Backward Design Process

TEACH ONLINE: DO IT YOURSELF (DIY) RESOURCES

Overview:

Backwards design is simply an approach to course design that begins with the end in mind. This document addresses:

- The Backward Design Process
- Student Learning Outcomes & Module Objectives
- Alignment

Who should consider using the Backward Design Process?
Anyone designing an online or hybrid course on their own or with an Office of Online Education course development team.

What is it best used for?
Ensuring that there is alignment between the course student learning outcomes, module objectives, assessment instruments, learning experiences and instruction.

Approximate time for completion
The time required varies depending on the individual(s) developing the course, the subject matter, and the amount of existing materials that are appropriate for use in an online course.

Backward Design Process

Instructions
There are 3 simple steps to backwards design:

1. Identify the desired results
2. Determine the acceptable evidence
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction

The articles and videos below will provide a more in depth information about the Backward Design Process and applying it to your own online or hybrid course development.

Tutorials

- Understanding by Design, *Chapter 1: What is Backward Design?* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.
- Backward Design Process, YouTube Video
- Educational Innovation at UW-Madison: The "Backward Design" Framework on YouTube

Student Learning Outcomes & Module Objectives

When designing an online course, best practice is to identify and list the objectives for each module, in addition to the SLOs for the course as a whole. Module objectives help students understand what they will know and be able to do as a result of completing a specific module. It helps students understand not just what they will learn, but what is expected of them to demonstrate that they have learned it.

Backward Design Process

TEACH ONLINE: DO IT YOURSELF (DIY) RESOURCES

Alignment

Alignment is a best practice of online course design. All of the instructional content (teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessments) included in the module should be aligned in order to reinforce one another and designed to ensure that students are able to achieve the module objectives.

Backwards design is a good means of ensuring alignment. The Eberly Center at Mellon University recommends that instructors who are trying to align their learning objectives, assessments, and instructional strategies, should ask themselves the following three questions:

- **"Learning objectives:** What do I want students to know how to do when they leave this course?
- **Assessments:** What kinds of tasks will reveal whether students have achieved the learning objectives I have identified?
- **Instructional strategies:** What kinds of activities in and out of class will reinforce my learning objectives and prepare students for assessments?" (Carnegie Mellon University, 2016)

When designing your online course, we recommend that you ask two more questions:

- **Rigor:** Are the module objectives written with an appropriate level of rigor?
  You want to ensure that the level of rigor is appropriate for the level of the course, the specific topic(s) you are teaching in the module, and what point in the semester the module occurs (beginning, middle, or towards the end).
  If you have not written learning objectives or outcomes before, Bloom's Taxonomy can be very helpful in determining an appropriate level of cognition and rigor, when determining and writing learning objectives for modules.
- **SLO alignment:** How do the module objectives support student achievement of the SLO's?
  If you have taught face-to-face courses before then you are probably familiar with student learning outcomes (SLOs). The module objectives should be written to ensure that students completing the course achieve the SLOs. As we mentioned above, the module content is also aligned to the module objectives. This ensures that the content in each module is aligned to the SLOs.

Additional Resources

- The UNLV Quick Guide to Writing SLO's.If you have never written student learning outcomes or module objectives before, this handy guide from the UNLV Office of Assessment will give you a quick overview of the basics.
- Arizona State University's Learning Objectives Builder. This online tool walks you through the process of writing measurable outcomes and learning objectives.

- The Colorado College's Revised Bloom's Taxonomy web page can be useful when you are trying to determine SLO's or module objectives.
- The five University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs) define what all UNLV students should know and be able to do when they graduate.

Please Keep in Mind:

Accessibility Considerations
The Office of Accessibility Resources provides information and training for accessibility of digital teaching and learning content. Visit: https://www.unlv.edu/accessibility.

Copyright Considerations
Faculty must ensure that any content they include within an online or hybrid course does not violate copyright protections. For more information please visit:
https://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright and https://guides.library.unlv.edu/copyright.

References

Carnegie Mellon University (2016). Align Assessments, Objectives, Instructional Strategies. [online] cmu.edu. Available at: https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/alignment.html [Accessed 18 Feb. 2019].

Wiggins, G., McTighe, J., & Ebrary, Inc. (2005). Understanding by design (Expanded 2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.