**Process for Strategic Curriculum/Program Design**

1. **University Goals**

* Locate and ensure you understand the **university goals** in advance of planning.
* Remember: **resource allocation decisions** for curriculum design and revision are often made based on consistency with the institution’s goals and strategic mandate.

1. **Establish a Vision for the Curriculum**

* Begin by describing a **future** ideal, without considering practical constraints: “Which knowledge, skills and attitudes would your **ideal graduate** possess?”
* In addition to whatever vision a department might create, the University of Windsor has established a set of **graduate attributes/characteristics** that all undergraduate programs should try to develop in their students. Use these as a “meta-set” of goals for your program:

1. The acquisition, application and integration of knowledge
2. Research skills, including the ability to define problems and access, retrieve and evaluate information (information literacy)
3. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
4. Literacy and numeracy skills
5. Responsible behaviour to self, others and society
6. Interpersonal and communications skills
7. Teamwork, and personal and group leadership skills
8. Creativity and aesthetic appreciation
9. The ability and desire for continuous learning

* Generally, curriculum design has more **buy-in** when key people are involved in its development, such as the faculty members who would be responsible for the program!
* The vision may be developed through individual thought, followed by group brain storming in the context of a **department meeting or retreat**. Initial ideas can be refined to identify the most important elements, and these can be developed into program-level learning outcomes. In some cases, the process may be easier when facilitated by a consultant external to the department, to keep the process moving and sidestep political and interpersonal hurdles.

1. **Consider Internal Strengths and Weaknesses**

* Examine the vision for the curriculum that has been identified.
  + What are the inherent strengths and weaknesses of that vision?
* Examine existing curricula in your department.
  + What are the strengths that contribute to the curriculum?
  + What are the weaknesses that will detract from the curriculum?
  + What can you do about these?
* **Revise** the vision for the curriculum in light of these.

1. **Consider External Elements that Will Affect the Curriculum**

* Examine elements that may have an impact on the program’s feasibility or success.
  + Who are the **stakeholders** (students, community, professionals, employers)? What do they need? What do they want? What would attract their interest or turn them away?
  + What is the external **environment** (politics, economics, population) and which elements of it could or should affect the design and viability of the proposed curriculum?
  + What future disciplinary or cultural **trends** are likely, and how could or should they affect your proposed curriculum?
  + Which other **external opportunities and threats** need to be taken into account?
* **Revise** the vision in light of these.

1. **Design the Specific Components of the Program**

* Using the work you did to create the vision, and taking into account what you learned from steps 3 and 4, devise **program-level learning outcomes**.
* Using the program-level learning outcomes as goals for your graduates, work backward to determine **course-level learning outcomes**.
* Check for alignment:
  + **Teaching methods**: How will you help students achieve the outcomes?
  + **Learning experiences**: What will students do to achieve the outcomes?
  + **Assessment tasks**: How will you and students know when they have achieved the outcomes?
  + Do the outcomes, teaching methods and assessments **align** in each course?
  + Do the courses **align** with each other, the program-level outcomes, and the vision?
* How will you **organize and sequence** the learning experiences (eg. courses)?
* Who will put the plans into action?
* What are the **timelines** to develop the full curriculum?
* Have you considered relevant experiences that might be integrated (eg. High Impact Practices, cohort experiences, etc.)

To assist with this process, consider using a curriculum map to check for alignment

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Curriculum/Program Outcomes** | **Component** (eg. Courses) Year 1 | **Courses**  **Year 2** | **Courses**  **Year 3** | **Courses**  **Year 4** |
| Outcome 1  (eg. Skills) | Introduce |  | Reinforce |  |
| Outcome 2  (eg. Knowledge) |  | Introduce | Reinforce | Master |
| Outcome 3  (eg. Attitudes) |  |  | Introduce |  |
| …. |  |  |  |  |

(Newble & Cannon, 1995)

1. **Establish how the curriculum will be assessed and refined.**

* Who will do the assessment of the complete curriculum?
* How will you know if the program-level outcomes are being achieved? Possible methods include:
  + Comparison to current curriculum
  + Student and faculty formative feedback
  + Outcomes assessments, performance indicators, and benchmarks
* Consider how the assessment process can be **integrated** into the curriculum so that it is not additional work, but part of a regular and ongoing curriculum process.
* Decide how the assessment information will be used to **refine and improve** the curriculum.