

Handbook to Accompany Guiding Principles for Quality Curriculum

This handbook provides further clarification and examples to accompany the Guiding Principles for Quality Curriculum.

Core Values:

A student's education is a holistic journey that encompasses in-class and out-of-class experiences. Good curriculum acknowledges and fosters these connections as we prepare students to meet their goals.

In general, curriculum at UFV is:

- reflective of our identity and strategic priorities as expressed in UFV's Strategic Plan, Education Plan, SEM Plan, Institutional Learning Outcomes, and commitment to Indigenizing the Academy;
- intentional, in that it is designed with care to meet the criteria listed below; and
- continually improving and adapting to changing contexts.

Principles:

Quality curriculum is:

1. Outcome-driven, aligned, and intentionally designed to achieve its purpose.
2. Rigorous, meeting credential-level standards recognized by the Ministry, by professions, industry, and by academic communities, and striving for excellence.
3. Current, relevant, and forward-looking.
4. Connected to civic and personal obligations and growth as central to learning.
5. Flexible – It provides varied modes of delivery, recognition of prior and alternative learning experiences, and multiple program pathways.
6. Inclusive – It respects and honours people's differing backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and identities as a foundation and support for each student's success. It is in compliance with human rights legislation, and reflects UFV's commitment to internationalization, Indigenization, and access.

1. Outcome-driven, aligned, and intentionally designed to achieve its purpose.

Good curriculum is more than a disparate collection of courses or learning activities with no clear purpose, connection or logical progression among its elements. As Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe wrote, “We need to think of unit design work as the intellectual equivalent of a GPS device in our car: by identifying a specific learning destination first, we are able to see the instructional path most likely to get us there.”¹

Programs should have clearly identified Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Learning outcomes are phrased to answer the question *what will a graduate of this program be able to do (knowledge, skills, abilities)?* PLOs must be interrogated to ensure that they match with the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). A program alignment map is typically used for this purpose.

It is also important to verify that the Program Learning Outcomes are met through the course outcomes and other educational activities of the program, e.g. Co-curricular activities, co-op, Study Abroad, etc. These are the core elements that every student going through the program will encounter. Electives, if any, should also be shown to have value in helping the students meet the program outcomes and ILOs. Another element to consider is whether the components of your program or course are sequenced to achieve the intended purpose. For instance, courses that provide foundational skills should be taken early in the program.

Once course outcomes are clearly articulated, they must inform the design of the content of the course itself, including learning activities, supporting material, instructional approach, use of technology, and assessment. These items lead the student toward the program goals. Course content is designed to support learners in meeting the course and program outcomes; it should be chosen for that purpose only.

Assessments tools are designed to measure the students’ achievement of the outcomes. They are also an indicator of how well the curriculum is designed. If students are unable to demonstrate that they achieved the learning outcomes, it indicates that the curriculum, either in its structure or delivery, needs attention. Assessment closes the loop of quality curriculum design.

Guiding questions to ensure that program outcomes are aligned to ILOs, and course outcomes, activities, and assessment are aligned to program outcomes.
At the program level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do your program outcomes match with the ILOs?• Do your course outcomes support your program outcomes?• What does the course sequencing/mapping look like? What needs to be offered and when to allow for student program completion?
At the course level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do your course assessments measure your course outcomes?• Do the course activities prepare the students for the assessments?

¹ *The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units* (Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD, 2011), p. 7.

What to look for to ensure that elements of curriculum are intentionally designed to meet the program's or course's purpose:

At the program level

In a four-year degree where a level of specialization in a particular subject is expected, the subject is introduced to the students at the lower level. The upper level requires increases in complexity and sophistication of knowledge and skills built on the lower-level work.

- Are students provided in their lower-level courses with the tools (skills and knowledge) that they require to perform as expected at the upper-level?
- Do prerequisites facilitate the movement of students from one level to another without creating unnecessary barriers? Are the prerequisites about specific topics or general academic maturity?
- Are the requirements for admission to the program well aligned with the program content and requirements, and designed to ensure students' success in the program? An example of misalignment is a program admission requirement that is lower than a prerequisite for a core lower-level course in the program.
- Is repetition of content or concepts in the curriculum intentional? Where foundational knowledge and/or skills are reviewed, they should be approached from a different perspective, expanded, or examined in more detail?

