

**The University of Edinburgh**  
**The Moray House School of Education**  
**School Postgraduate Studies Committee**

**12<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

**Revised Course Descriptor for “Designing Courses” within the  
Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice**

Brief description of the paper

This paper proposes an update to the Designing Courses option within the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. The changes proposed are as follows:

1. One small edit to the learning outcomes on the advice of the external examiner.
2. Change the mode of delivery from blended to fully online.
3. Some updating of the course content.
4. Change the mode of assessment to online via a blog but retain the same focus of the assessment as in the previous version of the course.

Action requested

For approval.

Resource implications

Does the paper have resource implications? No

If ‘Yes’, in which section(s) of the paper are they described?

Risk assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis? No

If ‘Yes’, in which section(s) of the paper is it set out?

Equality and diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? Yes, the changes proposed would have positive benefits for equality and diversity.

If ‘Yes’, in which section(s) of the paper are they described? The “rationale and overview section”

Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

If no, please indicate why the paper must be withheld, and for how long (eg until decision is publicly announced):

Its disclosure would substantially prejudice a programme of research		Its disclosure would substantially prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs	
Its disclosure would substantially prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation		Its disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence actionable in court	
Its disclosure would constitute a breach of the Data Protection Act		Other (please give further details)	

Any other relevant information

Dr Velda McCune will attend for discussion of this item.

Originator of the paper

Dr Velda McCune, Deputy Director and Senior Lecturer, Institute for Academic Development, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

# Revised Course descriptor: Designing Courses

*Dr Velda McCune, Deputy Director and Senior Lecturer, Institute for Academic Development, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014.*

**Credit rating:** 10 credits, SCQF Level 11

**Course leader:** Dr Velda McCune

## Rationale and overview

Designing Courses is a successful existing option on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP). The participants on the PGCAP are almost exclusively staff from across this University interested in developing their academic practice. The present proposal is to move the teaching of Designing Courses from the present blended learning approach to a fully online course. The rationale for the shift to fully online learning is twofold. Firstly, it is important that the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice models a broad range of effective practice in teaching and assessment in higher education. At present the majority of this programme is taught face-to-face with no course taught fully online. Given the increasing emphasis on online and distance learning within the University, through projects such as the Distance Education Initiative, it is important to provide new academic staff on the PGCAP with rich online learning experiences. Secondly, offering a course fully online provides greater flexibility of participation for staff as the teaching is not tied to specific timetabled slots. This is valuable generally for staff in busy academic roles but also specifically for some disabled staff and staff with caring responsibilities. This course will therefore continue to be suitable for academic staff who participate in the PGCAP but will enhance the accessibility of the programme.

This re-design of the course will retain the same learning outcomes (with the exception of a minor change suggested by the external examiner) and has a similar course description. As such this course focuses on the design and development of courses in higher education whether face-to-face, blended or online. Consideration will be given to the particular strengths and weaknesses of different modes of delivery. The course includes consideration of the vertical and horizontal relationships of courses with the rest of the curriculum and students' programmes of study. Emphasis is also placed on the challenges for students in engaging fully with course content and processes, and how design decisions can enable the structuring and scaffolding of effective student learning.

The course gives participants the opportunity to critically examine key issues which arise and need to be resolved when designing new courses or redesigning existing ones. They develop a keen awareness of the underpinning theoretical considerations and their implications for practice. At the same time the requirement to apply their knowledge and understanding by working with the development of a particular course sharpens participants' appreciation of the affordances and constraints of contextual features, and encourages them to develop creative responses to real-life challenges.

Participants are encouraged to expand their repertoire of strategies and practical approaches by moving outside their familiar frameworks and engaging in

investigation and discussion across disciplinary boundaries. The course also helps advance participants' ability to communicate in appropriate ways to peers, senior colleagues and students the underlying rationales for choices made between competing possibilities.

The previous course descriptor from DRPS is presented in Appendix 1. Comments on the new proposal from the external examiner, course team and PGCAP students are presented in Appendix 2.

## **Learning outcomes**

On completion of the course students will be able to demonstrate:

- analytical engagement with key issues and writings on course design and development
- alertness to students' perspectives, their orientations and the challenges they face
- critical reflection on course purposes and their articulation, with course activities and assessment - both conceptually and within specific contexts
- critical awareness and understanding of ways of monitoring, reviewing and taking forward course development\*
- appropriate attention to the place of a course in an overall programme of study and issues of progression

\* this ILO has been adapted slightly as the external examiner pointed out that the previous version was rather low level.

