Unit 3

Planning a Course: Philosophy Becomes Practice

Unit Objectives:

1. Develop a plan for a course that you will teach or expect to teach.

2. Design a syllabus for that course, including objectives, methods and assessment.

3. Link that syllabus to your philosophy.

4. Write a plan for the first day of class.

5. Develop a vision for your ideal course.

6. Link that vision to your philosophy.

Course Planning in the Beginning

What do teachers think about when they get ready to teach a course? To some extent that depends on their teaching experience. After a number of years teachers have worked out many standard issues in planning a course, but certainly not all of them. Tom McGovern (2000, p. 1-2), an experienced and award-winning teacher, contrasts two approaches to course planning, those of the scientist and the artist.

The *science* of course planning and implementation follows the linear pathway of a research project and its reporting in a journal article. We propose goals and questions for the course and for our students based on the syntheses of available literature on many topics. We choose teaching methods shaped by empirical evidence and self-design. During the semester, we gather systematic observations and perform analyses of multiple performance measures. And finally, we evaluate the efficacy of our initial questions, the methods we used, and the results obtained, after the term is over, and then begins the cycle of planning for another semester.

The *art* of course planning is more intuitive, like the task of bringing a theater production from concept to performance. Historical antecedents, contemporary audience preferences and sophistication, environment and mood setting, uses of technology, and "how it might play in Peoria" become critical ingredients. Unlike a theater production, however, a faculty member must be playwright, stage designer of light and sound systems, score and lyrics composer, choreographer, director, and lead (often solo) performer.

In the past 100 years, how many times in how many places and for how many different audiences have faculty planned a semester of their various courses? Whether our preferred preparation heuristic is that of scientist, artist or some other unique amalgamation of the two,

thinking deeply about the course planning enterprise makes every autumn something to anticipate for its inspirations, rewards, and challenges.

We will approach the topic of course planning from the standpoint of a person teaching a course for the very first time with the understanding that the general principles and methods of course design can be applied as well to a course that has been taught many times previously. The guidelines and critical thinking exercises that follow should prove as useful to an instructor new to teaching a particular course as to an instructor faced with the task of teaching a course that has been taught numerous times before by instructors with a range of teaching styles and course objectives. These guidelines and exercises should also be helpful to those individuals interested in designing a course that explores new topics using innovative teaching strategies regardless of whether they approach what they are doing as academic artists or scientists.

The first step in successful course design is to consider the many influences that contribute to your current thinking on how the course should proceed. The range of possible factors that influence this process include such things as your prior experience as a student; outstanding, magical teachers as well as poor teachers you have encountered; your knowledge of learning theories; prior teaching experiences, if any; relevance of content; and experience with new technologies. In reality no course design can be *completely* fresh. Teachers across all disciplines have taken courses before. It is possible you may have even taken the course you are teaching in the past, and have fading memories of what worked and didn't work for you when you were the student. You may have accessed syllabi of other teachers who have designed a course that is the same as or similar to the course you plan to teach, either through your department, colleagues at other universities, or the Internet. You may have discovered online resources such as "Project Syllabus," or Campus Compact Syllabus initiative, or Open Yale

Courses, all of which contain a number of excellent models to consult in constructing your own syllabus. There are also numerous books that contain examples of syllabi for a wide range of disciplines (O'Brien, Millis, Cohen, & Diamond (2008), Lang (2008), Nilson (2007), Davis (2009)).

Thinking about where you've been and where you'd like to go as a teacher represents an important starting point for planning a course consistent with your teaching philosophy. Being true to both the scientific rationale for what you do in the classroom and the personal values, ethics and preferences that define who you are as a person will increase the chances of students having a synchronous course experience where learning objectives are met. Our first activity in this section asks you to be an artist, that is, to be creative, imaginative, and non-linear.

Activity: Course planning by free association.

Think of a course that you would like to teach or have taught. Write the name of that course at the top of a blank sheet of paper. Now free-associate about that course, writing down notes about the thoughts that come to mind. Please do this before reading ahead.

You may have begun with those "must cover topics", and then included some exciting potential exercises, assignments, films and active learning experiences for students. Readings for the course inevitably creep into the equation early on, and even our unique anxieties about teaching this course may rear their ugly heads. It is not uncommon to think about what you want students to experience and learn through this course from a first-person perspective. We almost imagine how the comments from our teaching evaluations will read or what might be noted on

Rate My Professor. This is the way many teachers begin to think about course design. Thinking like an artist helps us to generate lots of ideas about our courses.

