Planning Your Course in Moodle

To assist faculty members with designing their new course quickly, the eLearning Department has Moodle Course Shell Templates available for faculty members to use that incorporates many of the design principles discussed in this series of articles. These course shells are also based on the iDesign courses developed for McNeese's RN to BSN program. If you would like to design your new online course as you read through this series of articles contact Wendi Prater (wprater@mcneese.edu) to set up your course shell in Moodle.

In this article, we will review the basics of pedagogy and instructional design. They are important as you set up your educational programs and build courses in Moodle. If you fail to take pedagogy and instructional design into consideration early in the process, you run the risk of having to rebuild your courses later, which can be very tedious, time-consuming, and expensive (in terms of labor). So, it's a great idea to bookmark this section and return to it often, each time you begin to develop a new program, course template, demo course, or individual courses.

Let's start with a fundamental question: what would you like your students to be able to do after they complete your course? It sounds like a simple question, but it's the key to setting up an effective structure for your Moodle course and also to select the best possible resources, activities, and assessments.

As you plan your course, it is important to keep in mind what you want your students to learn, and then, how you would like them to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. With these things in mind, you can plan your course so that it has a clear, logical structure and the elements tie neatly together and reinforce each other.

We will also learn how to use course-level learning outcomes as the foundation for your course. Using course-level learning outcomes means that we are starting with the "big picture" view. Then, we'll take a closer look at each of the sections in your course and learn how to create more specific learning outcomes that will serve as the framework that ties the big-picture goals to the resources, activities, and assessments of your course. With such a solid foundation and framework, you'll never feel lost or frustrated as you build your course. Instead, you'll feel confident as you select your course's resources, activities, and assessments.

In this section of training, we'll discuss the following topics:

- Writing and using learning outcomes spanning the course
- The importance of outlining learning outcomes
- Ideal course structure
- Universal Design for Learning
- Resources and activities selection
- Effective assessment strategies

Learning outcomes

One of the best ways to start planning your course is by thinking about what you'd like your students to be able to do when they successfully complete it. At the same time, it is good to envision how they should demonstrate their new knowledge or skill. What your students are able to do as a result of taking the course are the learning outcomes of the course. Both terms refer to the notion of a course that is focused not just on the content to be covered, but also on the skills, abilities, beliefs, and attitudes that result upon completion of the course.

Learning outcomes encompass the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the students should gain on completing the course. Learning outcomes are known by other terms as well. They are often referred to as course outcomes, course objectives, learning objectives, and student learning outcomes. In all cases, they are important because they shape every aspect of your course, from selecting content and activities to creating assessments that determine

whether or not the course or learning program was effective.

As you consider what you would like your students to do, you are incorporating a student-centric approach that puts more emphasis on how they should do something than what they should do, which results in a more active approach. Instead of thinking about what you'd like to teach, you're considering how to facilitate the learning process.

Writing learning outcomes

Because you are focusing on student performance and bearing in mind what you'd like your students to do and how they should be able to demonstrate their new knowledge, skills, and abilities, your outcomes need to be written with the plan of action in mind.

So, as you go through the process of determining what the learning outcomes should be for your course, jot them down. You may come up with a long list initially, that may be adjusted later. Just make sure that you eventually select the ones that best reflect what you'd like your students to achieve. We'd like to follow best practices for instructional design, so we recommend that your final list should contain not more than six or seven outcomes.

To transform your informal list of desired outcomes to formal learning outcomes statements, you may benefit from using the S. M. A. R. T. approach, which was first developed by George T. Doran. Since this approach was first published, it has become very popular in many applications that need to measure goals and outcomes. The criteria are very handy for making sure that your statements are complete. Here are the S. M. A. R. T. guidelines, and where your outcomes should be:

- Specific: Make sure that the desired outcomes are not too broad
- Measurable: Include a quantity or a way to measure progress
- Attainable: Your desired outcomes need to be achievable
- Relevant: Make sure that the desired outcomes relate to your course
- Time bound: Make it clear by when the objective should be achieved

As you write your S. M. A. R. T. outcomes, be sure to avoid verbs or phrases such as "understand", "appreciate", "know about", "familiarize yourself with", and "develop an awareness of". Instead, use active verbs and phrases that connote measurable results, such as "identify", "describe", "analyze", "evaluate", and "create". Look back at the guidelines, and you'll see that they may not be measurable and may also have other deficiencies.

Bloom's Taxonomy

As you start to shape your learning outcomes, many teachers and course designers find it very useful to use Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide. Benjamin Bloom was an educational psychologist who helped develop a classification scheme for learning objectives that reflects how to show mastery in different skills, knowledge areas, and abilities.

The result—Bloom's Taxonomy—is a series of six different categories of skills, which ascend from the most basic types to the most complex ones.

There are six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, which ascend from the lowest to the highest cognitive skills as follows:

- Knowledge/remembering
- Comprehension/understanding
- Application/applying
- Analysis/analyzing
- Evaluation/evaluating
- Synthesis/creating

You can use Bloom's Taxonomy to create your learning outcomes using verbs that describe student learning. Review a charts or download a PDF for future use. Bloom's Taxonomy can help you take a building block approach to teaching and learning by starting with the least complex cognitive skill category (Knowledge/remembering) and then moving up through the levels so that by the end of the course, your students are able to synthesize and create the information.

After you have created the six or seven learning outcomes for your course, keep in mind that you're aiming for outcomes at a variety of different levels. Then, you will need to assemble them in ascending order of complexity. Doing so will help you organize the way you present the material and select your resources and Moodle activities. It will also create scaffolding in which your students use the material they've just learned to ascend to the next level.

Adding Student Learning Objectives to Moodle Course

In the McNeese course shells, student learning outcomes are added into the Course Orientation book that is located at the top of the course dashboard in Moodle. To edit the book, follow these instructions. The student learning outcomes are located on the third page in the Course Orientation.

Student learning outcomes are also included in each module of the course shell. At the top of each module in the course, you will see a book labeled "Introduction". This book introduces students to the module. The first page of the book includes sections to add your module student learning outcomes. To edit the book, follow these instructions.

Next Steps? > Continue by reading the next article in this series Organizing Your Course.

We have also included articles to help with classroom management strategies to this knowledgebase. Also, check out recommendations for transitioning your on-campus class to an online class fast.