## **Teaching and Learning**

This 10 credit course will be offered over 6 working weeks to fit in with the basic pattern of the other courses on the PGCAP which have a part A and part B with 6-8 weeks in between when participants complete independent study tasks. These 6 weeks will be divided into three blocks of online teaching. Careful attention will be given to the initial socialisation processes which support participants to feel comfortable learning with one another and in fully online environments.

Each block of the course will begin with a recorded presentation which will introduce participants to core themes in that block. The rationale for these short presentations is to introduce participants to key themes from the literature in the context where there is no one core text which would be suitable for these purposes. Such an introduction is also useful given that many course participants will not be experienced in reading educational research literature. Assigned readings for each block will be related to these presentations. There will then be opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous online discussion of the presentations and readings to provide opportunities for participants to develop their understanding, critique the ideas presented and address any misconceptions arising. Synchronous discussion will be used to resolve initial queries and to gauge participants' engagement with the course content. Guided asynchronous discussion will be used as a means to provoke deeper reflection on course content.

A core teaching and learning approach for this course will be the blog that participants will write throughout the course. This is an extension of the successful blog approach which was used as the independent study task in the previous iteration of Designing Courses. Participants will choose a course in their subject area to focus on in order to contextualise and increase the relevance of what they are learning. This could be an existing course they wish to redesign or a completely new course. Each week they will be required to write about specific topics which relate this course to what they are learning on Designing Courses. An indicative list of blog topics is given below. Participants will also be required to give feedback on other participants' blogs and the course leader will comment on the blogs. Participants will be required to comment on at least three blogs each week and to comment on different blogs every week. This will provide rich opportunities for formative feedback throughout the course.

The three blocks of the course will be as follows:

**Block 1, Weeks 1-2, Course Design Basics**

In this block participants will be introduced to some of the important initial issues to be taken into account when designing or redesigning a course in a research intensive University. Themes to be covered in this block will include: University processes for course development, monitoring and review; University and College Learning and Teaching Strategies; the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; graduate attributes and their expression in learning outcomes; the vertical and horizontal relationships of courses with the wider curriculum and students' programmes of study; alertness to students' perspectives and implications for widening participation and equality and diversity.

Indicative blog topic 1a: Participants to introduce their chosen course and contextualise it within the relevant programme(s). Participants to indicate key questions or interests they have in relation to their chosen course.

Indicative blog topic 1b: Participants to give an outline of key aspects of student diversity on the programme and initial suggestions of the implications this may have for course design.

**Block 2, Weeks 3-4, Promoting High Quality Learning through Course Design**

The focus of this block will be on considering in more depth what makes for high quality learning in particular contexts and how course design can promote high quality learning. Themes to be covered in this block will include: taxonomies of learning; learning as acquisition and participation; high quality learning in particular academic subject areas; constructive alignment of teaching and assessment practice with learning outcomes; the relationships between curricula and students' learning.

Indicative blog topic 2a: Participants to pick one theoretical frame (e.g. constructive alignment) and to write a post which considers their chosen course in this light.

Indicative blog topic 2b: Participants to research one assessment practice which is new to them and write a blog exploring the suitability of this assessment practice for their chosen course.

### **Block 3, Weeks 5-6, The Wider Context for Course Design**

In this final block, participants will be encouraged to reflect on different perspectives on the broad purposes of higher education and the implications this has for course design. Themes to be considered in this block will include: different stakeholder perspectives on the purposes of higher education; metaphors for students as learners in diverse contexts and their implications for course design; international perspectives on course design.

Indicative blog topic 3a: Participants to write a blog presenting their argument for what they see as the most important purpose of higher education in relation to their chosen course.

Indicative blog topic 3b: Participants to pick one stakeholder in their current course and blog about their perceptions of this stakeholder's perspective on the course.

### **Indicative study activities and notional time commitment**

Study activity	Time commitment
Synchronous and asynchronous discussion	15
Reading and reflection	40
Guided study (formative blogging)	20
Assignment preparation	25

### **Indicative reading**

#### **Core texts**

Anderson, C. and McCune, V. (2013). Facing an uncertain future: curricula of dualities. *Curriculum Journal* 24(1), 153-168.

Ashwin, P., Abbas, A. and McLean, M. (2013). Representations of a high-quality system of undergraduate education in English higher education policy documents. *Studies in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2013.842211

Barnett, R. (2004). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research and Development* 23(3), 247-260.

Biggs, J. B. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education* 32, 347-364.

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A. and Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development* 16(2), 133-145.

Cousin, G. and Deepwell, F. (2005). Designs for network learning: a communities of practice perspective. *Studies in Higher Education* 30(1), 57-66.

