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Instructional Designs for Expository Writing Using ACUE Practices

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This document is a compilation of four instructional design and reflection responses submitted during the ACUE course held during the Winter and Spring academic quarters of 2019. Those included are: (1) Establishing powerful learning outcomes; (2) Aligning activities and assignments with course outcomes; (3) Developing and using checklists and rubrics; and (4) Engaging underprepared students. I selected these examples, and present them in this order, as I believe they show a positive progression from early stages of course development to course rubrics and assessments to my overall teaching philosophy and how I think individualized student learning can be realized within a pedagogical framework. First, the redesigned learning outcomes for the course are shown followed by an example of an assignment that has been redesigned to fit those outcomes. Next, the complete rubric for the final research paper of my Social Science 306 course is used as an example of how effective rubrics and checklists have been incorporated into my courses. And finally, a reflection on how I have sought to better engage underprepared students discusses what I did in my courses while also addressing what I plan to do in future courses. These examples serve as only a small sample of the work created during the ACUE coursework. While not included in this document, I also made adjustments to my syllabus to include information on mental health services on campus, incorporated more active learning in the form of quizzes and activities utilizing students' phones, as well as encouraging students to embrace their creativity in their academic pursuits. Overall, I hope to continue refining my teaching practice and to implement the concepts learned throughout the ACUE course.

1. Instructional Design 1A – Establishing Powerful Learning Outcomes

Current Objectives for expository writing course: This class will help students develop their writing skills and increase their awareness of the writing process. The assignments and exercises in this course will emphasize reading comprehension, critical thinking, punctuation, sentence structure, research strategies, and overall form.

New objectives:

1. Students will evaluate and critique sources of knowledge (research papers, news articles, etc.).
2. Students will identify and report on current local, national, and global events related to topics within social science.
3. Students will formulate a research question, integrate critical reading of sources, and produce a research project.

My thoughts:

I tried to make the learning objectives as actionable as possible. The major assignments in this course are focused on these goals. The new objectives are useful to my students since they now are clearly specific to the assignments of the course, so students will be able to see that they actually accomplished those goals/objectives by the end of the course. One learning objective that I would like to develop would be something within the “create” level of cognitive level of learning outcomes. I think since the students will write a final research paper (objective 3), create could be incorporated into this in the form of a presentation, poster, or video.

Because I went through this module in an in-person workshop, another faculty member talked about a paper airplane activity that he does in his course to encourage critical thinking/thinking outside of the box. I have been trying to find ways to teach my students that creativity is still necessary even in academic research, but I appreciated what a unique approach this might be; an assessment not based on specific materials, but thinking, concept building, and student engagement.

Finally, I already tend to focus on critical thinking and remind students regularly of what a certain assignment teaches them in regards to that. With these refined objectives, I will explain at the start of the course (“syllabus day”) how the various course assignments will fulfill those objectives, while also indicating throughout the quarter when giving an assignment, which of the objectives it aligns with.

2. Instructional Practice 1C – Aligning Activities and Assignments with Course Outcomes

Based on the objectives* that I crafted for Module 1A, and the work that was started in Module 1B on aligning assessments with learning outcomes, I decided to design a transparent assignment aligned to your learning outcomes**.

*My department refers to them as learning objectives on the syllabus rather than course outcomes, so that is how I will be referring to them.

**See second page for transparent assignment.

I selected this task as I know it is something my courses have lacked. I generally prepare a form with the basics for assignments (page length, citations, etc.), but I've never provided a detailed explanation of how each assignment relates to the course overall. I'm hoping that will clearer guidelines that are directly related to the course objectives that students will better understand the work required of them and will be more invested in the process.

I will continue crafting transparent assignment guidelines for my courses, so that there is a clear correlation for students between the work I am requiring them to complete and the course as a whole. I also hope that with clearer course objectives and assignments, students will understand how the skills learned in this course can be applied in other areas of their lives as well.

Article Analysis and Critique

Purpose: The first learning objective of the course is “students will evaluate and critique sources of knowledge.

Skills: The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills which are essential for academia and important for everyday life as well.

- Understand the basics of statistical data, and how that can be evaluated.
- Judging and evaluating in order to provide feedback on what could be improved in the article.
- Develop a well-organized and well-reasoned critique of the assigned reading.

Knowledge: This assignment will also provide a general familiarity for topics relevant to the social sciences, specifically, the gender wage gap.

Task: Read the article by June O’Neill (2003), “Catching up: The gender gap in wages, circa 2000”. You will be assessing her article, looking to see if she made a compelling and supported argument. Consider some of the following in your reading of her text:

- How can you assess the value or importance of her argument?
- What is your opinion of O’Neill’s overall argument? (Provide explanation.)
- What conclusion does O’Neill draw, and do you think this is accurate?
- What evidence can you find to support O’Neill’s argument?

