

## Conceptualize a Course / Teaching Workshop for Graduate Students

Joseph Heathcott

For all of us, building a course is a craft that we labor to improve though rarely master. And regardless of the stage of your career, it is always worth revisiting basic principles of course development. Teaching, after all, is a creative practice that requires constant reflection.

Over the semester, we invite you to conceptualize and build a course in your field. By the end of this assignment, you should have a fully developed and annotated syllabus, with a description, learning goals, course policies, assignments, and a detailed weekly schedule with readings and other materials.

There are many routes to building strong courses, but we have identified a few useful steps to guide you along the way. The first step is to collect syllabi in your field. Ask your friends, professors, fellow graduate students, and anyone else to share their syllabi with you. Do not hesitate to write scholars in your field who teach at other universities to ask if they would share their syllabi.

By November 7th, you should have a document that responds to the prompts below.

1. Tell a story. A simple, elegant story. Every course tells a story, and is part of a larger narrative we call the curriculum. A course organizes and presents information, builds skills and confidence in students, promotes inquiry and discovery, and creates an environment for the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the world. What is the big idea of your course? What are the large goals--not specific learning outcomes, but the big hopes? What do you hope students will know and be able to do coming out of the course that they didn't going into it?
2. Establish the context of your course. What kind of learning environment is this: a research university, trade school, liberal arts college, professional program, community college, labor union extension school, special summer program? Who are your students and where are they coming from? Do they live in dorms? Are they commuters? What are their lives like?
3. Position the course within a curricular framework. Where does it fit in the longer arc of student learning? Is it a course that prepares them for other courses, or does it stand alone? How does it relate to other courses with similar topics and approaches? Would preparation of the course benefit from conversation with colleagues in other disciplines or fields? What skills and capabilities do you hope students will have coming into the course? Since one course can't do everything, where will students acquire additional knowledge and advanced skills?
4. Define the basic parameters of your course. Is it required or elective? If required, it is part of a major or a broader college core curriculum? Is it introductory, intermediate, or advanced? Is it focused on knowledge in a discipline or is it a topical course with broad appeal across disciplines? Is it primarily content-driven, skills-oriented, or geared toward production--or some combination? What is the signature pedagogy: lecture, seminar, studio, laboratory, or some combination? Why does the course employ the particular pedagogy you've identified?
5. Describe the main aspects of the course. What is the topic of the course? What are its spatial and temporal limits, and why? What kinds of materials will students investigate? What is the balance between materials selected by the instructor and materials students select for completion of their projects (if applicable)? How will students be evaluated--exams, quizzes, short papers, synthetic papers based on readings, independent or group research projects, art and media productions, exhibits, posters, performances? Will students complete multiple small projects or one large project, and if the latter, how will it be broken into phases?