

Defining Features: Survey Course

Key Features

A survey course is typically a course of broad disciplinary perspective. Often, the survey can incorporate different aspects and content from a specific field, but can also include content from other disciplines for which all of the content may share common objectives. Survey courses can be introductory in nature and may serve to expose students to material that is foundational for continued study in the discipline, or can be a stand-alone course after which students may not encounter the discipline again. These courses are sometimes specifically for non-majors in the discipline, but can also be included in the course of study for discipline majors.

Key Design Considerations

Some key questions to consider when designing a survey course:

- What are the goals and objectives faculty agree can be related in a single course that may represent their discipline?
- Is the survey course intended to be discipline-specific or interdisciplinary?
- If more than one discipline is involved, do all stakeholders have consensus of goals, objectives and content?
- To what extent does each of the involved disciplines have a stake in this particular survey course?
- What structural framework for the course will accommodate the expected class sizes?

Contextual Variations

Discipline specific survey courses often function as foundational to that course of study whereas multiple discipline survey courses tend to be identified as general education courses to expose students to disciplines that are related by other means. For example, a survey course in humanities may barrow content from philosophy, theology and history to create a specifically designed experience integrating the three disciplines. In a more unified approach to science, a survey course may address content from biology, chemistry and physics.

Core courses or courses designed to create a common student experience may be designed as survey courses, allowing students to be involved in a common course or group of courses while exploring different disciplines and deciding on majors.

Selected Resources

Erickson, L. O. (2009). Skills and content: New designs for the survey course. *The French Review*, 946-961.

Kapp, J. L., Slater, T. F., Slater, S. J., Lyons, D. J., Manhart, K., Wehunt, M. D., & Richardson, R. M. (2011). Impact of redesigning a large-lecture introductory earth science course to increase student achievement and streamline faculty workload. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 8(4), 23-36. <https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v8i4.4196>

Tobias, S. (1990). *They're not dumb, they're different* (Vol. 101). Tucson, AZ: Research Corporation.

Walling, R. (1942). Book requirements of survey courses. *The Library Quarterly*, 12(1), 75-93.