Stating Course Objectives

In order to provide the most complete coverage of course design issues, it is necessary for thoughtful teachers to prepare their courses from the scientist's perspective as well. Scientists can be creative and imaginative too, but at some point they get more systematic about hypotheses and methods. In a multi-year study of what he termed "the best" college teachers, Bain (2004) identified several questions these teachers used when designing courses. They frequently began by asking themselves what should students know and be able to do upon completion of the course. This leads to our first step in the science of course planning, developing the course objectives. Where do course objectives come from? In some cases others give them to you. Your department or college may have had committees that developed course objectives to provide consistency across instructors and semesters. In some fields, professional organizations may specify a curriculum and course objectives, either recommended or required, for accreditation. Most commonly; however, you will be able to make your own decisions about objectives. Inevitably, these objectives should be based to a considerable degree on your understanding of learning theory and your ever-evolving theory on teaching, the teaching philosophy statement.

Activity: Articulating some course objectives.

What knowledge or skills should your students have developed by the end of your course?

Write two objectives for the course you have in mind. This activity is just to get you started thinking about the intended outcomes for your course.

Your philosophy of teaching will be a most important influence when writing objectives. .A clearly articulated plan based on an explicitly stated philosophy of teaching enables peers and others to critique how you implement that plan in the classroom, as well as the plan itself. It also gives you a solid basis for self assessment.

Activity: Outline some philosophy-informed course objectives.

For the course you have in mind, write objectives that clearly are based on your philosophy. For example, if your philosophy says that you want your students to think critically about major issues in your field, one objective should reflect that idea. You might begin by identifying the ideas in your philosophy that potentially could relate to one or more course objectives.

The Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives

More than fifty years ago a group of educators gave careful thought to the issue of writing course objectives. They did this in two areas, cognitive and affective objectives (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia,1964). The cognitive objectives continue to be influential as ways of analyzing what teachers expect students to be able to do. In 2001, a revised version of Bloom's taxonomy was proposed (Anderson, & Krathwohl, 2001). The original categories are presented from lower or simpler cognitive processes to higher or more complex thinking modes and are listed here.

Level	Verbs to indicate
KNOWLEDGE	State, list, name, define
COMPREHENSION	Explain, identify, discuss
APPLICATION	Demonstrate, illustrate
ANALYSIS	Analyze, compare, contrast
SYNTHESIS	Create, design, compose
EVALUATION	Evaluate, criticize, value

Activity: Course objective wording.

Look at the objectives you have written for your course so far. Where do they stand in relation to the cognitive taxonomy outlined above? It is likely that your goals for student learning may not have been best explained through the verbs you chose originally. If necessary, change the verbs used to state your course objectives.

To varying extents, the verbs you use to articulate course objectives may vary based on more than just unique intricacies of individual teaching philosophies. For example, an introductory course for freshmen may place more emphasis on knowledge, while a senior seminar may focus more on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. You also may find that some of your objectives are more affective, which means that they concern developing students' attitudes and values. Other objectives are skill-based, in that you may want students to develop in areas like writing and teamwork. This taxonomy is useful, but not intended to hamper one's own creativity in composing course objectives.

Soon after Bloom and his colleagues developed their taxonomies, there was an active movement to encourage the use of behavioral objectives (Gronlund, 1970). The idea made sense to many people then, and it still does. These are the essential ideas for defining behaviorally based course objectives:

- You should be able to specify what you want students to know and do. Behavioral objectives are stated in terms of student performance, not things the teacher will do. For example, "expose" students to something, is what the teacher does, not what the student is expected to do.
- State the specific conditions under which a specific student behavior is expected. For instance, students may be allowed to use a textbook during and exam to evaluate an objective.

State the expected level of performance for students with specific descriptors (e.g., learn three out of four developmental theories; given a diagram of the human brain, label all four lobes).

Activity: Articulating behavior-based course objectives.

Identify which objectives you have already written that are stated in behavioral terms. Pick three objectives that are not stated behaviorally and restate them so that they are more behavioral in nature.

