

Developing Effective Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Maps for Academic Programs
Workshop by Linda Suskie
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Breakout Exercises

Faculty and staff at colleges and universities—public and private throughout this region—are frustrated. Newly hired faculty and co-curricular staff—whether full-time or adjunct—are experts in their discipline but have no training on how to fulfill faculty responsibilities of teaching, curriculum design, assessment, leadership, etc.

“Austin University” has decided to address this by offering a 15-credit graduate certificate program to current and prospective faculty throughout the state. For better or worse, the program is titled, “Higher Education Faculty Certificate” and it consists of five courses:

- HE 710 Teaching Today’s Higher Education Student
- HE 720 Curriculum Development in Higher Education
- HE 730 Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education
- HE 740 Faculty Roles, Responsibilities, and Leadership
- HE 800 Advanced Studies in Higher Education Faculty Roles and Responsibilities

The person at your table whose birthday is closest to today (coming or going) will play the role of the director of this program and answer any questions about program purpose, course content, etc. Austin University has hired the rest of you, all renowned curriculum design experts, to help the director develop learning outcomes and a curriculum map for the program.

1. Draft **one** learning outcome for the program. Make sure **it will be addressed in at least two courses** and that it meets the traits of effective learning outcomes:

- An outcome
- Clear to colleagues and students
- Observable
- Focuses on skills, not just knowledge
- Relevant (What’s **most** important for faculty to be able to do beyond what they learned in their discipline?)
- Rigorous yet realistic
- Neither too broad nor too specific

2. Complete the program curriculum map for the program.

3. On your own, brainstorm next steps in developing meaningful program learning outcomes and curriculum maps at your institution. Consider the following questions:

A. Which of the following resources might help you identify potential program learning outcomes?

- Your college's mission statement, vision statement, and strategic goals
- Syllabi of current courses, especially capstone experiences
- Transcripts, which can be analyzed to identify the courses that students choose to fulfill program and general education requirements, when they typically take them, and the sequence in which they take them
- Goals or standards espoused by relevant disciplinary associations and accreditors
- Surveys or interviews of prospective employers of graduates of your college or program
- Admissions criteria for academic programs your students pursue after program completion
- LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes (www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes)
- Degree Qualifications Profile (degreeprofile.org)
- VALUE rubrics (www.aacu.org/value-rubrics), which offer good, concrete definitions and explications of some notoriously fuzzy learning goals

B. Which of the following might be good questions for faculty to discuss?

- What is this course, learning experience, or discipline all about? What do we value about our discipline? What are the most important things that students learn in this course, program, or learning experience? Why are those things important?
- What does our disciplinary association (or major authorities in our discipline) think students should learn?
- Why do we offer or require this course, program, learning experience, or general education requirement? Why is it important that students study this? How do we want this experience to prepare them for or enrich whatever they do after graduation?
- What do we expect of students in this course, program, learning experience, or general education requirement?
- What do we want *all* students to get out of this program or general education requirement, regardless of the particular course, track, or professor they elect?
- How does this course relate to other courses in this program or general education curriculum? How does this program or general education requirement relate to other disciplines that students may be studying?
- What do we want students who successfully complete this course, program, learning experience, or general education requirement to know or be able to do five or ten years after graduating?
- What do our students do after they graduate? What are the most important things they need for success in those pursuits?
- What makes our graduates successful? What makes them attractive to potential employers, graduate programs, and the like?
- If our program prepares students for specific careers, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes do employers look for?

C. How will you aim for consensus on a program's key learning outcomes?

D. Who will draft each program's curriculum map, and how will they do so?

E. How will program faculty vet the curriculum map for accuracy?

F. Who will analyze the curriculum map in terms of the following?

- Is every program learning outcome addressed in multiple program requirements?
- Does the program conclude with an integrative, synthesizing capstone experience?
- Is the curriculum sufficiently focused and simple?
- Does the program use research-informed strategies to help students learn and succeed, such as high-impact practices?

G. How will the analysis of the curriculum map be brought to program faculty for discussion?