Group-Based Activities & Discussion   3 Hour Course Guide

Mini-Term Courses

Mini-term courses provide a unique opportunity to engage in new pedagogical practices advantaged by intensive instruction. As with all course design, it is helpful to begin with the course learning objectives; Rather than merely condensing all the content and activities you might cover in a 15-week course, 3-week courses allow instructors to reduce span but increase depth. Synchronous mini-term courses, typically scheduled for three hours per day, yield new and exciting opportunities for classroom engagement.

3-Hour Synchrounous Session

3-hour instructional blocks provide time for daily activities that otherwise are challenging to fit into 50-75 minute course sessions. For example, you can open each class with a mini-activity, such as an ice breaker, brain opener, or metacognitive activity. You may also provide structured time at the end of each session for reflection to capture each student's learning for that day.

These two practices might be difficult for shorter time periods, but can be easily embedded in a 3-hour session. Longer course sessions also provide opportunities for active learning principles. Building in these interactions "flips" the course by reducing lecture time and promoting engagement and discussion during synchronous meeting times.

Active Learning Framework

These active teaching models for mini-term are positioned at the intersection of Backwards Design (Wiggins & McTighe 1998) and the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework (Fisher & Frey 2008).

Backward Design emphasizes intention and purpose of course activities and assessment, beginning the design process with establishing key outcomes, then determining the assessment of such outcomes, and then the content, resources, and activities that will lead students to desired results.
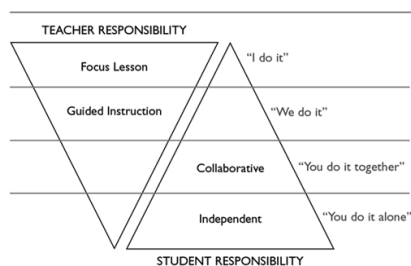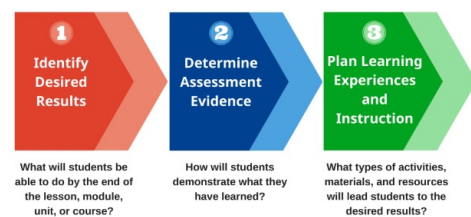

Backward Design Model

Image retrieved from: https://humboldt2.instructure.com/courses/27792/pages/intro-to-student-learning-outcomes-slos

Image retrieved from https://dpi.wi.gov/ela/instruction/framework

GRR positions the importance of interaction with other students, encompassing Bruner's work on scaffolding, Piaget's work on cognitive structures and schemata, and Vygotsky's work on the zone of proximal development. Students are more engaged when provided structured opportunities to learn from each other. (Fisher & Frey 2008).

Quick Tips

- Be clear about course expectations of daily work. Remind students of time required for a 3-credit, 3-week course (3 hours in class, 4-6 hours out of class each day, for example). Setting this expectation up front, even with an email to registrants before the class begins, can help ensure students are aware of your expectations and ready for the intensive nature of the course.

- Help students maintain focus and energy by varying the pace and frequently changing classroom activities (10-min micro lecture, 30-min individual directed activity, 10-min group discussion, 20-min report out to class.

- Finally, find opportunities to make your 3-week course a community. The intensive nature of mini terms could mean your students are seeing you and their peers more than they might see their own loved ones! These deep connections present the opportunity for a powerful and collaborative learning experience.

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Course Design for Group-based Learning

This serves as a suggestion for how you might structure a particular 3-hour synchronous session during mini-term devoted around group-based learning. These models embed active learning and flipped design principles, where students engage in collaborative inquiry in class, and learn content (in Canvas) out of class. Course materials are introduced before the synchronous session, and the time spent during synchronous online sessions is repurposed for inquiry, application, and assessment.

Before Class

1. Assign recorded lecture(s) using Studio or Panopto, and embed knowledge checks throughout the video. If you do not have any recorded lecture, assign a reading and create a discussion board where students answer comprehension questions about the reading. The discussion must be completed before attending class.
2. Create a discussion board where students can post additional questions they might have about assigned reading(s)/recording.
3. Review those questions prior to your in-class session.

During Class

Time Block	Possible activities:
1	Social Icebreaker or metacognitive activity to build community
	Short activity that follows up on previous class or homework
2	Synchronous lecture, set up for group activity
3	Breakout Groups: When planning your group work, let the following questions guide you: 1. How will group work help your students meet one or more of your learning objectives? (Principle of alignment) 2. How will you configure your groups? Assign roles (Speaker, Notetaker, Time Manager). Here are a few suggestions for structuring your breakout rooms: • Cue participants with language such as, "Open the digital tool by clicking the link in the chat." • Let participants know how to ask for help in breakout rooms and allow them to return to the main room at any time. Active learning strategies you might use in your breakout rooms include, but not limited to: Jigsaw technique, collaborative notetaking, concept mapping, think-pair-share.
4	Group Presentations, Debrief This might be groups sharing out their discussion takeaways, designated students summarizing the key points made and questions raised, or asking students to reflect and share what they learned. Rather than summarizing the discussion yourself, partner with your students
5	Reflection and wrap up: Carve out some time at the end of class for students to reflect on the discussion, either in writing or orally. You might consider collecting written reflections through a Google Form or through the chat feature in Zoom. Consider asking students to not only reflect on what they learned from the discussion, but to also summarize key ideas or insights and/or pose new questions.

Quick Tip!
Tools that you might use to facilitate group include Google Slides, Google Docs, Jamboard, or PearDeck, to name a few.

Quick Tip!
Blocks 3 or 4 may be repeated as often as needed within the same course session, depending on length of group brainstorming and presentations/debrief.

After Class

Extend the discussion: Encourage students to continue the class discussion by leveraging asynchronous course spaces (e.g.: Canvas discussion board). You may ask students to summarize the discussion, extend the discussion by contributing new ideas, or pose follow-up questions that will be discussed asynchronously or used to begin the next synchronous class discussion.