A Guide to Backward Design of Courses

1. Identify overall goals
2. Specify learning outcomes
3. Determine appropriate evidence
4. Plan learning experiences & instruction

Goals describe the instructor's aims, wishes, or aspirations for students in the course.

- Goals are general: What do you want your students to have retained 3 years after the course?
- What provocative questions are worth pursuing? What big ideas are worthy of understanding?
- What new capacity is being sought?
- What does the program or outside agency specify as required goals for the course?

Each goal is then broken into more specific learning outcomes.

Student learning outcomes provide concrete descriptions of people performing a task.

- Student learning outcomes (SLO) are observable and concrete and usually fall into one of three categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- There is a logical relationship between goals and outcomes: outcomes make progress toward goals observable by identifying actions that will demonstrate successful completion or performance of a task.
- Is the SLO specific and observable? Is it a result of learning in the class?

How will you know if your students have achieved the learning outcomes?

- How will you know that students really understand? How will you ask students to demonstrate their learning? What will you accept as evidence to document and validate that a learning outcome has been achieved?
- Remember that multiple measures give a more valid assessment.
- How will you ensure that the assessment methods and media you choose provide equitable opportunity for all your students to demonstrate what they have learned?

What instruction, experiences do you need to provide your students in order for them to achieve your learning outcomes?

- What information do students need in order to be prepared for the assessments? What do they need to do or experience or practice?
- How will you make learning both effective and engaging given your SLOs and the evidence you need?
- What sequence of activity will best prepare students to achieve your desired results?
- Ensure accessibility of all information and activities.