

## Core Teaching and Learning

### Core Review Teaching Subcommittee

### April 2024

The Core Review Teaching Subcommittee was charged to recommend standards for teaching and learning in core courses. The Core Review Teaching Subcommittee has extensively discussed the principles that should inform teaching in Core classes. The Subcommittee has reviewed the characteristics of the students who take Core courses at FSU, comparing them with students at other UNC Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). We have also reviewed the resources available at FSU for instructors to improve teaching in the Core.

### Principles of Core Teaching and Learning

As a result of this work, the Subcommittee recommends that the following principles should guide teaching in the Core:

- **General Principles:** Every Core course should be designed using evidence-based strategies to promote student success. These include but are not limited to
  - Alignment and optimization of learning objectives, activities, and assessments.
  - Clarity and organization of overall course design as well as module design.
  - Promotion of student engagement through proven learning strategies such as active learning, adaptive learning, peer learning, and flipped learning.
- **Principles of Teaching in Core Courses:** Core courses differ in significant ways from those taught in the major, and pedagogy should reflect that. Core Courses enroll a high percentage of beginning college students. They also enroll a high percentage of non-major students. Core courses are generally introductory, with large enrollments. These distinctive features of Core courses should be addressed explicitly by incorporating strategies to
  - **Motivate students.** Non-major students may not find the content inherently interesting. Instructors have a duty to address the relevance to students and engagement with students.
  - **Be extremely clear and well organized.** Instructors cannot assume any tacit or prerequisite knowledge of the course content or skills, unless there is a designated prerequisite or placement criterion.
  - **Reinforce core skills wherever appropriate.** Instructors in Core courses are not only teaching their designated subject matter. They are also teaching skills as part of a program – the Core Curriculum. For this reason, Core instructors need to reinforce core skills that are used in their courses. These skills will include one or more of the following (dependent on what the revised core learning outcomes are determined to be):
    - **Transitional Studies:** Goal-setting, time management, note-taking and study skills, self-assessment, growth mindset, etc.
    - **Communication Skills:** written and/or oral
    - **Reasoning Skills:** Critical Thinking, Quantitative Literacy

- **Information Literacy:** Including productive and ethical use of AI and similar technologies.
- **Principles of Teaching Core Courses at FSU:** FSU students differ in significant ways from students at any other UNC institution. Those differences include
  - **Diversity:** FSU is an HBCU. We enroll a high percentage of African American students. However, we also enroll a much higher percentage of non-traditional students – transfer, adult, military-affiliated, and returning – than other UNC MSIs. Most of those students must take at least some core courses. This diversity should be addressed through
    - **Equity-based course design**
    - **Inclusive teaching practices**
    - **Flexibility and responsiveness**
  - **Risk:** We enroll a high percentage of marginally prepared students, including students returning to higher education after a long delay. We enroll a high percentage of Pell-eligible students. Academic and financial risk should be addressed through
    - **Incorporation of Transitional Studies skills**
    - **Scaffolding and academic support**
    - **Formative assessment and opportunities for students to improve**
    - **Flexibility and responsiveness**
  - **Delivery:** FSU enrolls a high percentage of online students and offers a high percentage of online courses. Because most FSU instructors teach at least some classes online, there is a high expectation of technology use even in face-to-face classes. This can create challenges for students who may struggle with access to technology hardware, software, and/or connection as well as with the skills needed to use technology for educational purposes. These challenges should be addressed by ensuring that
    - **Technology expectations are clear.**
    - **Course-specific technology** is explicitly and carefully supported.
    - **Resources are available** to students for non-course specific technology. Examples include technology orientation courses or training videos, the locations of campus computer labs and Wi-Fi, and the availability of devices.

## Implementation Options

How do we ensure that all core courses are informed by these principles?

FSU has strong support for faculty development. All faculty who teach online or hybrid courses must complete a certification process that involves developing a course that meets Quality Matters standards. Quality Matters addresses general principles of course design such as alignment of objectives, activities, and assessment; clarity and organization; active learning; and incorporation of educational technology. Since most faculty at FSU have completed certification, we can assume that they are implementing these course design principles in their core courses.

That is an assumption, however, because Quality Matters is focused on online courses. There is no guarantee that faculty apply those principles in face-to-face sections, nor is there at present any mechanism for ensuring that they do so.

In addition, Quality Matters does not address some of the principles of core teaching outlined above. These include principles such as motivation, reinforcement of other core skills, diversity, risk, and equity. Fortunately, FSU has invested in faculty development that does address these principles by bringing ACUE to campus. ACUE provides training specifically addressing many of the principles of core teaching and learning identified in this report. As of this report, 78 instructors have completed one or more ACUE courses. However, there is no guarantee that all faculty teaching core courses will complete this faculty development nor that they will apply what they learn in their courses.

The Subcommittee has discussed several options for ensuring that the principles of core teaching and learning will be applied to core courses. These options are not mutually exclusive.

### 1. Fund ACUE at a level that enables all faculty to participate.

The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) offers pedagogical training that is recognized by the American Council of Education. The training is broken down into courses. Instructors can earn certification by completing four courses.