Criteria for Success: Write a 4-5 page critique essay of O’Neill’s article, which can include positive or negative critiques. This essay must include the following:

- A brief summary of O’Neill’s paper. No more than 1 paragraph in length.
- A clear thesis and stance. Must either decide that O’Neill’s argument is valid or invalid.
- At least 3 critiques (either positive or negative) of O’Neill.
- Direct quotes and paraphrased portions must have APA citations.

For a full breakdown of the grading for this assignment, see the rubric available on Blackboard. This assignment is worth 50 points.

What were you assessing?	What was your assessment method?	What were the results?	What did you learn?	What are your next steps?
<p>Critical reading/Critical thinking* – one of the course learning objectives</p> <p>*This is one of the most significant skills that students can learn at a university. While I love teaching content, my main goal as an educator is to give students skills and means of applying knowledge in their everyday lives.</p>	<p>A group project that required students to find and compare resources from internet websites and scholarly journals. Together, the students completed a chart with the most significant research listed at the top. Students had to explain why sources were either academic or not, including explanations of data, evidence, support, credibility, etc.</p>	<p>Students did very well on the assignment. They seemed to learn how to work together effectively, while also learning from the project. Overall, each group did exceptionally well on the assignment (about 80% of the class receiving full credit). I also saw results in their other assignments, with some of the highest scores I've seen on the Article Analysis Critique paper I have them write during the quarter.</p>	<p>I learned that students really seem to benefit from group work, especially group work that has such a clear and important goal. Students were able to easily see how this project tied into their later research papers and personal assignments for the course.</p>	<p>I will be most interested to see how this project works in future quarters, and if I continue to see improvement in the research assignments that follow. This was a clear example of learning to apply their critical reading/thinking, to accomplish a task together, and then utilize those skills as they progressed through the remainder of the course.</p>
<p>Research methods – the most significant course learning objective</p>	<p>A final research paper (8-10 pages), where students were required to formulate their own research question, find resources to support it, organize their argument.</p>	<p>Although this is an assignment that has always been required for the course, this is the first time that I had the above project proceed it. And what the data shows is that I had the highest grades on the final research paper of any time I've taught the class before.</p>	<p>Last quarter, students averaged a 90% on the research paper, with 17 of the students receiving a 90% or higher. This quarter, although the average for the class went up only 2% points (to 92%), there were 21 students who received a 90% or higher. While this does not necessarily seem definitive, these classes both performed similarly in the course, being active and attending the course at similar rates. The improvement seems to correlate to the inclusion of the new group project, although, as stated before, that will need to be implemented in future quarters to see if the improvement trend continues.</p>	<p>My next steps are to look at the trends going forward. To keep track of how <u>students</u> do on the above group project, and see if it seems to correlate with continued improvement on the individual research project. Further, incorporating activities that force students to critically think and read in their everyday lives (such as analyzing Facebook posts or news articles) might help them further develop and hone their critical reading/thinking skills. This might also provide a good connection between their academic knowledge and life activities to help them have a vested interest in the learning process.</p>

3. Instructional Design 5B – Developing and Using Rubrics and Checklists

For this module, I chose to redesign the rubric for the final research paper in my expository writing course. I have a rubric that I have been using for years in that course (with minor adjustments here and there), but with these last few modules, I have been working towards better incorporating my new course objectives into the activities and guidelines I use. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to align my rubric with those objectives as well.

The objectives I developed in module 1A are as follows:

1. Students will evaluate and critique sources of knowledge (research papers, news articles, etc.).
2. Students will identify and report on current local, national, and global events related to topics within social science.
3. Students will formulate a research question, integrate critical reading of sources, and produce a research project.

Based on these objectives, I came up with general categories for my rubric. From these categories, I drafted the rubric seen on the second page.

Evaluate sources of knowledge – Research

Formulate a research question – Content/organization

Integrate critical reading of sources – APA Citations

Produce a research project – Grammar, style/voice, introduction/conclusion

Based on this new rubric, I'm hoping that students will 1) have a better understanding of how this assignment connects to the class as a whole and the objectives therein, and 2) feel more invested in the process as they can clearly see how they will be graded.

Before the next quarter, I would also like to create a comprehensive checklist (and likely a transparent guideline similar to the one created for module 1C) for students so that they can easily understand the exact requirements of the assignment.

I've never had students seem particularly interested in the grading rubric, only in the grade, but I'm hoping with a clearly rubric and guidelines that will change.