Critical Thinking Interruption

- **How difficult is it to switch your broad-based cognitive objectives and affective objectives into crystal clear behavioral objectives?**

- **What do you see as some problems with the behavioral objectives approach?**

Affective objectives are important too, perhaps more so in the arts and humanities than in the sciences. For many teachers these objectives concern attitudes and values that are implicit; we expect and hope that these things are accomplished but do not state them in our syllabus. And because they are quite difficult to state in behavioral terms, it means they will be difficult to assess as well. We need to be concerned about the limits on what we expect from students in this area. Should we expect students to accept our values? We will address this issue in a later chapter.

Activity: What are your affective objectives?

Identify the affective, or value-based, objectives among the objectives you have written. If you don't have any value-based objectives articulated, take some time to think about these now. As far as these objectives go, think about whether you consider them to

be more or less important than your cognitive and behavioral objectives stated earlier?

Will you put these in your syllabus? Why or why not?

Activity: Complete the Teaching Goals Inventory.

The *Teaching Goals Inventory* (Angelo & Cross, 1993) is a useful tool to analyze

your course objectives. A goal is broader than an objective. It is a general statement

describing where the students should be at the end of the course. An example of a goal is

students will understand how the body functions. An objective describes steps necessary

to reach the goal. In completing the inventory, you are asked to think of your goals with

respect to specific courses. This online version is self-scoring and lets you see the

importance you place on goals in these areas: higher-order thinking skills, basic academic

success skills, discipline-specific knowledge and skills, liberal arts and academic values,

work and career preparation, and personal development. It is a good tool to help you

think about what you want to accomplish in your course, and your teaching in general.

Activity

Complete the online Teaching Goals Inventory. Comparing the results you obtain

from the Teaching Goals Inventory with your philosophy may reveal instructive

inconsistencies. For instance, your philosophy may say that you care about students, yet

the inventory may reveal that personal development is not important for you, which

would lead you to think more carefully about what "caring" means.

The Syllabus

The course syllabus can be viewed in many ways. It is not only the public presentation of your course plan, but it "reveals aspects of an instructor's teaching philosophy, methodological preferences, and educational policies" (Nilson, 2007, p. 8). You show it to students and to others who want to know what you do in your course, and if you save these documents over the years they show how you have changed, or not, in your approach to an individual course. In short, the syllabus is an important document.

The primary audience for this document is your students. The syllabus tells them what the course is about, what is expected of them, what they can expect of you, and when and how they will be evaluated. It also tells them something about what the teacher is like. We know that students do not pay attention to many things in the syllabus that the teacher thinks are important, like the course objectives (Becker & Calhoon, 1999), so it is important to use strategies from the first day that encourage students to read the syllabus. Some faculty ask students to work in pairs, read the syllabus and generate a series of questions based on the syllabus for discussion with the faculty member. Others require students to read the syllabus and complete a quiz on key points. Yet other faculty members invite the students to assist in developing some aspects of the syllabus (e.g. sets of expectations for faculty member and for students). Many faculty members discuss the syllabus on the first day of class. If you chose this strategy, you will want to say a little about each objective and why you included it and what the student should be able to do by the end of the course. They discuss why a particular textbook was chosen and how students will use it in the course. Review the schedule pointing out that you have used bold type to indicate when assignments are due and the dates of examinations. Go over your course policies on attendance, academic honesty, and other issues. Your philosophy should be a guide here. In this talk with

students about your course, be human and use humor as it comes naturally to you. But, most importantly, make it clear to students what is expected of them.

One might think that the syllabus is a pretty standard document, but there is considerable variability in what teachers include and the format in which they present the information. Nilson (2007) presents course themes, requirements and information visually in a graphic syllabus. Bain (2004) advocates the use of what he refers to as the "promising syllabus" which consists of three main parts – statements on what the course will offer the students in terms of development and future opportunities; what students would have to do to attain the opportunities and development afforded by the course; and finally, a summary of "how the instructor and the students would understand the nature and progress of learning" (p. 75).

The following is one list of the major content areas of a syllabus, adapted from Altman and Cashin (1992).

- Course information: Name of the course, course number, credit hours, location of class meetings, class meeting time.

- Instructor information: Name of the instructor, title associated with the instructor (e.g., assistant professor), the instructor's office location and contact information (e.g., phone, e-mail), times and days of office hours.

- Textbook(s) to be used during the course.

