

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 Synchronous 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.

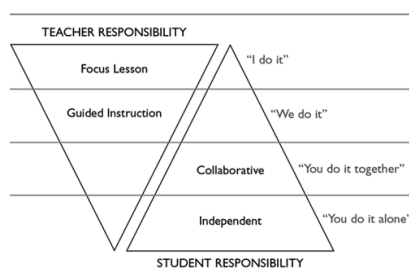


Image retrieved from <https://dpi.wi.gov/ela/instruction/framework>

Backward Design Model

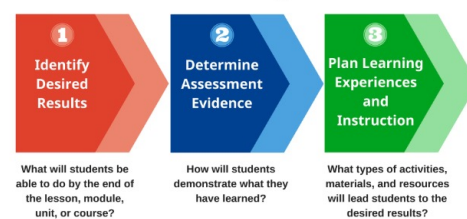


Image retrieved from: <https://humboldt2.instructure.com/courses/27792/pages/intro-to-student-learning-outcomes-slos>

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.

Course Design for Individual Research or Projects

This serves as a suggestion for how you might structure a particular 3-hour synchronous session during mini-term devoted around individual directed projects or research. 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 Find ways to reduce lecture time and promote discussion. For example, record any lengthy lecture for students to watch before class, or break up lengthy lectures into 15-min increments spread throughout the 3hr - meeting.

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	Brief lecture and discussion in Zoom
3	Self-directed and individual learning examples. Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read and analyze an article or resource• Watch a video and answer questions or make comments in Canvas Studio• Create a concept map• Engage in reflection, blogging, journaling• Participate in problem solving• Contribute to the discussion board
4	Have students return and report out, articulate or model findings
5	Reflection and wrap up, set the state for the next class meeting

After Class Follow up activities and discussion (asynchronous) in Canvas.