

How To Series

The Basics

February 2014

Unit/Session Planning

Why Planning Matters

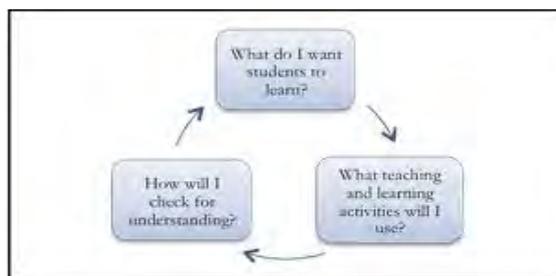
As instructors take advantage of new technologies, new learning methods, and multiple ways of assessing student learning, planning becomes increasingly critical and more complex. It is important to guide students' success in a course by helping structure wise usage of time. Good unit/session planning provides an intentional path for the use of time both in and out of class. "Faculty who teach their courses with clarity and organization, and provide prompt and formative feedback have a positive impact on the learning and development of their students. being, leadership, openness to diversity, and academic motivation" (Blaich & Wise, 2008 cited in NSSE 2013).

Students, like faculty, lead very busy lives and highly value their time. Like faculty, they don't have time to waste. Students respect and appreciate teachers who display a sense of organization. This includes organization of the course, the content, the assignments, and perhaps, most importantly, organization of the time in and out of class.

Students derive their motivation for the course and content, in large part, from their interaction with their instructor. The disorganized teacher tends to disrupt student motivation. Thoughtful, well designed plans for learning lead to student engagement and boost motivation. Intentional plans also result in faculty feeling more confident.

Planning

A unit or session plan is a road map depicting what and how students will learn, and how instructors will measure that learning has occurred. Unit/session planning can be viewed as a 3 step process, (please refer to the figure below by the University of Michigan and the 3-column figure at the bottom of the page).



Step 1 (Column 1): Develop A Set Of Learning Outcomes

A learning outcome is a statement describing what skills and knowledge your students will be able to demonstrate by the end of a unit or class session. Learning outcomes generally answer two basic questions:

- a) What are the important and difficult topics of the unit/session?
- b) What do I want students to be able to do or know at the end of this unit/session?

(Continued on the next page)

Outcomes	Pedagogy	Assessment

Benjamin Bloom (1956) and his student, Lorin Anderson (Anderson and Sosniak, 1996), addressing the cognitive domain of learning, provide a hierarchy of learning levels that includes (from the bottom up): memorizing, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Consider which level(s) is appropriate for each outcome. A set of active verbs for each level of learning is found [here](#). These verbs can be most helpful in writing student learning outcomes.

Student learning outcome statements should begin: "By the end of this unit/session, students will...."

(Music example) "...students will demonstrate knowledge of musical scale structure."

(Information systems example) "...students will be able to diagram an information system process."

Once you have your outcomes composed, the next action is to prioritize them based on importance. This will allow you to reflect upon which are most important and plan the time, both in and out of class, accordingly.

Step 2 (Column 2): Plan Specific Learning Activities Reflecting The Outcomes

There are [three basic types of teaching and learning](#) (Peters and Anderson, 2008):

- Type I: Passive, lecture style
- Type II: Questioning, faculty led group discussion and problem solving
- Type III: Co-learning (students and the teacher learning together)

The use of these three teaching and learning types is a function of the level of the class, and the balance needed across all three. Types II and III are examples of active engaged learning which has been shown in 30 years of research to be typically more effective than pure Type I in promoting deep and sustained learning.

That isn't to say that presentation / lecturing is inappropriate. It is the **balance of all three**, given the course context, that leads to excellence in teaching and learning. This [link to our site](#) provides numerous examples of active engaged learning activities.

Consider which learning activities work best for which outcomes. If you would like further information on types or the opportunity to brainstorm how to balance the three types of teaching and learning, please [contact the TennTLC](#) for a planning consultation.

Step 3 (Column 3): Assessing Learning

A critical piece to unit/session planning is to develop means of assessing whether students are learning or not. Within a unit/session, [formative feedback](#) can be used to gauge learning. What questions can you ask students to check their learning? [Classroom Assessment Techniques](#) (CATS) can be very helpful and there are many of these tools available online (e.g., have students write down clearest point/muddiest point). [Quizzes](#), a form of summative feedback, can be beneficial as they hold students accountable for [preparation](#). There are many other forms of summative feedback that are described at <http://tenntlc.utk.edu/summative-assessment/>.

An example is provided on the table below.

Outcomes	Pedagogy	Assessment
Students will be able to accurately employ diagramming language to describe an information system (IS) process	(Students will already have learned programming symbols and their meaning.) An extensive case study will be provided and students will work in teams to diagram specific parts of the IS process model.	A homework assignment will be assigned. Students will be tested individually on a midterm exam which provides a comparable IS case.

Resources:

- http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea_Paper_42.pdf
- http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2_5
- NSSE Annual Report. (2013). A Fresh Look at Student Engagement. Page 18. Retrieved from: http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2013_Results/pdf/NSSE_2013_Annual_Results.pdf#page=11