

Guide to Curriculum Development

Before a department can undertake the reviewing of a curriculum or a program, efforts must be made to ensure that changes made to existing curricula and programs meet the overall objectives and goals of the program itself. The process of developing a new curriculum is one that must be undertaken methodically. It is important that departmental colleagues reach a consensus regarding fundamental aspects of the program. Below is a list of areas that should be considered once a decision is made to develop a curriculum for a department or unit.

1. Philosophy

Record your beliefs, assumptions, and values related to your program and your teaching. You might begin this process by examining your department's mission statement, reviewing professional accreditation requirements, or by soliciting feedback from departmental colleagues. The department should arrive at a consensus regarding the program's philosophy.

2. Students

Review the characteristics of the students in your program. List common learning characteristics that are instrumental in determining the nature of your courses of instruction. For example, students may speak English as a second language or may be responsible for families.

3. Goals & Objectives

List the goals and objectives of your program (goals are more general; objectives are more specific). This list should include the knowledge, skills, and attitudes/values that you expect students to have when they leave the program and the university. For example:

- students will be able to critically review research articles in the discipline
- students will be able to develop and implement computer simulations

4. Structure and Sequencing

Review each individual course in the program to determine its contribution to individual goals and objectives. Also consider which course(s) inform other courses and the sequence in which students take the courses and/or are required to take the courses. Try to develop a "flow chart" or a hierarchical diagram which illustrates the relationships among courses in the program and how they lead to overall program goals. This analysis might reveal gaps, redundancies, or illogical sequences in the program (for example, program goals that are not addressed through specific courses; unnecessary prerequisites, and so on). If so, changes in course syllabi should be addressed.

5. Instructional Strategies

List instructional strategies (methods and materials) used for each course. Include information on: a) lecture and questioning, b) group work, c) online components (if any), d) library readings and e) textbook and assigned readings. These strategies should be analyzed based on the extent to which they meet the needs of the student population and match the program goals and objectives.

The primary consideration here is whether the methods and materials align with outlined learning expectations. If students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of a particular skill, teaching strategies must provide opportunities for student to “do” that skill. For additional advice concerning instructional strategies, please contact the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

6. Evaluation of Learning

Instructors should list the techniques used to evaluate student learning. For instance, a) essays, b) multiple choice tests, c) group work, d) independent projects. As with strategies, these techniques should be analyzed as to the degree to which they meet the needs of the student population, match instructional methods and materials and match program and wider university goals. Evaluations should not only reflect the content of the course and program, but also the nature and type of expected learning.

7. Evaluation of Instruction

How is the effectiveness of instruction in the course/program evaluated? This is as much a part of the curriculum as evaluation of learning. These techniques should be listed. For example, a) student ratings of instruction, b) review of student work, c) anecdotal comments, letters, and records, and d) peer review of course outlines. The department should ensure that all aspects of the program are regularly and systematically reviewed for the purpose of making changes and improvements in the program.