- Supplementary readings that are required, recommended, or on reserve in the library.

- Course description: A narrative similar to the college catalog.

- Course objectives.

- Examinations: Format of the examinations, dates of examinations.

- Assignments: Types of assignments and when they are due.

- Grading scale and standards.

- Course calendar: Topics addressed for each class, readings that the students are responsible for during each class, vacation days and special events.

- Course policies: Explicit articulation of policies related to class attendance, tardiness, class participation, missed exams, extra credit, late assignments, academic dishonesty, and classroom etiquette..

- Academic support services: Location and hours for the writing lab, locations and hours for services for students with disabilities, location and hours for counseling center, and resources available for students looking for assistance with their study skills and time management.

We will work on assignments, examinations, and grading in later sections. Here we give some thought to other, more general, items typically found on the syllabus. **Choosing a**

Textbook and Other Readings

This section focuses on selecting textbooks. In some fields, there may be a dozen or fewer choices and careful comparison is possible, but for many subjects there are too many textbooks to compare all of them. Instructors of some courses, such as literature courses, often do not select a textbook, but instead compile sets of readings or lists of books or resources for students to use in the course. In still other courses such as those in technology areas, course content may be continually evolving making selection of an up to date textbook problematic. Mary has faced this challenge in instructional technology courses that she teaches because of the pace at which technologies change. She often uses e-books that are freely available to students as well as comprehensive websites all of which tend to be more up-to-date than traditional textbooks as one way to address this problem.

Regardless of the type resource we use, textbook, collection of readings, online resources, many of the following suggestions for selecting a textbook will apply. We have to rely on what Nobel laureate (economics), Herbert Simon, called satisficing (Rainey, 2001), which essentially means choosing textbooks or resources that are good enough. To inform the satisficing process, several information-gathering strategies are typically pursued. For instance, one might ask those who taught the course before what book they used and why. Reviews of textbooks are available in many professional journals. In psychology we are fortunate to have comparisons of textbooks in some course areas where there are many choices (e.g., introductory psychology textbooks; Griggs, 1999; Griggs, Jackson, Christopher, & Marek., 1999).

These are some dimensions to consider in textbook selection (based on Dewey, 1999).

- Think of some course concepts that typically are difficult for students or are important in your mind as an instructor, and see how well the book explains them.

- Difficulty is determined by reading level and amount of detail. Consider who your students are and what they are prepared to handle. "Easier" books are not necessarily "dumber." That is, it is possible to present an idea in clear, simple language with good examples and facilitate maximum learning in students.

- Interest in a reading source is often facilitated by the quality of the writing. Some books are more fun to read than others. Does the text "draw you in?" Try to skim a chapter. If you can't skim because it's so interesting, that's good.

- Features like marginal definitions, critical thinking activities, self quizzes, and application sections can be good pedagogical devices, and have been found to facilitate student learning of the reading materials (Sikorski, Rich, Saville, Buskist, Davis, & Drogan, 2002).

- The length in pages for the book as a whole, and the length of individual chapters, may also be relevant to your course objectives. Consider how much detail you want students to master and which topics are essential. Think about the balance of breadth and depth that you want and the time you wish for students to spend on other, non-textbook learning activities. Many teachers try to cover too much in a course, which can hamper student learning.

- It's worth remembering that today's textbooks are quite expensive. New editions are published frequently, not because of rapid advances in knowledge, but to overcome the market in used books. Students do appreciate professors who attend to the broader issues like the cost of living that impact their academic lives.

- Consider the supplementary materials that are provided to students (e.g., study guides, CD-ROMs, internet access) and instructors (e.g., videos, PowerPoint slides,

computerized testing). You can get a good sense of the quality of supplementary materials and whether you want to require their purchase by students by talking to publishers' representatives or visiting book exhibits at national and regional professional meetings.

- Consider also the wealth of free resources available on the Internet, and if any of these might serve as primary or secondary sources for the course.

- Your end-of-course student evaluations should include their comments on the textbook, which you can use to guide your decision making for the next semester.

Activity: Evaluate some potential textbooks or course resources.

Get a copy of two textbooks or course resources that pertain to the general topic for a course you plan to teach in the coming months. Apply the criteria described above, and other personal criteria you may have based on your teaching philosophy to identify which book or resources would best serve your purposes in your course.