FSU has contracted with ACUE to offer training to instructors. Currently ACUE is funded to provide roughly 160 enrollments per year. Because faculty have generally taken about 2 courses per year, the current level of funding supports about 80 faculty per year. FSU employs about 400 unique instructors each academic year. At that rate, it would take at least five years for all instructors to receive training.

However, there is no guarantee that all instructors will complete the training just because it is offered. ACUE training represents a significant investment of faculty time and effort. That time and effort should be recognized and rewarded. Currently, faculty receive \$500 for completing an ACUE course. That compensation should be doubled to \$1000, possibly in conjunction with a requirement to demonstrate implementation of ACUE strategies in core courses.

- Pros: ACUE is an excellent training program with evidence-based teaching strategies.
- Cons:
  - ACUE is time and effort intensive.
  - ACUE is expensive.
  - By itself, ACUE training does not ensure that core courses incorporate such teaching strategies.

### 2. Develop face-to-face teaching certification.

FSU requires all faculty teaching online and hybrid courses to complete a training course developed by the Office of Faculty Development. A similar course could be developed for face-to-face courses. To avoid duplication, the course could focus specifically on course design and teaching strategies unique to the face-to-face environment. Or duplication could be addressed by modules those with the relevant certification could skip.

- Pros:
  - Would ensure that instructors teaching face-to-face classes have the same level of preparation of those teaching online and hybrid courses.
  - FSU already requires training for online and hybrid courses. Adding face-to-face certification would logically fill the remaining delivery mode.
- Cons:
  - Would impose an additional burden on faculty.
  - Would not by itself ensure that face-to-face core courses are taught using the strategies in such training.

A variation on this would be to require certification for new instructors over a defined period of time. New faculty could earn certification starting with their primary delivery mode (online, face-to-face, hybrid) and then earn other certifications as their schedule requires.

### 3. Identify, reward, and spread excellence in core teaching

Develop a system for identifying excellent instructors in the core, rewarding them with recognition, support, and compensation, and encouraging them to share their teaching strategies with other core instructors. For several years FSU ran a Freshman Fellows program that identified such faculty. This program could be revived and updated.

- Pros:
  - Would recognize excellent teaching in the core as a value of the University.
  - Would encourage excellent teachers to share their practices with other faculty.
- Cons:
  - Would require financial support.
  - Runs the risk of diverting funds from faculty who need help.

### 4. Require teaching and learning plan as part of core course certification and assessment.

Currently any course proposed to fulfill a core requirement must include an assessment plan specifying the assessment, how it maps to the relevant core learning outcome, and how faculty will implement the assessment plan. Faculty are required to assess core courses every other year. As part of the assessment process, faculty reflect on student performance and discuss ways to improve performance where it does not meet targets.

The core course assessment plan could include a requirement to specify teaching strategies intended to ensure student success on the assessment. The report could include a discussion of the teaching strategies implemented, how they affected student performance, and what changes in teaching will be tried for the following assessment cycle.

- Pros:
  - Embeds a discussion of teaching and learning into the core assessment process.
  - Requires faculty to agree on a set of teaching strategies.
  - Requires faculty to report on effectiveness of teaching strategies.
- Cons:

- Additional burden on faculty.

### 5. Ask faculty to report on effective teaching strategies as part of the core course assessment report.

This strategy is essentially Strategy 4 above minus the requirement for faculty to agree on teaching strategies as part of the assessment plan. Faculty would identify teaching strategies they found effective as part of their individual core assessment report.

- Pros:
  - Simple to implement.
  - Minimal burden on faculty.
- Cons:
  - Does not require discussion of teaching among faculty.

### 6. Develop faculty learning communities in core teaching

Faculty learning communities (FLCs) are structured conversations among groups of faculty around a common topic of interest. FLCs typically last a year, during which the members research challenges related to teaching and explore solutions. Core FLCs could be structured in a number of ways:

- By discipline, to support innovation in natural science, the social sciences, or the humanities.
- By core learning outcome, to support improvement in teaching practices related, say, to critical thinking.
- By theme, to explore ways to infuse equitable pedagogy in core courses.
  
- Pros:
  - Faculty-led discussions of topics of interest
- Cons:
  - Requires significant oversight, organization, and support.

### 7. Provide training in reinforcing core learning outcomes.

Every core course is certified for one core learning outcome. For example, HIST 110, World History to 1600, is certified for Global Literacy. However, this course is also writing intensive. History instructors could benefit from training in research-based strategies for teaching written communication. Critical Thinking is another skill that is certified for one course but relevant to most if not all core courses.

- Pros:
  - Help core instructors reinforce and develop core skills across the Core.
- Cons:
  - Requires support to develop and implement such training.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The Teaching Subcommittee recommends that Option 4 be included in the revised core: Require a teaching and learning plan as part of core course certification and assessment. Every core course must already have an assessment plan, and every core course must already report on assessment results and use of results. Teaching strategies are implicitly part of the discussion of assessment results and their use for improvement. Option 4 would make that implicit part explicit. It would also drive a discussion of teaching strategies during the assessment planning process.