Course Objective	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Inadequate
Research	Includes background, context, and idea development. Utilizes academic sources throughout.	Idea and context are developed with use of some academic sources.	Idea is development somewhat with use of some academic sources.	Lacks a clear context with <u>a</u> only a few sources (and perhaps not all academic) utilized.	No background context, and few to no academic sources.
Content	Theme/topic is well defined. Clear research question that is thoroughly addressed.	Theme/topic is defined. Research question is present.	Theme/topic is roughly defined. Some of the necessary content is addressed.	Theme/topic is vague. Discusses some ideas but lacks cohesive and relevant content.	Lacks a clear them/topic. Discusses ideas that may be unrelated or unclear.
Organization	Logical and subtle sequencing of ideas through well-developed paragraphs, a clear thesis, and headings.	Information is presented in a logical sequence with some flow between ideas.	Adequate flow of ideas. Lacks headings and clear points.	Lacks clear sequence of information. Few distinct headings.	Lacks sequence of ideas, a clear thesis, and structure.
Citation	Utilizes significant sources with correct format and no errors. Includes more than the required number of academic sources	Cited works are academic but may lack consistent citations.	Few academic sources but may all be cited correctly.	Few cited works. Little to no engagement with sources. Incorrectly cited.	Academic sources are absent.
APA Format	Formatting contains no errors.	Formatting contains few to no errors.	Formatting contains regular errors.	Formatting contains numerous errors.	Lacks formatting.
Introduction & Conclusion	Introduction demonstrates clear topic and subtopics with a clear thesis. Conclusion has a strong review of material and integration of thesis. Insightful discussion of relevance.	Introduction includes key topics/questions and subtopics. Thesis statement included. Conclusion contains evidence related to the thesis and discusses relevance of paper.	Introduction conveys topic and some subtopics. General thesis. Conclusion reviews some evidence related to the thesis. Relevance of paper briefly included.	Introduction presents topic but lacks a clear thesis or subtopics. Conclusion does not summarize research or lacks relevance of paper.	Introduction does not convey topic. No thesis. Conclusion does not summarize evidence or discuss relevance of paper.
Grammar	No grammatical mistakes. Excellent use of transitions and complex sentence structure.	Few grammatical mistakes. Good use of transitions and complex sentence structure.	Some grammatical mistakes or lack of transitions.	Many grammatical mistakes. Word use confusion.	Many grammatical mistakes. Lack of flow. Difficult to understand due to many errors.
Style/Voice	Appropriate for audience and purpose. Shows originality. Word choice is specific, purposeful, dynamic, and varied. Clear, active sentences.	Appropriate for audience and purpose. Word choice is specific and somewhat varied. Sentences are mostly clear and active.	Somewhat appropriate for audience and purpose. Word choice may be general, redundant, or cliched. Unclear sentences including passive voice.	Does not fully address audience and purpose. Word choice is redundant. Unclear sentences.	Inappropriate or does not address audience and purpose. Word choice is excessively redundant. Unclear sentences.

4. Reflection 2E – Engaging underprepared students

Identify students' readiness for learning – use early in-class, nongraded assignments/Assess students early to give them a “date point”

I combined this idea of a non-graded assignment (they received points simply for completing it) with the ideas of module 2C (as I completed that module at the same time as this... I'm behind!) of providing a survey to better learn about my students. Since I teach a writing course, I wanted to have an early assignment to see everyone's writing abilities while also getting to know more about them.

This seemed to be effective because students could see how I would grade a written assignment, but without the stress of knowing that this assignment would receive a specific grade. I was also able to see from their narratives, where each student is coming from, allowing me to tailor some of the course material to their work. When students submit their next written assignment this week, they seem to be more at ease as they know what I expect from their writing.

In the future, I would certainly implement this kind of activity even earlier in the quarter, most likely in week one or two.

Implement practices that support student success – Ensure that assignments and activities prepare students

This quarter, I am focusing much more on meeting students where they are at and helping them to achieve the goals they individually have, rather than setting some vague expectation across the board. I've introduced more variety in the types of assignments (I added the aforementioned narrative and an in-class persuasive essay). I am hoping that with the increase in types of writing, more students will feel they are actually capable of completing this course and are capable of writing academic research. Obviously, the results remain to be seen. But in order to see how effective this is, I plan to provide an end of the quarter survey that asks students which assignments they preferred, which ones helped them, if they feel they were able to grow and were supported, etc.

Implement grading practices that support student success – Use exemplars to ensure that expectations are clear, provide opportunities to use feedback to improve performance

I have always relied almost entirely on rubrics to help students feel prepared for graded assignments, but after this module, I realized how important examples of past assignments could be. So, for their most recent paper, I provided excerpts of previous student assignments, asked students to evaluate what they read, and then gave my own feedback as to how the student did on the assignment. Students seemed more comfortable moving forward with their papers, but it remains to be seen overall how effective this is.

I am also planning to implement more opportunities for revision this quarter. Turnitin now offers (or maybe I'm just now realizing it offers) a revision option for assignments, so I will be using that for their final papers. They will submit a draft, receive feedback and edits from me, and then be able to resubmit.