

What Elon faculty are saying about CATL course design working groups

"The working group was invaluable." (Fall 2005)

"I found open discussions with other committed educators to be extremely engaging and valuable. I was able to obtain feedback on potential assignments, which helped me clarify pedagogical intentions and, at times, provided me with needed affirmation in assignment sequences and choices. I valued the feedback provided by group members, and enjoyed offering feedback to and sharing ideas with others." (Fall 2005)

"This was a great experience for me. I feel it was a good opportunity to interact with faculty of other disciplines and stages in their careers." (Fall 2005)

COURSE DESIGN WORKING GROUP – OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

Session 1: What's the point? Establishing goals and understanding the context

Be ready to talk briefly with your group about the following questions:

- What are your **learning goals** for the course?
- What is **the context** of the course?
 - Who are your students and why do they take the course?
 - How does the course fit into the curriculum – required or elective, first year or capstone, etc.?
 - How does the course fit into the rest of your term/year (what else is going on that shapes how the course will work?)

To help you prepare for the first group meeting, read the first chapter of **Understanding by Design** by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (1998). This chapter explores learning goals and explains “backward design” – an approach to course design that many faculty find helpful. When you join a group, we’ll send you a copy of this chapter. **Understanding by Design** also is available in the CATL library at Holland House.

Session 2: How do I know if they've got it? Thinking about learning and assessment

In session 1 we talked about goals and contexts; now let's think about **student learning and assessment**. In other words, what student behaviors will provide evidence for you that they have learned what you want them to learn? Here are three key ideas related to assessment that you might consider for this session:

Prior knowledge - Research on how people learn demonstrates that prior knowledge and beliefs are crucial to new learning. What do students bring with them into your class and how does this affect their work with material and ideas they're encountering in the class? How will you learn what students think and believe early in the term, and how will that knowledge shape how you teach?

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Transfer – Transfer refers to the ability to appropriately apply new knowledge or skills in a different setting. Transfer is fundamental to deep, lasting learning. What might transfer look like in your course? What should students be able to **do** with what they're learning in your course?

Feedback - Feedback is essential for learning. Feedback can be **formative** (developmental, not related to a grade) or **summative** (linked to a grade or formal evaluation). Feedback is particularly helpful when mistakes are not punished severely, so students can focus on learning from their mistakes, rather than on reacting to the grade. Also, you don't have to be the only person providing feedback to students – peer and self assessment can contribute to student learning without consuming your time.

For this session, then, come ready to talk about learning and assessment in your course.

Session 3: What will we do today? Linking the big picture to individual class meetings

In this session, we'll talk about the nitty-gritty of the course - the schedule, assignments, individual class activities, and so on.

Think about how you begin the course. The first few class meetings, and particularly the first day, are essential in setting the tone for the term. What will you do on the first day (or during the first week) to help establish the class environment that you want?

Think about how assessment supports learning throughout the term. In other words, how does what we discussed in session 2 translate into your course schedule?

Think about the rhythms of the term. Every course has its own rhythms connected to:

- The frequency, timing, and duration of class meetings (for example, does class meet early or late in the day?);
- Your schedule during the term (e.g., do you have travel or have major deadlines?);
- Patterns in student life (e.g., what's best in class right before and after Spring Break?).

There's no single "right way" to pace a course, but it often is helpful to try to anticipate and shape the rhythms of the course.

Session 4: Will it work? Putting it all together

In this session, you should be nearing completion of the course design process. This is a good opportunity to think about how the course will work as a whole, and to discuss questions you still have about any aspect of the course. For example:

- What do you anticipate as the biggest challenges (for you, for students) in the course?
- How will you know how the course is going? What are some ways during the term that you might gather feedback on the course and your teaching?