Not all programs are vertically structured. A one-year certificate, for instance, may be constructed to provide a range of entry-level skills.

- Is there a capstone activity, practicum, portfolio, or other opportunity toward the end of the program where students demonstrate that they've acquired these skills by applying them to a project?

A program may be designed to achieve an interdisciplinary specialization, for instance in Peace and Conflict Studies.

- Are there a few core courses in the program where the connections are made between the various disciplinary approaches to the study or practice of peace and conflict studies?

At the course level

- Are the activities designed so that students are comfortable with basic skills, such as how to summarize an author's argument, before asking them to complete a more complex task, such as to compare the view of two or more authors?

2. Rigorous, meeting credential-level standards recognized by the Ministry, by professions, industry, and by academic communities, and striving for excellence.

Programs (and by extension course content) must adhere to standards articulated by bodies outside of UFV.

All degree-level programs (for instance, a major) must meet criteria set by the Ministry of Advanced Education. These are organized under six broad categories: 1. Depth and breadth of knowledge; 2. Knowledge of methodologies and research; 3. Application of knowledge; 4. Communication skills; 5. Awareness of limits of knowledge and 6. Professional capacity/autonomy.

Several programs must also meet sets of skills and knowledge areas articulated by professional and academic bodies. In some cases, a program content is closely monitored, even set, by the professional accrediting body (e.g., in social work and in the trades); in other cases, professional organizations articulate key competencies (e.g., team work) that we seek to include in our programs even if we don't formally seek accreditation. For instance, the recently-created Biochemistry major examined how teamwork is meaningfully incorporated in the program because it is one of the fundamental skills identified for practice in the field.

As with the elements of good curriculum design discussed thus far (outcome alignment and intentional design), reviewing from time to time how a program meets Ministry, professional, and academic standards is good practice. In addition to when a new degree is created, this is done through regular program reviews and renewal of accreditation.

The goal should be more than simply meeting the standards, although in some cases the standards are very stringent. By "striving for excellence", we recognize that creating and maintaining good curriculum is a process of continuous improvement that balances those external standards with UFV values and these *Principles*.

Guiding questions:
At the program level
<p>The Ministry’s standard for <i>Professional Capacity / Autonomy</i> is described as: “Qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study, employment, community involvement and other activities requiring: 1) the exercise of initiative, personal responsibility and accountability; 2) working effectively with others; and, 3) behavior consistent with academic integrity.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do graduates of your program show that they have acquired these qualities and skills upon graduation? <p>Accreditation bodies will set specific program requirements. For example, the Accreditation Standards of the Canadian Association for Social Work Education stipulate that, “The four-year BSW curriculum reflects a balance of general education (at least 40 percent) and professional education (at least 50 percent) and a field practicum of at least 700 hours” and the Industry Training Authority provides detailed curriculum material for our apprentice programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What accreditation standards exist for your program? • How is your program delivering or meeting the standards? • If a program exceeds the discipline-specific standards and requirements, what is the rationale and potential negative impact on the program’s breadth and flexibility for students?
At the course level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which course outcomes/courses support which accreditation standards for the program? (see Section 1 on alignment and mapping)

3. Current, relevant, and forward-looking.

Current and relevant curriculum considers recent scholarship and academic trends in the discipline or field. It is informed by a knowledge of the fields of professional practice that graduates of the program will enter. It connects what is taught in university to current issues, problems, and applications. Students are more likely to be interested in what they are learning, more motivated to learn new concepts and skills, and better prepared to succeed after graduation if their learning engages real-life contexts, equips them with practical and useful skills, and addresses topics that are relevant and applicable to their lives outside of school.

Curriculum is forward-looking if it anticipates changes in the academic, work, or community environment, such as changes to technology or professional practice. This may mean that program outcomes are designed to be adaptable to rapidly-changing environments and technologies. Forecasts of future trends in the discipline or workplace should be consulted in developing program outcomes and in considering program changes.

