



## **Building a Pathway for Student Learning: A How-To Guide to Course Design**

Jones, Steven K.; Noyd, Robert K.; and Sagendorf, Kenneth S.  
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2014

Book Review

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There are many important discussions happening in the academy about how to re-envision the student experience in order to provide better learning opportunities. The culture of higher education is undergoing a shift from an instruction-centered model to a learning or student-centered paradigm. These discussions are extremely significant in that they force faculty to re-evaluate and re-envision the traditional models – and ultimately lead to a more thorough and permanent education for the students. However, many of these studies are difficult since ways of applying these new theoretical models is often not immediately obvious. In *Building a Pathway for Student Learning*, Jones, Noyd, and Sagendorf have compiled a comprehensive and effective workbook addressing this lack.

The workbook represents the results of a faculty development course design retreat that the authors have conducted for the last several years. This is not a book about course design, it is a systematic workbook giving direction for designing a learning-centered course in any discipline. At every stage in the course design process, the reader is reminded that, “our success ultimately comes not from what we as instructors are able to do but from what our students learn as a result of taking our courses” (9). To this end, the following pathway is suggested for effective course design. First, know the students you will teach. Second, identify the course learning goals. Third, build a summative assessment to determine the extent to which students have accomplished the learning goals. Fourth, develop a list of learning proficiencies that are required to successfully accomplish the learning goals, and then sequence them. Fifth, create learning experiences that will allow students to build and develop the central proficiencies, and to accomplish the learning goals. Sixth, construct several formative assessments, and use them to evaluate student progress toward the core

proficiencies, which will encourage student improvement.

After going through each of these stages, the authors lead the reader through two synthetic activities: creating a course poster and syllabus. The course poster assembles the learning experiences to be utilized in class, the proficiencies that will be developed, the way these proficiencies will be assessed, and the goal of the class, in order to ensure coherence and alignment within the course, and to transparently display the structure of the course to students. The syllabus is envisioned as a tool to demonstrate the learning-centered design of the course, not just the course policies and assignments. Each of these synthetic steps is aided by the use of the companion website.

The workbook has much to commend. First, each chapter contains a helpful and thorough survey of the more significant research on the topic under consideration. Second, the system suggested to redesign courses is logically ordered, and effective. Third, at several key points the authors suggest proactive ways of finding evaluation of stages in the course design from colleagues. Most importantly, the authors recognize that effective course design has to be a flexible system; they do not claim to have all the answers for how every course can best be structured, rather they provide a series of guiding questions so that individual instructors can think through how to order their classes so that they effectively take students from wherever they begin, to the acquisition of central proficiencies and the accomplishment of learning goals, whatever the discipline. For these reasons, this book should be essential for anyone developing or revising courses towards a learning-centered model.

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