Decisions about Course Policies

Your course policies, which may seem mundane and sometimes legalistic, serve two important purposes: preventing problems and implementing your philosophy. These policies show how you want to relate to your students, a topic that could be included in your philosophy. For example, your attendance policy will look different if you think of nurturing students' independence in a climate of trust, rather than teaching responsibility by holding students accountable. Some colleges will give you more choice than others in these areas, but you always will have choices to make that can contribute to whether you have problems later in the semester or not. Any policy should be clear and unambiguous and stated in clear, measurable, behavioral terms. Imagine the worst case, a disciplinary panel that expects you to explain why you failed a student. That will be easier to do if your policy was clear, fair, and followed.

Attendance. If you decide to have an attendance requirement that includes excused absences, your problem becomes one of deciding what evidence you will require to support the excuse. Students' cars do have flat tires, they do have close relatives who die, they wake up with the flu, and they may have children who get sick. Do you want the burden of evaluating notes from doctors and auto mechanics? It can be done, and may have to be done, if your college requires attendance. However, some teachers prefer not to face this problem in almost every class period, and certainly not in large classes where a lot of time and effort would be involved in taking attendance. Students make choices, including whether or not to come to class, and if there is a cost in missing a class or a benefit in showing up then that will contribute to their decision of whether or not to attend class. For more arguments for and against taking attendance see Green (2007).

Missed examinations. This is a more difficult problem than attendance because the cost to the student of missing an exam (getting a zero) is high. There is little agreement about the solution to this challenging problem because most teachers want to be fair to all students; we want to be sensitive to emergencies and crises in students' lives while not condoning bogus excuses. The following policies are examples of ways that some instructors have addressed this problem:

- Allow students to take a make-up exam if they have "a legitimate excuse." This may require the teacher to evaluate notes from physicians, funeral directors, and others. Additional implications include the need to prepare a separate exam and make arrangements to give the make-up exam.

- Allow students to drop one exam. This avoids the problems associated with giving make-up exams; however, doing this means that you will not assess or count performance on one part of your course. A student may decide if passing grades have been obtained on the first exams, to simply ignore the material for the last exam. The implication here is that mastery of three-quarters of the course content (e.g., if you have four exams) is acceptable. Also, a student may miss more than one exam.

- Give a comprehensive final exam that serves as the make up for students who missed earlier exams, and also represents a chance for other students to improve their grade in the course if they wish to take the cumulative final exam. However, some might argue that using this strategy, makes the final exam serve different purposes for different students, making assessment unequal and unfair.

For more advice on dealing with students who miss exams and assignments see Perlman and McCann (2005).

Late assignments. Give your assignments to students well ahead of the due dates, and in your course calendar indicate the days on which the assignments will be provided, as well as when they must be submitted. Remind students a week before the due date. For large, end of term assignments, consider inserting milestone dates throughout the semester where progress towards the final product can be checked to help students meet final deadlines. Even when you do those things, some students will be late. Most teachers lower the grade for late papers, often by a certain number of points or percentage for each day beyond the due date. Your choice here is to either be firm (you gave plenty of advanced notice) or implement your excuse criteria on a more fluid scale. Don't forget, you could always be forced to articulate your policy during an administrative hearing if a student elects to protest a grade.

Activity: Write a policy statement for your course concerning attendance, missed examinations, and late assignments.

After you write your policy, using clear behavioral criteria, review your teaching philosophy statement. Are your policies consistent with your teaching philosophy statement? If not, how will you change one or both of them?

Class participation. As an undergraduate Jim was quite shy and would avoid classes where he might be expected to talk, so he has some sympathy for students who find this difficult. As always; however, one's course objectives and teaching philosophy are guides to your practice. In a later section we will see that some important objectives are accomplished best in small group discussions. However, what objective is served by requiring all students to talk in large

groups? If you do have a participation requirement you will face not only the problem of the shy student, but of the loquacious one. You also will have to evaluate participation by counting or estimating who talks in each class, and grading the quality of their participation. It is difficult to do that and teach at the same time. Incorporating online discussions into class participation often provides a way for all students to contribute to discussions. Participation should be encouraged rather than required, and in Unit 5 we will discuss ways to do that.

