



TIPSHEET

DESIGNING A COURSE

Developing or re-designing a course

Though the administrative process for proposing or revising a course will vary by department and division, the course design process can be a valuable practice for instructors and students. Newly-designed courses can demonstrate commitment to improving teaching in your department or discipline (and can form an important component of your teaching dossier), and help to ensure that individual courses reflect new developments in research or program requirements or in approaches to established topics.

Once you have established a topic or focus for your course ask yourself these general questions:

- What do I hope students will know or be able to do at the conclusion of the course?
- What previous knowledge of or experience with the topic or methodologies of the course will students need in order to study this topic?
- How will this course fit into the department's programs of study?

As well as some questions about logistics:

- At what level is this course best offered? Is it best offered as a full or half year course, a seminar or a lecture course?
- How many hours a week will be required?
- Is this course a degree requirement or an elective?
- Will this course require additional labs or tutorials?
- Do the content, goals, or structure of the course require a specific type of room (seminar, lecture, lab?), limited enrolment, specific prerequisites, or skills?
- Will I have a Teaching Assistant? If so, what role will he or she play (marking, leading tutorials?)

Discuss your conclusions with the appropriate administrative office.

Content

- Review course outlines on similar topics from your own department or from other institutions. (Explore the Syllabus Finder at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/tools/syllabi/> or other syllabus repositories specific to your field).
- Consider means to organize the material: Chronologically? Thematically? From the broad to the specific? Problem-centred? Around particular sources or methods of approaching the topic?
- Consider means to incorporate inquiry- and research-based activities into the course, including ways to incorporate your own research.

Assessment

- Consult your administrative office regarding any assessment requirements or policies (for example, some first-year courses require an oral component; others require final exams).
- Consider the amount of time and any additional resources (e.g. TAs) that you will be able to devote to assessment.
- Think back to your goals for the course, and consider what types of work (e.g. literature reviews, written reflections, research design) might best help you meet and assess these goals. Be creative with the types of assessment you choose (see, for example, some of the suggestions at: <http://library.queensu.ca/webisi/alternative.htm>), but also consider that you can design traditional assignments in innovative ways:
 - o For project and written assignments, see: http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/teaching_tips/Other/ad_checklist.pdf.pdf
 - o For tips on designing multiple choice exams, see: http://ltc.umanitoba.ca/multiple_choice/home or http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~murdockj/teaching/MCQ_basic_tips.pdf
- Review some tips for designing assessment to encourage academic integrity and discourage plagiarism. See: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/faculty> and www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity

Texts & required readings

- Decide how much reading will be assigned each week and what kinds of readings (textbooks, primary sources, journal articles, popular non-fiction) will most help students achieve your goals for the course.
- Look for new and interesting texts and articles to include by reviewing recent book reviews and journals in the field and in related areas, and consult librarians and colleagues for suggestions.
- Consult librarians to see whether related special resources (archives, letters) are available in the university or another local library.
- You may choose to put together a course reading packet. Remember to allow enough time to gather the material, obtain copyright clearance and have the packages put together and printed, and be aware of relevant deadlines, usually about one month before classes begin – see <http://www.utpprint.com>.

Course Outline

- Review other course outlines (from within and outside your department/program) for effective and innovative ideas for how to organize and communicate course details and requirements.
- Consult the Office of Teaching Advancement's tip sheet "Developing course outlines," available at <http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/resources/teachingissues/DevelopingCourseOutlines.pdf>.

Other Issues

Consider whether your course might benefit from the use of academic technology, including a course Blackboard site or website, discussion boards, or audio or visual materials.

Consider whether you would like to use Turnitin.com for your assignment submissions. For more information, see: <http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/turnitin/index.html>.

Additional Resources

Resources from the University of Toronto:

Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, University of Toronto. (2004). Information For Instructors Teaching Undergraduate Courses. Retrieved from www.ecf.utoronto.ca/apsc/registrar/instructors/index.html

Office of Student Affairs, Faculty of Arts & Science, University of Toronto. (n.d.) Faculty handbook: Course information for instructors. Retrieved from <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/main/faculty/resources/faculty/acaresources>

Office of Teaching Advancement, University of Toronto (n.d.). Academic integrity at the University of Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity>

Proctor, M. (Co-ordinator, Writing Support, University of Toronto) (2008). Designing assignments and presenting them to students. Retrieved from <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/faculty/designing-assignments>

Other resources:

Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington. (n.d.). Resources: Course design. Retrieved from <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/designtools.html>

Includes links to a number of resources from the University of Washington on topics related to course design, as well as to several case studies describing course development and re-design experiences.

Davis, B.G. (1993). Preparing to teaching the large lecture course. In *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/largelecture.html>

Teaching Support Services, University of Guelph. (n.d.). Course planning and design. Retrieved from <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/resources/idres/packagecpd.html>