York: Longman.

Fink, L. D. (2003). Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wiggins, G., and McTighe, J. (1998). Understanding by Design, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Additional References

Davis, B. *Checklist: Components of a Comprehensive Course Syllabus.* Available at: http://teaching.berkeley.edu/sites/teaching.berkeley.edu/files/SyllabusComponents_0.pdf

Writing Learning Objectives using Bloom's Taxonomy, UNC-Charlotte http://teaching.uncc.edu/learning-resources/articles-books/best-practice/goals-objectives/writing-objectives

Learning Objectives for Philosophy Courses

- Loyola University New Orleans http://chn.loyno.edu/philosophy/department-philosophy-goals-and-learning-objectives
- University of San Diego http://www.sandiego.edu/cas/phil/program/learning_objectives.php
- University of Portland http://college.up.edu/philosophy/default.aspx?cid=6556&pid=2486
- Type into google "Philosophy Course Learning Outcome" for more examples

Feedback Survey

Contact: mjacquar@uwo.ca

Thanks!