Extra credit. Assignments that are beyond what is usual, normal, expected, or necessary are called extra credit. It is not clear what purposes are served by these assignments. Students who are not doing well in a course should be studying more, not doing additional work. Perhaps students who are doing A work need a further challenge. Whatever the objective, any extra credit assignments should be designed so that all students have an equal opportunity to do the work (Palladino, Hill, &Norcross,1999). For example, asking students to attend a lecture off campus may be more difficult for those without a car.

Activity: Writing additional course policies

Based on the critical thinking interruptions on controversial topics in course planning, and your own personal thoughts and philosophy, write additional policies for your course. Try to be as comprehensive as possible in outlining the rules. After you write these policies, compare them to your philosophy. Are they consistent? If not, what will you change?

Academic integrity. Academic integrity is a nice phrase to use when saying, "don't cheat." Cheating on examinations is widespread. (This will be covered in more detail in the uniton testing and grading.) Plagiarism has been made easier by the availability for sale on the Internet of papers on hundreds of topics. Most colleges have a policy and procedure concerning academic honesty that should be provided to students. Your syllabus should make it clear that you will not tolerate cheating and what will be done to offenders.

Academic integrity is a serious matter, and you want to be fair as well as firm. You may want to convey a sense of trust for students in general, but toughness for cases of cheating. Students value fairness in their teachers; they do not want to see other students have an unfair advantage. If they see a teacher who has a casual attitude toward cheating, some students will take that as a signal to cheat.

Prevention is preferable to punishment. It takes a lot of time to gather the evidence and present it for a disciplinary process, which could become a legal case. Knowing that this effort is required, discourages some teachers from pursuing cheaters. There are steps you can take that will prevent cheating dilemmas from morphing into ethical and/or professional dilemmas:

- Provide a clear statement in your syllabus that defines what you mean by cheating and plagiarism. It is surprising how many students do not know what plagiarism is, particularly in this era when so much information is available online.

- Be clear on what will happen to students who cheat each and every time. Such students might be given an F on the particular exam or assignment, or fail the course. Whatever your decision, be consistent.

- Relate your policy to that of the college, including the disciplinary procedure.

- When instances of cheating are discovered, talk with students about reasons for cheating. Make clear that while you understand the pressure that many students are under, you don't condone cheating. Offer to help students with study problems and personal emergencies or find help from other sources.

- Carefully monitor examinations. Some teachers use exam time to grade papers or read their mail at a desk in front of the room. This signals a casual attitude toward cheating. In fact, Jason asks each student to bring all of their bags, beverages, and pocketbooks to the front of the room before every examination. This sends a clear message that every precaution will be taken to ensure that the playing field during examinations is level for all parties. Create assignments that make cheating difficult. Most importantly, make it clear to students that you are a teacher who cares about honesty and integrity.

Activity: Write an academic honesty statement for your course.

State what you expect from students and what will happen if they violate your policy. Consult your college policy and refer your students to it.

Classroom etiquette. Although not typically listed as an element of the syllabus, we include a statement that indicates the value we place on respect: our respect for students and our expectation that they respect each other and us. This includes coming to class on time, being a good listener, not talking while others are speaking, and doing the reading before class. If your course includes online discussion and work, you will want to want to talk about expectations online as well as in class. We think that it is what you say and do in this area that has more of an

effect than what is written in the syllabus. For this reason, many faculty ask students to talk about their expectations of the faculty member as well. Being a model of respect gains respect.

Grading. Students will put more effort into activities that get them "points." They want to know what their assignments and exams are worth, and how many points they need to achieve a hoped-for grade. Each exam and assignment will be assigned some number of points, and thus an importance weight. Think about how these weights are related to your course objectives. They should reflect what you think is most important and what the student understands to be important based on the course objectives. Most teachers then determine grade cut-offs, with the number of steps defined by college policy concerning the use of plus and minus grades. For example, indicating that 90% of the total points is an A creates an illusion of objectivity. This and other grading issues will be discussed in Unit 7.

Schedule. It is a good idea to label your course calendar a "tentative schedule" to allow for flexibility if needed, and unexpected delays. However, exam and major assignment dates always should be firm and printed in bold. The schedule should let students know what topics will be covered with the hope that they will prepare the assigned material for that date.

O'Brien et al (2008) provide examples of syllabi from many different disciplines, while Nilson (2007) includes graphic syllabi that display course information in a visual format.

