Backward Design to the Future
Disrupting the Course Development Timeline

SCAN ME

Tulane SoPA LD&D
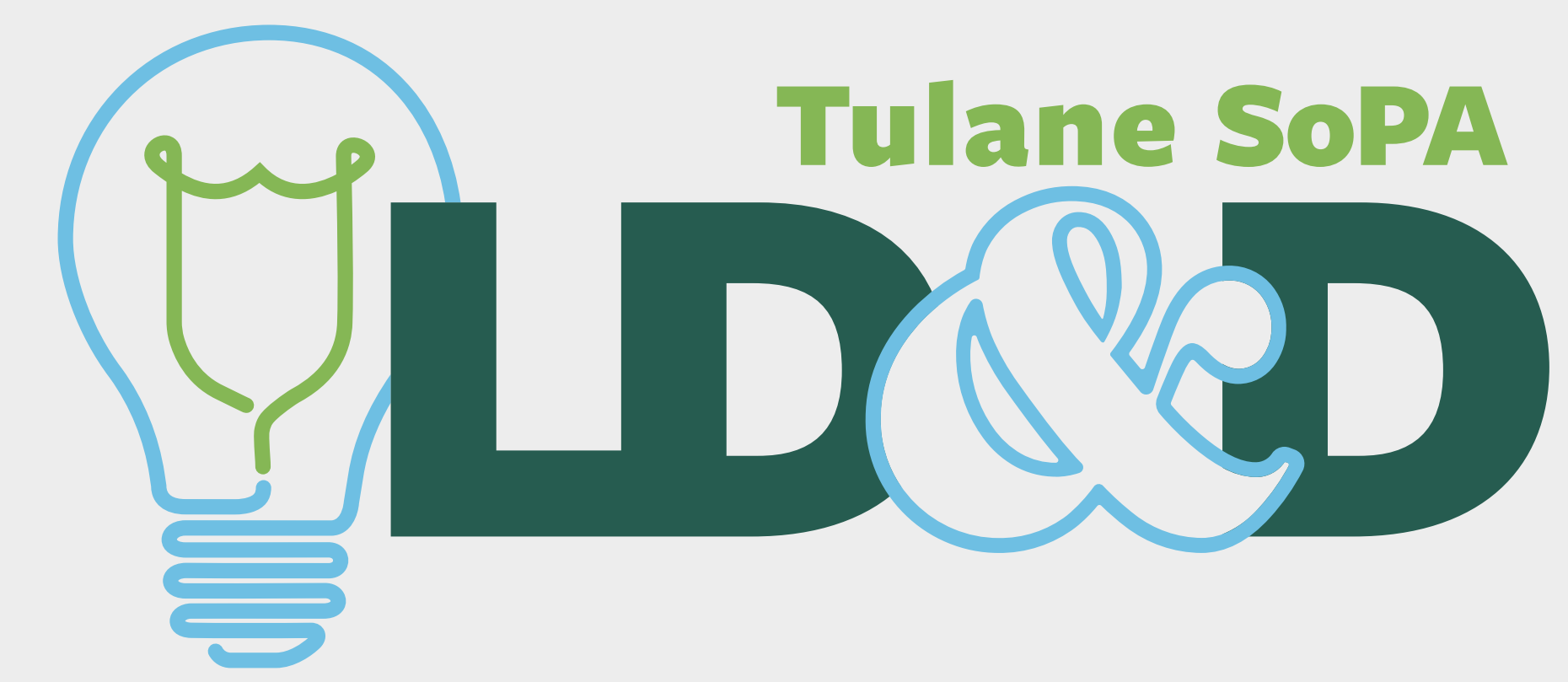
Assessment

The CDW assessment module focuses faculty on the assessment activities that meet the course and program learning outcomes (CLOs, PLOs). If a CLO falls short of what students should be able to do beyond graduation, the faculty are directed to collaborate with their peers and program leadership to make the necessary modifications. Assessment methods that best measure the course and program objectives are developed by faculty with support and guidance from Tulane SoPA LD&D. While there is certainly a place for true-or-false and multiple-choice exams, authentic assessment activities are strongly encouraged.