Elliot, C. and Reynolds, M. (2012). Participative pedagogies, group work and the international classroom: an account of students' and tutors experiences. *Studies in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2012.709492

Hounsell, D. and Hounsell, J. (2007). Teaching-learning environments in contemporary mass higher education. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, BJEP Monograph Series* 11(4), 91-111.

JISC Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design:

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdesign.aspx>

Open University Learning Design Initiative:

<http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/29228368/Open%20University%20Learning%20Design%20Initiative%20%28JISC-OULDI%29%20project>

McArthur, J. and Huxham, M. (2011). Sharing control: a partnership approach to curriculum design and delivery.

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/StudentEngagement\\_ResearchBid2011\\_Edinburgh](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/StudentEngagement_ResearchBid2011_Edinburgh)

Macmillan, J. and Mclean, M. (2005). Making first year tutorials count:

Operationalizing the assessment-learning connection. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 6, 94-104.

Meyer, J. H. F. and Land, R. (2005). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher Education* 49, 373-388.

Rodger, S., Turpin, M. and O'Brien, M. (2013). Experiences of academic staff in using threshold concepts within a reformed curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2013.830832

Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher* 27(4), 4-13.

Sin, C. (2013). Lost in translation: the meaning of learning outcomes across national and institutional policy contexts. *Studies in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2013.806463

Toohey, S. (2002). Designing courses for higher education. Buckingham: SRHE and OUP.

<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/completed-enhancement-themes/research-teaching-linkages>

## **Assessment**

### *Summative*

As in the previous iteration of Designing Courses, the coursework assignment requires participants to consider, in greater depth and within the context of a specific course in their own disciplinary area, some of the key challenges and practical issues that need to be addressed in the design and/or redesign of courses. They will apply the knowledge and understanding gained during the course and through further enquiry and engagement with relevant literature.

The specific summative assessment to be completed is a modification of the previous assessment in Designing Courses which provides a better fit with the fully online mode of teaching and learning. Participants will add five new posts to their blog about a specific course, beyond the formative writing they did about this course in their blog during the taught component of the course. This new writing will total 2500 words. The first post will be a course design for which a template will be provided which is similar to the paper work which participants would submit for course approval. The four further posts will offer critically reflective evidence informed commentary explaining the justification for these design choices and will show how participants' thinking has moved on from their earlier formative posts. It will be made clear to participants that these summatively assessed posts must draw richly on relevant literature and address all of the learning outcomes for Designing Courses. Participants will be supported by the course leader to work multimodally in their formative and summative blogs giving them experience of how forms other than text can be used in assessed work.

### *Formative*

To provide a clear distinction between the formative and summative work for Designing Courses participants will be given specific topics on which to write their blog posts during the taught component of the course. These topics will be relevant to the writing of their summatively assessed blog posts but will not replicate the focus of the summative task. Participants will receive regular formative feedback on these posts from their peers and the course leader.

## Appendix 1 – previous course descriptor from DRPS

### Postgraduate Course: Designing Courses (EDUA11180)

Course Outline			
School	Moray House School of Education	College	College of Humanities and Social Science
Course type	Standard	Availability	Not available to visiting students
Credit level (Normal year taken)	SCQF Level 11 (Postgraduate)	Credits	10
Home subject area	Education	Other subject area	None
Course website	None	Taught in Gaelic?	No
Course description	<p>This unit focuses on the design and development of courses, particularly but not exclusively at undergraduate level. It includes consideration of the vertical and horizontal relationships of courses with the rest of the curriculum and students' programmes of study. Emphasis is also placed on the challenges for students in engaging fully with course content and processes, and how design decisions can enable the structuring and scaffolding of effective student learning.</p> <p>The course gives participants the opportunity to critically examine key issues which arise and need to be resolved when designing new courses or redesigning existing ones. They develop a keen awareness of the underpinning theoretical considerations and their implications for practice. At the same time the requirement to apply their knowledge and understanding by working with the development of a particular course sharpens participants' appreciation of the affordances and constraints of contextual features, and encourages them to develop creative responses to real-life challenges.</p> <p>Participants are encouraged to expand their repertoire of strategies and practical approaches by moving outside their familiar frameworks and engaging in investigation and discussion across disciplinary boundaries. The course also helps advance participants' ability to communicate in appropriate ways to peers, senior colleagues and students the underlying rationales for choices made between competing possibilities.</p>		

Entry Requirements (not applicable to Visiting Students)			
Pre-requisites		Co-requisites	
Prohibited Combinations		Other requirements	None
Additional Costs	None		

Course Delivery Information								
Delivery period: 2012/13 Full Year, Not available to visiting students (SS1)						Learn enabled: No		Quota: None
Location	Activity	Description	Weeks	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
No Classes have been defined for this Course								
First Class	First class information not currently available							
No Exam Information								