Planning Course Modules

Each section or unit of your course also requires planning using an approach similar to that used to plan your whole course. In his course on preparing to teach psychology, Victor Benassi has students design teaching modules (Benassi, Jordan, & Harrison,1994). We recommend that you use that approach in planning sections of your course.

A teaching module includes these components:

1. Statement of objectives for the unit. Use the same process here as you did for planning your course objectives.

2. List of unit resources. What will you draw on for your class presentation and activities?

3. General outline of the major topics of this unit.

4. A detailed outline with the specifics of your presentation and class activities. This is your script for the unit.

5. Assessment and its relation to the objectives. Benassi recommends writing a "table of specifications" that relates individual test items to the objectives. You could do that with other forms of assessment, as well.

This might be a lot of work when you do it for the first time. However, you then will have a file for each module that can be modified and to which new material can be added, including evaluation of effectiveness.

Vision

What it would be like to teach a really great course? You would have done your best as a teacher, the students would have been involved and inspired to continue learning about the course materials after the course ends, and the materials from that class would be highly rated by your colleagues. Everyone would know that it had been a great experience. Having a vision for the perfect course is one way to set standards for both process and outcomes, and also to motivate you to improve your teaching.

Activity: What does your perfect course look and feel like?

Find a quite place where you will not be disturbed. Visualize yourself in a classroom and imagine what you would be doing and how you would feel if this were the best class you ever taught. You know, that perfect class. Imagine your course evaluations at the end of the semester; what will they say about this great course? Think in general about what would make this your perfect course. Do this until you get tired of it. Make some notes on what you thought about, then write a vision statement for The Perfect Course.

The First Day of Class

Critical Thinking Interruption

- **Visualize the perfect first day of class for one of your courses.**

  o **What are you doing? What are you thinking about?**

  o **How are the students acting? What are the students thinking about?**

The first day is one of the most important days of your semester. It provides an opportunity to get a good start in accomplishing important objectives. These objectives may not be stated in your syllabus, but nevertheless are related to the success of your course: presenting a positive impression of yourself, encouraging student participation, modeling your style, and clarifying items in your syllabus. We include a discussion of the first day in this unit on planning because this day is a kind of meta-class that previews what the semester will be like. You reveal your plan to your students and begin to implement that plan.

Even after many years of teaching, teachers get a little nervous when facing a class for the first time. One solution is to write your name on the chalkboard, hand out the syllabus, make a reading assignment, and leave the room, thus postponing your nervousness to the next class. But you can do better than that. Good teachers use various approaches on the first day, depending on their style and the strategies that will be used in the course. For example, if a major strategy will be discussion, one suggestion is to include discussion in your first class.. McKeachie (2002, Chapter 3) has some good suggestions that may work for you, including the use of "ice breakers" and problem posting.

There is great variety in the types of activities you might pursue, and this variety is shaped by one's teaching style, personality, and views on student learning. For instance, Jim has students complete a Background Questionnaire that asks them things like their hometown, hobbies, and favorite TV show. He then uses this as a basis for students introducing themselves to the class (when the class is small) or identifying students with shared interests (large classes). He also tells students some (not too personal) things about himself.

Most recently, Mary has taught blended courses with some in-class sessions and other sessions completely online. Prior to the first in-class session, she introduces herself online to the students and asks students to introduce themselves and share up to three features or experiences that make them unique. This information is used in the first in-class session which always begins with a group activity intended to introduce the focus of the course.

Whatever your style, we advise coming to class early on the first day. Being the first person that students see and greet communicates that you are approachable and accountable and excited about the upcoming semester. Moreover, it conveys an interest in them as individuals. Of course, whatever first day practice you pursue should be consistent with your teaching philosophy.

Perhaps the most important thing that we do on the first day is to begin to learn the students' names. As they used to say on the old "Cheers" television show, you feel welcome where everybody knows your name. Not only does this help to build better relationships with students, it also helps to identify students when there are problems. In small classes this task is done easily by rehearsing the names during class and making associations with students' physical and behavioral characteristics. In large classes, Jim takes photographs of students in groups of six, records the names on each photo, and rehearses them at home while referring to

the Background Questionnaires. This has worked for Jim in classes of up to 100, although without regular rehearsal you might forget about 30% of the names by the end of the semester. Students are pleased when they see teachers make this kind of effort. Business must also be pursued on your first day. For instance, McKeachie (2002), and other experts on teaching suggest explaining your policies to students, clarifying your expectations for the course to prevent problems, and introducing the subject matter in a novel way. At the end of your first class, stay in the room for a few minutes to help students who have questions or problems.

