

# BACKWARDS DESIGN FOR THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM: AN OVERVIEW

Flipping the typical approach to course design

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MT Engage session: Thursday, 5/10/2018

- (1) Explain why using backwards design makes sense
- (2) Identify the three stages of backwards design
- (3) Reflect on MT Engage course design through a lens of backwards design

## SESSION OBJECTIVES

# INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Professors are designers
- ▶ Just in the classroom, we design...
  - ▶ Curriculum sequence
  - ▶ Learning experiences
  - ▶ Learning environments (to some extent)
  - ▶ Instructional approaches
  - ▶ Assessments of student performance
  - ▶ And so on...



*Perhaps not our office design but when it comes to our courses we ARE designers!*

# BUT HOW DO WE DESIGN OUR CLASSES?

- ▶ **My Story**

- ▶ Here's how I typically did my course design...

- ▶ Assigned new course
- ▶ Read course description
- ▶ Asked if any past syllabi were available
- ▶ Imagined what I wanted to achieve in this course (given flexibility I had)
- ▶ Mapped out what I would do in an overview
- ▶ Kept about a week or two ahead of the students throughout the semester
- ▶ Mixed in assessments when I planned on them; made them based on what I recalled having done
- ▶ Breathed at the end of the semester and hoped I would get the course again so I could revise

▶ *Does that sound similar to your experiences?*

▶ *Other examples, frustrations, etc.?*


# WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

- ▶ Rupert: “Can you help me with this?”
- ▶ You: “Where are you going?”
- ▶ Rupert: “I don’t know. Which road should I take?”
- ▶ ... (silence)
- ▶ You: “Does it matter?”



*“If you don’t know where you are going, then any road will get you there.”*

The problem is that if we design our classes in such an ad hoc way, we don’t know *who will get what* nor qualify *how effective our design was*

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# KEYS TO EFFECTIVE DESIGN FOR LEARNING



- ▶ The effectiveness of our design skills corresponds to whether students achieve explicit goals
- ▶ Keys to consider in designing effectively:
  - ▶ Maximize student-friendliness (not necessarily fun 😊)
  - ▶ Reduce common errors that impede results
  - ▶ Guided by institutional standards
  - ▶ Form follows function
  - ▶ Content precedes design; *design in the absence of content is not design; it is decoration*



# TWO SINS OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

## “Blind Coverage”

- ▶ March through a text/sequence in a valiant attempt to ‘cover’ everything
- ▶ No overarching goals are present in the blind march forward
- ▶ **“I’d love to answer that but we have to move on so...”**

*\*\* This is not the same as a purposeful survey, which is an important foundational thing\*\**



# TWO SINS OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Cover

- ▶ Most text is not important
- ▶ No one is paying attention to everything
- ▶ No one is paying attention to everything
- ▶ No one is paying attention to everything

answer  
move on

Since you have opted into MT Engage, which prioritizes depth I am guessing most of us agree here 😊

But, there is another sin of instructional design that is more relevant to MT Engage

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## “Hands On, Not Minds On”

- ▶ Building many engaging activities and experiences that lead only accidentally, if at all, to understanding or achievement
- ▶ Fun, interesting activities are enjoyed but don’t really lead anywhere – *everyone goes their own way and learning is greatly different from student-to-student*
- ▶ “There are no wrong answers in here; just engage with whatever interests you!”

# TWO SINS OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

In order to avoid this sin of instructional design it will be essential that you reflect on signature assignment and all assignments/activities and ask yourself: ***“Do I know what learners will be thinking about at any given moment?”***

If you cannot answer this with a yes, and one that is related to an essential understanding for the course you run the risk of sinning in this way

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- In order to enact *Understanding by Design* (backwards design), we need to make some shifts in our thinking...

Shift From		To
Thinking first about what to teach and how to teach it	→	Thinking first about what students are expected to learn and how they can best show that they have learned it
Prioritizing our preferred approaches, our readings, and activities	→	Prioritizing approaches, readings, and activities that prepare students for success in showing they have learned
Inputs Focus	→	Outputs Focus

# Understanding by Design

## UbD: Stages of Backward Design

### 1. Identify desired results

What should students know, understand, and be able to do?

What content is worthy of understanding?

What enduring understanding are desired?

### 2. Determine acceptable evidence

How will we know if students have achieved the desired results?

What will we accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency?

### 3. Plan Learning experiences and instruction.

What enabling knowledge and skill will students need to perform effectively and achieve desired results?

What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?

What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught in light of performance goals?

What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals?



# A FAST WALK-THROUGH 1<sup>ST</sup>

- ▶ Think about your MT Engage course you will be teaching
- ▶ Stage I: What do you want them to know?
  - ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> – List as many specific outcomes as you want to achieve in your course
  - ▶ 2<sup>nd</sup> – Classify these into “Know” and “Do”
  - ▶ 3<sup>rd</sup> – Place these into circles
    - ▶ BIGGEST CIRCLE: *Nice to know*;
    - ▶ MIDDLE CIRCLE: *Important to know*;
    - ▶ SMALLEST CIRCLE: *Essential understandings*
  - ▶ For each in the essential understandings, create an *Essential Question(s)* that drives learning first afterwards focus in on identifying smaller, necessary, outcomes below those (you will probably be placing items from the other circles underneath)

