COURSE DESIGN

This guidance, based on best practices in education, is designed to help you plan the design of your class as you prepare your syllabus and think about its content and structure. In addition, the last section lays out the information that you will need to share in your syllabus pursuant to ABA, University of Denver, and Sturm College of Law policies. Additional resources and information are available on the Faculty Resources webpages: https://www.law.du.edu/resources/faculty-resources

☐ ENVISION STUDENT NEEDS

A learning needs assessment is a process used by educators to determine what students need to learn to be successful. It involves reflecting on their current knowledge, skills, and abilities. This information is useful not only for tailoring course content to the academic abilities and career aspirations of students but also for facilitating knowledge acquisition. Learning research has repeatedly underscored the importance of connecting new information to prior knowledge and experience in the process of effective learning. In fact, Malcom Knowles included this idea as one of his—now famous—assumptions of adult learning. In envisioning the learning needs of students, consider asking some questions:

- *What are the demographics of the learners?*
- *What are their career goals of the learners?*
- *What is the current level of knowledge of the course?*
- *What challenges do the learners face?*
- *Where are they in their academic program?*

☐ PLOT COURSE TRAJECTORY

There are many ways of laying out the broad contours of a course. However, recent scholarship and in-the-classroom experience points to a 'backwards design' approach as the best way forward. In short, this design methodology unfolds in three steps:

- *Identifying learning objectives*
- *Determining learning assessments*
- *Finding learning activities*

At the heart of backwards design is the movement from objectives to assessment to activities. Just as important is the 'alignment' of these elements—that is, the direct and explicit connection between them. In practice this means that educator chooses learning assessments that will most effectively achieve the identified learning objectives; and—in turn—one chooses learning activities that will directly introduce students to the content on which they will be assessed.

☐ IDENTIFY COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Course learning objectives are clearly written, specific statements of observable student behavior or action that can be measured upon completion of a course. The most effective learning objectives are those that:

- *Are learner-focused ('students will ___ ' rather than 'the course will ___ ')*
- *Can be measured ('students will be able to analyze')*
- *Address multiple types of knowledge (facts as well as concepts, processes, and metacognition)*
- *Target various levels of thinking (e.g., information recall and analytical skills)*

☐ DETERMINE CORRESPONDING ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Determining what types of assessment to include in your course rests on the answer to this question: How will you know your students will have achieved the course objectives?

☐ FIND APPROPRIATE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The possibilities of what constitutes a 'learning activity' are endless since it simply refers to the work students must do to complete the course and achieve the learning objectives. Traditional learning activities include lectures, reading, and writing. If the course warrants it, you may also consider other learning activities, You can ask which activities will best help students achieve the stated learning objectives.

☐ ABA REQUIREMENTS FOR DISTANCE (REMOTE) COURSES

As you design your distance class or distance learning activities, you should also ensure that they will satisfy the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools Standard 306.

For distance (remote) classes, ABA Standard 306 requires "regular and substantive interaction between the students and faculty teaching the course."

Regular interaction shall include:

"(1) providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course as defined by Standard 310(b);

(2) monitoring the student's academic engagement and success; and

(3) ensuring that the faculty member is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student."

Substantive interaction "requires engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and includes at least two of the following:

(1) providing direct instruction;

(2) assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;

(3) providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course; or (4) facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course."

☐ SKETCH COURSE STRUCTURE

Having laid the foundation of your course (in terms of aligning learning objectives, assessments, and activities), consider how your course will be structured. More concretely, you can ask yourself:

- *Which topics are essential to cover?*
- *How will the course content be divided and presented?*
- *Which learning activities will you use and how they will be arranged over the course of the term?*
- *When will students be assessed?*
- *Which assessments will be formative and which ones will be summative?*
- *How will you give feedback? Will it be graded or ungraded?*

At the end of this task, you will have a broad outline or general schedule like one that you might include in the course syllabus.

☐ PREPARE YOUR SYLLABUS

Once you have determined the content of the course, you can prepare your syllabus to share the information with students. In addition to sharing the assignments and structure of the course, your

syllabus should include the following information, pursuant to ABA, University of Denver, and Sturm College of Law policies:

- Assignments
- Course Materials
- Office hours and availability
- Disability accommodations. (Required University of Denver language is below)
- Learning Outcomes
- Class Attendance
- Formative and Summative Assessment
- Grading

Additional information is available on the Faculty Resources webpage:
https://www.law.du.edu/resources/faculty-resources