At the program level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the curriculum designed in response to and supported by recent scholarship in the field/discipline? Are the disciplinary tools and vocabulary you employ up-to-date?• Does the program provide opportunities for learners to confront/solve current problems in the discipline/industry? E.g. special topics courses, practica.• Do program outcomes emphasize skill development, metacognition, and critical thinking related to the discipline?• Does the program area maintain connections with an industry/discipline-based program advisory group and consult with this group on curriculum? Is your program responding to recent developments in the field?• In more general programs that lead to a variety of careers, relevancy can be achieved by consulting with employability skills resources, such as the Canadian government's or the Conference Board of Canada's publications.• Do capstone and/or practicum courses address immediate industry situations/needs?
At the course level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are courses reviewed informally before their formal review date to see if changes are required to reflect a change in professional or disciplinary practice?• Do courses include discipline or industry-specific problems/scenarios as examples and assignment prompts? Are connections with employers made for project work?• Are current examples and case studies used where possible?• Are you highlighting for your students the employability skills that they develop through their course work?

4. Connected to civic and personal obligations and growth as central to learning.

Quality curriculum concerns itself with more than the life of the mind, or with professional or economic pursuit; it recognizes the student as a member of community and as a whole person. It emphasizes the value that out-of-classroom experiences and obligations bring to learning, and the value that learning brings to community and personal life.

Activities that are not part of the academic curriculum are an integral part of a person's learning journey. These activities (such as one's participation in a club or event at UFV or in the community), enhance and bring relevancy to the curriculum, especially if explicitly connected to one's academic program. Specifically, they ask students to transfer and apply what they are learning in the classroom to another setting. This transfer of learning aids in building professional skills, creating fun and social connections, honing time management skills, and exploring other interests. Combined with the program of study, these skills help the student to meet the ILOs and develop into a well-rounded graduate. These experiences are often not assessed as part of a course grade or a program requirement, but they can be recognized by UFV through the co-curricular record, or they can be included in a student's portfolio. Although students are not assessed or required to participate in such activities, a good curriculum developer will actively connect the curriculum to the applied experiences by creating opportunities and networks, raising students' awareness about what is available, and communicating the value of participating.

Similarly, honouring the student as a whole person is critical to creating effective learning. Finding ways in our program and course activities to allow students to make connections between their university experience and their personal life and social obligations increases the applicability, and real-life meaning, of what they learn.

Examples of how the curriculum can be connected to community and personal life:
At the program level
A student is paired with a local employer for the duration of their program. The student relies on this external relationship to test new ideas, practice skills, and complete a professional portfolio. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are opportunities for practicum or internship placements built into the program?• Is an advisory committee of employers consulted in program design?
At the course level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are students provided options to participate in research that leads to conferences or publication?• Are students encouraged to attend events hosted by the Indigenous Student Centre?• Do courses draw on examples and content from real workplaces or community organizations within the discipline?• Are students given opportunities to network with industry connections, volunteer in the community, or engage in advocacy?

5. Flexible – Curriculum provides varied modes of delivery, recognition of prior and alternative learning experiences, and multiple program pathways.

Building flexibility in the curriculum offers students choices to customize their learning experience to meet their long-term educational and professional goals. Flexibility is accomplished in at least three ways: modes of delivery that allow students to determine how, when, and where they wish to learn; multiple program pathways that cater to specific audiences and needs; and recognition of alternative, individualized learning.

Flexible curriculum is learner-centred. Maryellen Weimer (2012), author of *Learner-Centred Teaching*, describes learner-centred curriculum as engaging students in the hard work of learning, including explicit skill development, encouraging reflection about learning, giving students some control over the learning, and encouraging collaboration.² In short, learner-centred curriculum allows for and encourages flexibility of instruction and assessment so students take responsibility for and participate in their learning.

At the program level

Using technology to provide remote or online study allow students to combine work, study, and personal commitments. Evening and weekend course scheduling, as well as accelerated or part-time options, also serves different groups of learners.

- Would a person with different life commitments and background (shift worker, stay-at-home parent, professional) be able to complete the program?