**Summary of Intended Learning Outcomes**

Successful completion of the course will enable participants to demonstrate:

- analytical engagement with key issues and writings on course design and development
- alertness to students' perspectives, their orientations and the challenges they face
- critical reflection on course purposes and their articulation, with course activities and assessment - both conceptually and within specific contexts
- awareness of ways of monitoring, reviewing and taking forward course development
- appropriate attention to the place of a course in an overall programme of study and issues of progression

**Assessment Information**

The coursework assignment requires participants to consider, in greater depth and within the context of a specific course in their own disciplinary area, some of the key challenges and practical issues that need to be addressed in the design and/or redesign of courses. They will apply the knowledge and understanding gained during the course and through further enquiry and engagement with relevant literature by undertaking one of two possible tasks.

**Special Arrangements**

Pre-course reading, in-course reading as well as assignment preparation complement face-to-face teaching/learning activities to a total of 100 notional effort hours.

**Additional Information**

Academic description	Not entered
Syllabus	Not entered
Transferable skills	Not entered
Reading list	Not entered
Study Abroad	Not entered
Study Pattern	Not entered
Keywords	Not entered

**Contacts**

Course organiser	Ms Janice McArthur Tel: Email: Jan.McArthur@ed.ac.uk	Course secretary	Miss Emily Salvesen Tel: (0131 6)51 6661 Email: Emily.Salvesen@ed.ac.uk
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## Appendix 2 – Comments on Revised Course

### From External Examiner

This seems to me to be an entirely sensible development. I have only the most minor of points:

1. In para 1 it seems a little unusual to say that you are intending "to adapt some of the course content to fit the expertise of a new course leader". Feels a little staff-led! Perhaps "to take advantage of the additional opportunities offered by the expertise ...."?

*[VM Note – the problematic sentence has been removed from the final version of the proposal]*

2. The learning outcome "Awareness of ways of monitoring" .... etc seems quite low level. Aren't you looking for proficiency in these areas?

*[VM Note – this is a good point and the learning outcome has been updated in the final version of the proposal]*

3. Good to see some attention paid to the specifics of a research-intensive institution, in Block 1.

*[VM Note – no change suggested here]*

### From Students

As an ex-PGCAP student and someone who has undertaken the Designing Courses course I like this new proposal. I feel that the three block design of will allow for more sustained engagement with relevant research literature and will afford better opportunities to relate the course to one's own practice. The assessment proposal of extending the blog assignment is a good idea as it will force people like me to engage more fully with the medium.

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What a good idea. I think the course is fine and actually better with the online element.

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I've just had a chance to look at the descriptor. Just a very brief single comment re your arguments for moving the course online. I thought it might be worth stressing that since the course covers many procedural issues of developing/describing/documenting/formalising a new course, these slightly more 'bureaucratic' activities might actually be easier for students to follow/systemise within an online course environment (which in itself is a highly structured and pre-planned beast!).

From Course Team

I think this looks *very* good, Velda; and in general is a welcome development.

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I think this looks great - particularly the explanation of why we want to move to fully online delivery.

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Thank you for sharing your revised plan for the update of Designing Courses. The plan seems to me to be well-considered and appropriate for the development of the programme as a whole. There is a balance of institutional context and wider issues, as well as between mastering basic principles and promoting critique and creativity. After several years of teaching on the programme, I intend to participate in this course as an auditor.

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This seems like a very coherent rationale to me. I think it is important too that we choose to go fully online with one of the programme **mainstream** courses, so that participants can see both a clear separation, and interaction, between the “medium and the message” as it were.

[Greater flexibility is] an increasingly important point, I think. This (flexibility) too will offer an important “model” for colleagues to reflect upon.

In passing, I think that you have achieved a very compact, yet compelling, description of the issues of concern in course design.

There is always the concern about “the online version” as implying a rather simple transition from one more to the other. I think that your account should leave few concerns about the extent to which this proposal has been thought through, from this point of view.

I would encourage you to – and I am sure that you will – think carefully about the nature, form and length of this “recorded presentation”. Ah – I think what follows addresses this directly. ☺

Clear rationale for the choice of the synchronous and / or asynchronous communications, I feel.

I think that this [focusing on a specific course] is a really nice, concrete approach.

Yes, I think this degree of quite structured guidance [about commenting on blogs] is good. I think that when engaging at a distance, one has to take steps to restore some of the structure which would be provided by time and geography in a f2f course experience.

Very helpful detail [about the blog topics], I think.

Yes, 5 X 500 words seems about right for this sort of [summative assessment] task.

That is a nice idea [getting participants to use a template like the one they would use for course approval].

Yes, nice [summative assessment] task.

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