About & End Pages

In this CDW module, writing the content for the About and End pages is the focus. Each module starts with an overview page with module learning objectives and concludes with a wrap-up page that summarizes past learning and previews what is to come.

In accordance with Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (1965), faculty:

1. Gain attention of the students;
2. Inform the students of the objectives; and
3. Enhance retention and transfer.

Setting this as the first task in developing the course provides an easy win and a great way to ease into using Canvas for faculty.

Course Planner Part II

Faculty begin to drill down into each module to establish a clearer understanding of the anticipated module content and activities. Part II of the Course Planner requires faculty to provide a list of:

1. Content and activities that will be consistent across all modules, and
2. Unique content and activities that are typically assigned once throughout the course.

In addition to this step, faculty are expected to list the anticipated assessment activities with their associated point values.

Course Planner Part I

Tulane SoPA faculty are responsible for providing the bigger picture of the course's purpose. Part I of the Course Planner asks faculty to:

1. Provide a course description;
2. Indicate their desired textbook (if applicable);
3. Identify Course Learning Objectives (CLOs) that each aligns to the appropriate Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) that are provided by their assigned program director;
4. Create a module outline of topics and list 2-5 Module Learning Objectives (MLOs) that each align to the appropriate CLOs; and
5. Provide an overview of the final assessment.

Historical Perspective

In 2018, Tulane's School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) developed a Course Development Workshop (CDW) to build online and hybrid courses following a Backward Design model at scale. Tulane SoPA Learning Design & Development (LD&D) learning designers shepherded faculty through the course build one module at a time.

Despite the course planning process, we found this model of building still led faculty to focus more on the learning materials (textbooks, readings, articles, videos, and lectures) rather than how the student was going to meet the stated course and module-level learning objectives. In this process, many faculty developers felt that they could not move forward before nailing down their selection of instructional materials.

The method of Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) posits instruction (lessons, units, or courses) should be developed based on the desired results, rather than looking to the methods, books, or activities preferred by faculty. Thus, in 2021 the Tulane SoPA LD&D team flipped the timeline and workflow of the CDW to organize course design and development deliverables in the order expressed along the path to the left on this poster. This improved workflow and timeline fosters holistic thinking about course design, thus preventing disrupted development schedules and disjointed alignment.

Instructional Materials

In traditional course builds, faculty might start by curating the textbook readings, articles, videos, and other learning material prior to developing assessments. However, in the Backward Design Model, faculty identify the learning objectives first and methods of assessing those objectives. Once that happens, faculty can then more purposefully select learning materials that prepare students to meet the learning outcomes.

By flipping the workflow of the CDW to truly follow the Backward Design model, rather than a module-by-module sequence, faculty report more confidence and efficiency in creating and curating learning materials.

Faculty are asked to complete an initial draft of their course outline on the Course Planner without the aid of a textbook. Why? If the curriculum should drive textbook selection, it is important to model this in our course building process.

Unique Features

From the beginning, the CDW intentionally models the best practices of a well-designed online course and its implementation to set the tone for faculty developers.

All modules and their materials are complemented by framing language that ties the assessment to the supporting material that supports the instructor's achievement of CDW objectives.
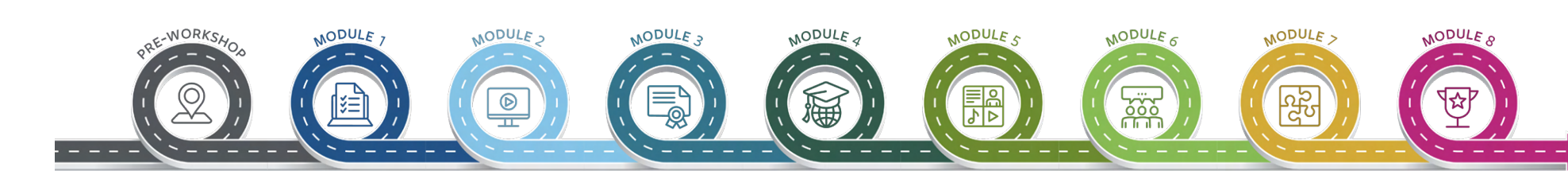
To promote an immersive experience, the learning designers are expected to demonstrate instructor presence in the CDW by communicating via email, Zoom, and responding in a timely manner with specific feedback to assignment submissions in Canvas.