Flexibility in a program is ensured through choice of electives and frequency of offerings (at least every two years).

- Can students choose options or topics that best relate to their interests and goals?
- Have options for prior learning to meet either admission or program requirements been built into the program?
- Could a student meet some program outcomes through a study abroad experience or student-generated activities?
- Are there options for transfer into and out of the program?
- In a cohort program in which courses are taken sequentially, is it possible for students to re-enter the program in the case of interruption?
- Does the program include opportunities for self-reflection on student learning through a capstone or reflective course, assignment, or project? Are opportunities for self-reflection built into the program in other ways?
- Do the program outcomes explicitly address skill development? Is collaboration encouraged in the program through the outcomes or the design?

² Weimer, M. (2012). Five characteristics of learner-centred teaching. *Faculty Focus: Higher Ed Teaching Strategies from Magna Publications*. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/five-characteristics-of-learner-centered-teaching/>

At the course level

- Are there options for different types of assignments to meet the same course learning outcomes (e.g., essay, poster, case study)?
- Does the course offer flexible assignment deadline choices for students?
- Is skill instruction embedded within the course content?
- Are students encouraged to reflect on the nature of their learning, either through specific assignments or class discussions?
- Are there opportunities for students to collaborate?
- Do course outcomes and assignments encourage students to work independently of the instructor and use critical thinking and problem solving skills?

6. Inclusive – The curriculum respects and honours people’s differing backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and identities as a foundation and support for each student’s success. It is in compliance with human rights legislation, and reflects UFV’s commitment to internationalization, Indigenization, and access.

Inclusive curriculum design takes into account the learners’ backgrounds, cultures, identities, social and emotional learning, and differing abilities. Inclusivity and respect for diversity require the creation of learning environments (physical and virtual) that increase feelings of belonging, engagement, and empowerment. It is equally important that students are encouraged to reach their potential and that no one is disadvantaged by teaching practices or curriculum.³ Under the *BC Human Rights Code* and *UFV’s Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy* (#18), people providing a service to the public have “a **duty to accommodate**” and should be aware that “discrimination does not have to be **intentional** to be against the law.”

Using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) enables designers to write inclusive curriculum. UDL is based on a methodology that advocates providing information to students in multiple ways, allowing different options for students to express their understanding of the material, and increasing motivation to learn by empowering students. The flexibility that is fundamental to UDL can be used to assist all students as it removes many barriers to learning that can result from cultural differences, varying ability, learning preferences, work and home responsibilities, or other life events.

The inclusive curriculum design approach advocated by the UK higher education sector elaborates on inclusivity. “An inclusive curriculum design approach is one that takes into account students’ educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being. It enables higher education institutions [...] to embed quality enhancement processes that ensure an *anticipatory* response to equality in learning and teaching.”⁴ The critical concept in this approach, as in UDL, is that actions to ensure inclusiveness and ultimately equity in access to education are most powerful when taken pro-actively, not in response, or in reaction, to a perceived deficiency.

At the program level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you considered the background of the program students?• Do program materials and content use gender or cultural neutral language?• Have the social and emotional learning needs of the students been considered?• Has consideration, adaptation, or alternatives for social or cultural barriers been made?• Are there structural barriers that help or impede admission of specific groups of students? How can these be addressed?

³ Hanesworth, P. (2015). Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: A model for learning and teaching practitioners. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/embedding-equality-and-diversity-curriculum-model-learning-and-teaching-practitioners-0>

⁴ Emphasis is ours. Morgan, H. and Houghton, A. (2011). Inclusive curriculum design in higher education: Considerations for effective practice across and within subject areas. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive_curriculum_design_in_higher_education

At the course level

- What levels of learning preparedness are in my classroom? How can I be aware of where students are at?
- Is there a variety of instruction methods so that students have more than one opportunity to understand course material?
- Do we take advantage of web-based course materials so that students can access resources for review and follow up class sessions?
- Is there a range of assessment methods?
- Are texts available in both print and digital format to ensure accessibility to the materials?
- Is an open textbook an option to reduce costs for students?