There are many resources that contain additional suggestions on how to prepare for and to conduct the first day of class. These include websites such as The University of Toronto's Center for Teaching Support and Innovation and books such as *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Bain, 2004) and *A week-by-week guide to your first semester of college teaching* (Lang, 2008).

Activity: Revised notions of the first day of class.

Based on your thoughts both before and after reading this section, revise and record your views of how the first day of class should run. Pay particular attention to the strengths and limits of your personality and your most important course objectives and teaching philosophies. Try being creative and provide a memorable first day experience.

Looking Ahead

We hope your first day of class goes well. Then you can look forward to the rest of the semester. The following units are intended to help you put your teaching methods into practice, assess your students' learning, deal with problems, evaluate your teaching, and contemplate your future as a teacher.

References

Altman, H. B., & and Cashin, W. E. (1992). *Writing a syllabus.* IDEA paper No.27. Manhattan, KS: Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development.

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl. D. R. (Eds.) *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* (Abridged edition). New York: Longman, 2001.

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers. (2ⁿᵈ ed.).* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Becker, A. H., & Calhoon, S. K. (1999). What introductory psychology students attend to on a course syllabus. *Teaching of Psychology, 26*, 6-11.

Benassi, V. A., Jordan, E. A., & Harrison, L. M. (1994). Using teaching modules to train and supervise graduate TAs. In Lewis, K. G. (Ed.). *The TA experience: Preparing for multiple roles.* Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Bloom, B. S. (Ed.).(1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives. Handbook I: Cognitive domain.* New York: David McKay.

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching, 2ⁿᵈ edition.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dewey, R. A. (1999). Finding the right introductory psychology textbook. In Perlman, B., McCann. L. I., & McFadden, S. H. (Eds.). *Lessons learned: Practical advice for the teaching of psychology.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Society.

Green, R. J. (2007). On taking attendance. *APS Observer, 20*, 33-36.

Griggs, R. A. (1999). Introductory psychology textbooks: Assessing levels of difficulty. *Teaching of Psychology, 26,* 248-253.

Griggs. R. A., Jackson, S. L., Christopher, A. N., & Marek, P. (1999). Introductory psychology textbooks: An objective analysis and update. *Teaching of Psychology, 26,* 182-189.

Gronlund, N. E. (1970). *Stating behavioral objectives for classroom instruction.* New York: The Macmillan Company.

Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S., & Masia, B. B.(1964). *Taxonomy of educational objectives. Handbook II: Affective domain.* New York: David McKay. Mager, R. F. (1962). *Preparing instructional objectives.* Palo Alto, CA: Fearon Publishers.

Lang, J. M. (2008). *A week-by-week guide to your first semester of college teaching.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McKeachie, W. J. (2002). *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers.* (11th edition). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

McGovern, T. V. (2000). *The art & science of course planning.* Unpublished manuscript.

Nilson, L. B. (2007). *The graphic syllabus and the outcomes map: Communicating your course.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

O'Brien, J. G., Millis, B. J., Cohen, M. W., & Diamond, R. M. (2008). *The Course syllabus: A learner-centered approach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass-Anker Publishers.

Palladino, J. J., Hill, G. W., IV., & Norcross, J. C. (1999). Using extra credit. In B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, & S. H. McFadden (Eds.), Lessons learned: Practical advice for the teaching of psychology (57-60). Washington: American Psychological Society.

Perlman, B., McCann. L. I., & McFadden, S. H. (Eds.). *Lessons learned: Practical advice for the teaching of psychology.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Perlman, B., & McCann, L. I. (2005). Dealing with students missing exams and in-class assignments. *APS Observer, 18,* 27-28, 34, 36.

Rainey, H. G. (2001). A reflection on Herbert Simon: A satisficing search for significance.

    Administration and Society, 33, 491-507.

Sikorski, J. F., Rich, K., Saville, B. K., Buskist, W., Davis, S. F., & Drogan, O.

(2002). Student use of their introductory textbooks. *Teaching of Psychology, 29*, 312-313.