Faculty submit their deliverables as Canvas assessments by providing a URL to the course. Once the assignment is submitted, the learning designers grade faculty submissions to assess each deliverable in alignment with Quality Matters (QM) Standards using the Canvas Speedgrader.

Examples of Success

This new timeline and workflow in the CDW have increased completion rates. For example, in the Fall of 2021, 55% of courses were completed on time; however, once the new timeline and workflow were implemented in Spring of 2022, on-time completion rates increased to 68%. Some faculty even completed their course builds early!

In addition to increasing on-time completion rates, the quality of the online and hybrid courses have improved through enhanced multimedia assets, increased levels of interactivity, and relationship building with weekly meetings.

"What a world of difference! This is the second course I've built through the workshop but the first with this new process and I can't tell you what a big difference it made in the process - from start to finish. Not only was I able to manage the process with less stress, but I also feel as though the course is so much stronger because of the backward design." - SoPA Faculty Member

Lecture & Media

An entire CDW module is dedicated to media planning and development, which will enhance the student learning experience and provide a competitive advantage. The Tulane SoPA LD&D media team has an extensive menu of possibilities, to include: instructor insight video lectures, illustrations and infographics, project overview videos and animations, linear and branching scenario interactives, animated and interactive lessons, podcasts, and guest interviews.

By placing the media development early in the CDW after the assessments and learning materials, faculty become aware of the need to supply assets that support or scaffold the learner's completion of assessments and not to re-create the same delivery of information already supplied by curated learning materials.

Engagement

In this CDW module, the faculty and learning designers continue to work together to create opportunities for students to interact with their instructors, their peers, and the course material by creating practice activities, formative assessments, live sessions, and discussion boards. This is the last CDW module that requires the faculty to work on content and activities for the course. The LD&D team focuses on boosting students' cognitive, motivational, and social-emotional engagement by building community and bridging the engagement activities to the learning and assessment activities.

Providing Orientation

At this point in the CDW, the course development is nearly finished. The LD&D team devotes a full week to work on the aspects of the course that serve to prepare SoPA learners for their upcoming coursework. The key to filling in the carefully templated pages for the Start Here module, Homepage, and Syllabus is in the details of the previous CDW deliverables. Therefore, it is critical the course has been fully developed to ensure that the information provided is correct.

Tying it Together

In this final CDW module, faculty are expected to have addressed all feedback from prior modules and updated the course. Faculty review the grading schema in Canvas and ensure all point values for assignments, discussions, and quizzes are accurate. It is at this point the learning designer conducts a final top-to-bottom review of the course to ensure the course structure and sequence still makes sense, everything is formatted properly, and accessibility strategies have been applied. Once the course is complete, the LD&D team convert the development course into a Blueprint course to serve as the standard for delivering online and hybrid courses. Regardless of the instructor or delivery method, students receive a consistent experience from one semester to the next.

"Thinking about the assessments up front then deciding on supporting materials and content was a good option because it allowed me to focus on filling in the gaps throughout the semester." - SoPA Faculty Member

"The course design process was great. My assigned instructional designer worked with me at every step of the process. She helped me keep on track to ensure I didn't get behind, but was also very respectful of my time and was flexible with meetings. As an adjunct with a demanding full-time job, this was perfect." - SoPA Faculty Member

"I truly cannot imagine creating a course without the course build workshops. It gives me confidence that I'm providing students with what they need to learn and succeed." - SoPA Faculty Member