

COURSE DESIGN TIP-SHEET

In preparing a course syllabus, it is helpful to consider the following questions:

1. What is your purpose in this course?

What do you hope to teach the students? What is the single most important thing you hope they will leave the course knowing or being able to do? Why are you teaching it? (This is not about what facts you want them to know at the end, but about what your larger or deeper objectives are for the course.)

2. What are your students' capacities and expectations and needs?

Who are your students? What do they know already, as they enter the course? How will you know what they know? What levels of sophistication can you expect? How much can you expect them to do? What courses have they taken? How much do they need to know at this level?

These are the two primary questions. From them follow the rest:

1. How are you going to tie the course together? What is the story line for this course? What are the logical links between sessions? And what are the larger sub-topics? How will you enable the students to follow the course's progression from week to week?

2. How are you going to get to the broader, underlying conceptual issues, as opposed to simply covering the material? Given the underlying purpose or concept or level of the course, what material should be emphasized and what can be cut?

3. How are you going to include material and perspectives of previously marginalized groups, e.g., women and various minority groups?

4. What teaching methods are you going to use - e.g., lectures, discussions, role plays, demonstrations - and in what proportions? What activities other than the readings and class discussions might be appropriate? How will you stimulate students to think about the material before class? How will you encourage/require students to prepare?

5. How will you get feedback from the students? How will you know if the course is working for them, what they are thinking?

6. How will you evaluate your students? How will you know what they do and do not understand? How will you know if they have learned anything, and if so, what they have learned?

7. How will you get feedback to the students? How will you grade and comment on their written and oral work?

8. How flexible are you going to be in meeting students' different backgrounds, interests and needs? Are you willing to change course in the middle of the semester if that seems appropriate? Are you willing to entertain different approaches to the material?

9. Having decided all this, how are you going to let your students know the overall plan for the

course, including suggested readings, non-reading assignments, when written material will be due and what it will consist of?

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