



Educational Design Services

Curriculum Design

Curriculum design is a program-based approach that takes a broad vision then organizes and executes that vision to meet specific goals. Curriculum Design differs from Instructional Design in that it is more comprehensive, overarching and wide-reaching. Curriculum design articulates a comprehensive program of learning, generally leading to the requirement for multiple types or sets of instructional design covering aspects within in the proposed program (curriculum).

Curriculum Design takes a vision and/or requirement for learning a comprehensive skillset, then creates the necessary content, learning strategies and activities, assessment modalities and outcome determinations to fulfil the program's vision and/or requirements such as meeting professional, regulatory, industry and/or institutional standards.

The outline should include consideration of, and plans for; the following (at least):

- WHAT are the desired outcomes,
- WHO will learn,
- WHAT will be learned,
- HOW it will be learned,
- HOW will the learning be assessed
- WHERE will the future outcomes be implemented

The basic elements of Curriculum design:

Purposeful and Systematic:

Curriculum design goes beyond determining required content for specific subjects or topics and addresses a program of learning or knowledge acquisition. There should be with specific objectives and outcomes for a program of instruction that include broad aspects of knowledge and skill acquisition, the ability to take multiple facts and pieces of knowledge and integrate them into concrete approaches, as well as being able to work with, and within these aspects to formulate approaches and solutions to problems and communicate them appropriately to others.



Focus on Learning:

Good curriculum design centers on what will be learned so that the program of learning offered aligns with desired outcomes and useful personal/professional development. Beware Curriculum designers that have theoretical knowledge but no practical experience in the field as this may place higher burden on the Program provider, instructors or learners than necessary and result in less good learning outcomes for all.

Assessment and learning evaluation should be fairly assessed, which includes consideration of the age and developmental stage for K-12 or post-secondary learners; life-stage(s) and prior experience for adult learners.

Curricula can be competency-based - focused on learners achieving mastery of certain skills and knowledge (competencies) rather than simply completing a set amount of coursework. The learning modalities and evaluations required for a competency-based curriculum are more complex and involve a greater level of Curriculum Design than subsequent Instructional Design. This type of Curriculum Design is most common for professional and adult learners such as internal training programs for staff (e.g. company- or industry-specific sales training programs), new employee orientation programs, internal professional development, and continuing education/professional development programs.

Alternatively, many standardized industry and professional curriculums focus of learners demonstrating that they have learned and assimilated a certain amount of knowledge in the field which is a “passing” grade or standard. These usually have one final, over-arching examination, and examples include the Bar Exam in Law, the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) or Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examination (MCCQE) for medicine in USA/Canada respectively, and Real Estate Licensing Examinations.

Comprehensive Planning:

Curriculum design is broader and deeper than Instructional design. It ensures that content, delivery, materials, assessments, and outcomes have an overall structure integrated into a larger program of learning that covers multiple topics and subjects, but interleaves them in such a way that a broader skillset is gained. The structure should be specifically oriented to an outcome or goal, and not merely impart generalized knowledge. This includes that all components of the curriculum work together to support knowledge acquisition, that learners emerge able to achieve their goals and work within their field/career, and that those offering the curriculum fulfil their mandate to train the learners.

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Designing a curriculum begins with initial interactions between the Designer and Leadership as well as provision of any written program mandates (industry standards, corporate requirements, visionary guidelines, desired outcomes). Next, there should be group meetings that cover the breadth of instruction, with content experts that will relay or guide individual aspects of the program/curriculum. This fulfills both theoretical requirements for knowledge transfer, but also practical considerations such as: when each instructional component within the program should be introduced/developed; how much time learners and instructors are expected to devote to the program of learning; the most effective ways to supply content to the intended learners, and practical aspects of evaluation (can the learners attend in person, what is the utility of group work for this group, is “testing” required and if so will this be written, presentation-based or verbal, and so on).

Remaining Current:

Curriculum design in the first instance, is labor, thought and skill intensive as well as being highly collaborative between those with vision and those required to action the vision, mandate or requirements (Curriculum Designer, Instructors and so on). In the early stages a collaborative and communicative approach is critical to ensure the curriculum meets the requirements and reasons for the program to be developed, as well as practical aspects of instruction (time available, cost, delivery modalities etc.)

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) will also be required to ensure that the broader curriculum remains relevant and up-to-date. Although best-practice is that the CQI process is ongoing through self-evaluation, curricular changes should only be organized and implemented as necessary with respect to changes in the professional, corporate or business environment such as to reflect new regulations, advances in the field, or adoption of new technologies. The CQI process is facilitated by ongoing reflection and evaluation of the program, then implementing revisions to improve program outcomes as necessary. Reflection and evaluation may be internal, or can involve requesting an external evaluation and report.

Practical Elements:

Curriculum design begins with communication of the over-arching vision and goals of the program of learning by the lead individual (visionary) and/or in accordance with professional, industry or corporate guidelines and standards. Due to the broad and deep nature, an independent Curriculum designer will need to familiarize themselves with the Mandate and the proposed breadth and depth of the Program including through provision of written materials/expectations for the program of learning and meetings, discussions and other communications with Leadership. Additionally, both individual and group interactions with Instructors is needed in order to determine appropriate progression and

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interleaving of subjects, topics and content as well as practical approaches to developing the program such as Instructor availability, time required for individual program components (as estimated by the instructors and/or subject experts) as well as the learning and time commitment expected of the learners by Leadership.

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