# A FAST WALK-THROUGH 1<sup>ST</sup>

- ▶ Continue working with the same class
- ▶ Stage II: How will you know that they know it?
  - ▶ For each *essential understanding*, create a list of possible products students could produce/complete to provide evidence they mastered it
  - ▶ Ensure that products align logically so that student product is a valid measure of the learning outcome, consider what will need to be done to ensure criteria for evaluation are valid/reliable
  - ▶ *Example:* Students will articulate philosophical underpinnings of the American Revolution – assessment must require writing/speaking (articulate)

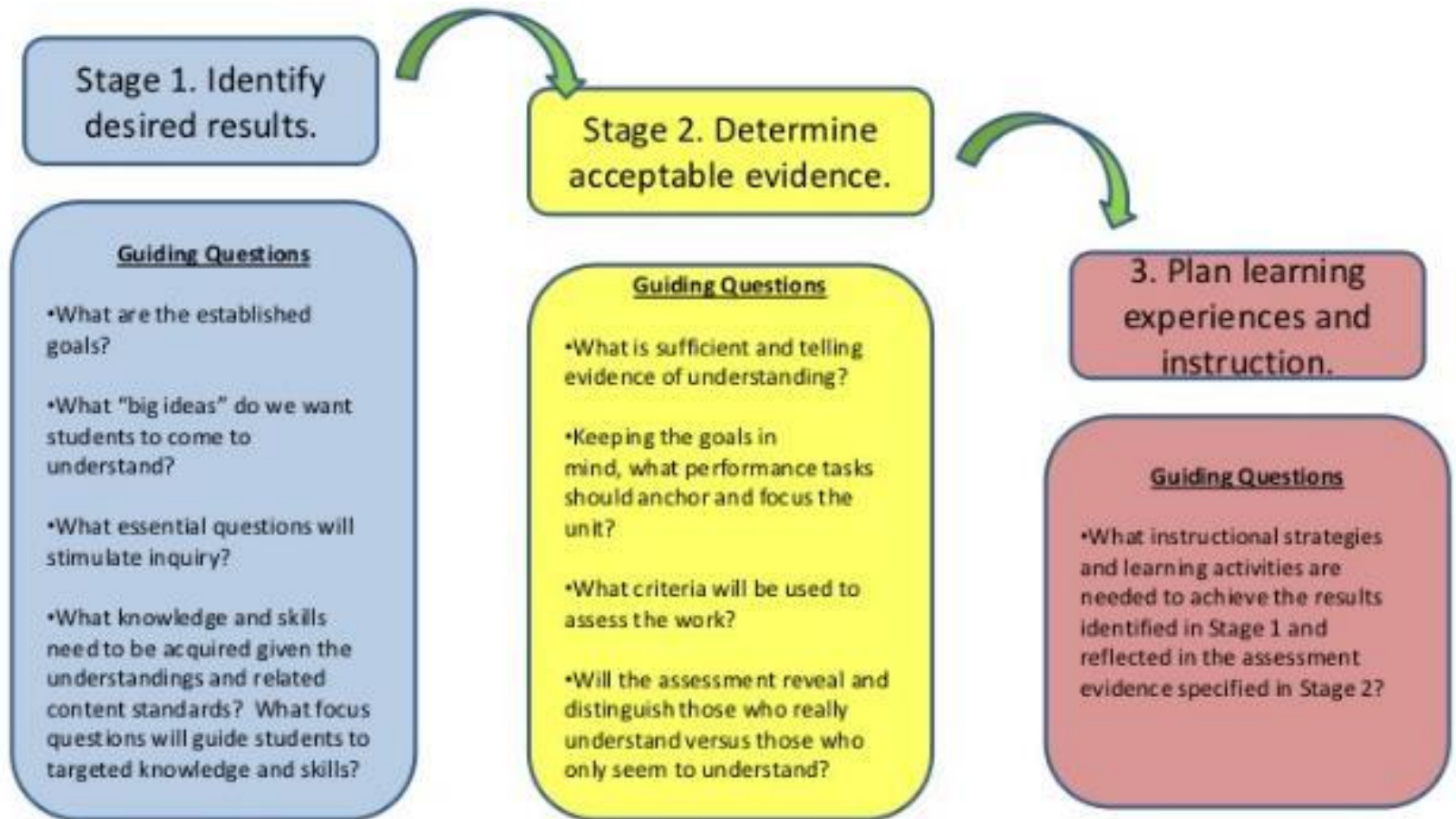


# A FAST WALK-THROUGH 1<sup>ST</sup>

- ▶ Continue with the same course
- ▶ Stage III: What do I need to do/provide to help them get there?
  - ▶ I personally like to walk my class through a mini-classical model
  - ▶ **Grammar** (essential foundations in place) -> **Logic** (critical examination of various perspectives) -> **Rhetoric** (accurately and elegantly providing an argument/evaluation/etc.)
  - ▶ *Notice that to identify the grammar stage for me (essential foundations) having the end goal clarified first focuses me so I cannot just pick my preferred topics – it focuses the aim on the essentials with more precision)*

# RECAPPING THE OVERVIEW

## UbD: Stages of Backward Design



# QUESTIONS, DISCUSSION, WRAP-UP

- ▶ Earlier, I claimed we'd all be able to do these in this opening overview session...
  - ▶ Can we? Let's review and ensure that we can 😊
- (1) Explain why using backwards design makes sense – *Why does it?*
  - (2) Identify the three stages of backwards design – *What are they?*
  - (3) Reflect on personal course design through these three stages– *Did you all do so? Reactions/Comments.*