



Course Development & Constructive Alignment

How to Use this Document: This is a step-by-step guide for developing innovative, high-impact learning experiences for students in hybrid and fully-remote environments and is intended to be used in combination with our other Course Development resources. This is not a 'to-do' list; rather, this document is intended to prompt reflection and productive conversations with the Teaching and Learning Team at UCPE as you progress toward the start of your course.

What is Constructive Alignment? Constructive alignment is a principle of course design based on the theory that new knowledge builds upon existing mental models and is constructed through action and reflection. It begins with identifying learning outcomes and then working backward to ensure that the modes of teaching, activities, and assessments are aligned with those outcomes.

1. Identify Skills-Based Learning Objectives and Competencies for the Course

- What topics will be covered? How will students engage with these topics?
- What do you want the students to know or be able to do by the end of this course?
- How do these skills translate to the current demands of the labor market? How would a student perform these skills as part of their career?

2. Map Out Course Modules

- How many weeks? How many synchronous sessions?
- Given the time you have, what do you feel is the most effective grouping and sequencing of course content and activities for achieving the course objectives?
- Each module in a course should include: a descriptive title, learning objectives, multimedia (external videos, recorded lectures, images, slides), readings, and opportunities to demonstrate comprehension, practice skills, and/or demonstrate competencies.

3. Identify Materials to Help Students Engage with Course Content

- What are the essential and relevant readings or resources for this particular topic?
- How will you leverage UChicago's wealth of online academic resources and collections?
- To increase accessibility of content, we recommend downloading and optimizing PDFs articles and other online content that may lie behind a firewall.

4. Plan and Record Asynchronous Video Content

- To ensure time spent in synchronous sessions is used primarily for active learning, determine what parts of the lecture can be excerpted for asynchronous delivery.
- Videos should be short (2-3 minutes) and not exceed 10 minutes. Complex topics can be broken down into smaller parts. Panopto or Canvas quizzes can be used for comprehension checks to ensure students have understood and retain the information presented.
- If you are recording lecture material, consider developing a script to provide structure. Consider making this script (e.g., Notes in PowerPoint) available/visible to students.



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5. Design Activities and Assignments Simulating Real-World Applications

- In order to successfully achieve the course objectives, provide students with the opportunity to develop or practice these skills and receive feedback on these attempts.
- Strive to create assignments and activities that simulate real-world applications of skills and competencies.
- Consider how you will assess student work. What criteria will you use? Will it be evaluated by grade, points, formative feedback, a rubric? How will you communicate to students the goals of activities assignments?

6. Identify Data and Tools for Hands-On Learning

- What digital tools will students be using to engage with the course content? How will you leverage learning technologies to enhance students' learning experiences?
- Consider setting aside class time or other fora for students to discuss and practice unfamiliar tools and technologies before using them to complete assignments.
- What kinds of datasets will students be working with during synchronous instruction and/or assignments? In which platforms or formats will you share datasets and tools?

7. Build Spaces for Critical Reflection, Interaction, and Dialogue

- While discussion boards are a common feature of many courses, be thoughtful about the kinds of questions or prompts. Questions that are open-ended or require the student to apply what they're learning to a new context create space for reflection and diverse responses.
- When requesting students to respond to others' posts, specify why and how they should respond. Push beyond the 'agree' and 'disagree' dichotomy to generate productive discussions.
- Virtual networking events with breakout groups and projects or activities that require group input are an important part of developing a sense of community and extending this community beyond the course.

8. Draft Synchronous Session Agenda

- The synchronous sessions or live classes should focus on providing students with opportunities to connect directly with the instructor(s) and with one another.
- Each session should include time dedicated to responding to student questions, and opportunities for students to practice the developing skills and/or engage in problem-based learning in small groups.
- What kinds of work can students engage in during a synchronous session that they couldn't otherwise? How do you want to use the time available to connect directly with students?

Additional Resources:

- Biggs, J. (1996) Enhancing Teaching through Constructive Alignment. *Higher Education* 32(3): 347-364.
- Ambrose, S.A. et al. (Eds.) (2010) *How learning works: seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.