Understanding by Design (UbD): Stages of “Backward” Design

Designing a course or curriculum by beginning with the end in mind and designing toward that end.

**Stage 1**
Identify desired results

- What should students know, understand, and be able to do?
- What content is worthy of understanding?
- What enduring understandings are desired?

In stage 1, we will clarify our priorities by consider our course goals, student learning outcomes, and curricular expectations.

**Stage 2**
Determine acceptable evidence

- How will we know if students have achieved the desired results?
- What will we accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency?

In stage 2, think about collected assessment evidence needed to document and validate that the desired learning has been achieved, not simply as content to be covered or as a series of learning activities.

**Stage 3**
Plan learning experiences & instruction

In stage 3, think through the most appropriate instructional activities.

Questions to consider:
- What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, principles) and skills (processes, procedures, strategies) will students need in order to perform effectively and achieve desired results?
- What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?
- What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught, in light of performance goals?
- What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals?

**The twin sins of traditional design** (Wiggins and McTighe, 2004):

- Activity-oriented design, “hands-on without being minds-on” Engaging experiences, fun activities but do not lead anywhere intellectually.

- “coverage”-oriented design
  The student is led through unending facts, ideas, and readings with little or no sense of the overarching ideas, issues, and learning goals that might inform study.

  The word cover refers to something on the surface, applied to teaching it suggests something superficial. When we “cover” material we focus on surface details. From the learner’s perspective, everything appears of equal value.

## Stage 1 – Desired Results

**Established Goals:**
- What relevant goals (e.g. content standards, course or program objectives, learning outcomes) will this design address?

**Understandings**
*Student will understand that ...*
- What are the big ideas?
- What specific understandings about them are desired?
- What misunderstandings are predictable?

**Essential Questions:**
- What provocative questions will foster inquiry, understanding, and transfer of learning?

**Students will know...**
- What key knowledge and skills will students acquire as a result of this course or unit?
- What should they eventually be able to do as a result of such knowledge and skill?

**Students will be able to...**
- Through what authentic performance tasks will students demonstrate the desired understanding?
- By what criteria will performances of understanding be judged?

## Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence

**Performance Tasks:**
- Through what authentic performance tasks will students demonstrate the desired understanding?
- By what criteria will performances of understanding be judged?

**Other Evidence:**
- Through what other evidence (e.g., quizzes, tests, academic prompts, observations, homework, journals) will students demonstrate achievement of the desired results?
- How will students reflect upon and self-assess their learning?

## Stage 3 – Learning Plan

**Learning Activities:**
What learning experiences and instruction will enable students to achieve the desired results? How will the design

- **W** = help the students know Where the unit is going and What is expected? Help the teacher know Where the students are coming from (prior knowledge, interests)?
- **H** = Hook all students and Hold their interest?
- **E** = Equip students, help them Experience the key ideas and Explore the issues?
- **R** = Provide opportunities to Rethink and Revise their understandings and work?
- **E** = Allow students to Evaluate their work and its implications?
- **T** = Be Tailored (personalized) to the different needs, interests, and abilities of learners?
- **O** = Be Organized to maximize initial and sustained engagement as well as effective learning?