Which teaching strategies faculty adopt is entirely up to the faculty teaching the course. The other options are resources available to faculty to help them improve teaching practices as they see fit.

## Appendix: Core Teaching Strategies

Many teaching strategies address the distinctive features of core courses at FSU. The following list, derived from ACUE courses, is not intended to be exhaustive. It excludes strategies that are already part of FSU's online and hybrid training programs.

### Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment

Create a learning environment that increases support, stimulates engagement, embraces diversity, and helps students persist. Many of the relevant principles are included in the

- LE4. Helping Students Persist in Learning
  - LE4.1. Build students' growth mindset
    - LE4.1.1. Share research on growth mindset
    - LE4.1.2. Assign activities and assignments that address growth mindset
    - LE4.1.3. Normalize academic struggles and mistakes
    - LE4.1.4. Send messages that recognize student progress
  - LE4.2. Increase students' sense of belonging
    - LE4.2.1. Help students overcome imposter syndrome
    - LE4.2.2. Establish peer-to-peer support
    - LE4.2.3. Hold both individual and group virtual office hours
  - LE4.3. Use choice and points when appropriate to increase persistence
    - LE4.3.1. Offer choice in course resources
    - LE4.3.2. Offer choice in assignment type
    - LE4.3.3. Offer options in assignment submissions
    - LE4.3.4. Offer points to incentivize students to do the work of learning
- LE5. Embracing Diversity in Learning
  - LE5.1. Examine how implicit bias affects your understanding, actions, and decisions
    - LE5.1.1. Become aware of your implicit biases
    - LE5.1.2. Consider how your implicit biases may impact students
    - LE5.1.3. Mitigate the impact of implicit bias in assessment and feedback practices
    - LE5.1.4. Use student feedback to reflect on your role as an inclusive educator
  - LE5.2. Create an inclusive online course and learning environment
    - LE5.2.1. Create an inclusive syllabus
    - LE5.2.2. Ensure your curriculum incorporates diverse perspectives and experiences
    - LE5.2.3. Ensure your course examples reflect a diverse society
    - LE5.2.4. Share resources that demonstrate attentiveness to students' diverse needs
    - LE5.2.5. Foster respect for diverse student identities
    - LE5.2.6. Set expectations and manage for respectful dialogue
    - LE5.2.7. Explicitly invite diverse perspectives and viewpoints

- LE5.3. Understand and mitigate the impact of stereotype threat and microaggressions
  - LE5.3.1. Understand the impact of stereotype threat and implement practices to reduce it
  - LE5.3.2. Recognize, avoid, and mitigate the impact of microaggressions
  - LE5.3.3. Teach students to recognize and address microaggressions
  - LE5.3.4. Use language to validate student identities

## Designing Learner-Centered and Equitable Courses

Aligning learning outcomes, learning assessments, and learning activities is a fundamental component of a course that promotes student success. ACUE training not covered in FSU's online and hybrid certification includes

- DC3.3. Engage students in tracking their progress
  - DC3.3.1. Identify and address muddiest points
  - DC3.3.2. Help students track their progress
- DC5. Equitable Grading Practices
  - DC5.1. Ensure students understand your grading practices
    - DC5.1.2. Support students in tracking their grades
  - DC5.2. Use practices that ensure the accuracy of grades
    - DC5.2.2. Reduce bias by focusing on academic achievement
    - DC5.2.3. Use inclusive grading practices to increase equity
    - DC5.2.4. Use grading scales that ensure accurate measurements
    - DC5.2.5. Assign greater weight to more recent and summative evidence of mastery
  - DC5.3. Use grading practices that motivate students
    - DC5.3.1. Provide opportunities to use feedback for improvement
    - DC5.3.2. Structure opportunities for students to reflect on and improve their performance
    - DC5.3.3. Mitigate the negative impact of late work
- DC6. Inclusive Syllabus
  - DC6.1. Create an inclusive syllabus
    - DC6.1.1. Use a checklist to ensure essential elements are included
    - DC6.1.2. Use student-friendly language and visuals
    - DC6.1.3. Include diversity and accessibility statements
    - DC6.1.4. Include links to academic and social support resources
  - DC6.2. Increase student engagement with your syllabus
    - DC6.2.1. Use visuals to create interest
    - DC6.2.2. Create a graphic syllabus to show connections
    - DC6.2.3. Create a liquid syllabus to increase equity
    - DC6.2.4. Include “big ideas” to show the relevance of course material



## Inspiring Inquiry and Lifelong Learning

Because core courses enroll a high percentage of beginning college and non-major students, instructors have a special obligation to help motivate students and demonstrate the relevance of their course to students personal and educational goals. The following strategies have been shown to help:

- LL1. Motivating Students
  - LL1.1. Inspire students about your topic
    - LL1.1.1. Share your interest and background in the discipline and encourage students to do the same
    - LL1.1.2. Share how course learning is relevant to students' interests and goals
- LL6. Developing Self-Directed Learners
  - LL6.1. Help students learn to plan their approach to assignments
    - LL6.1.1. Effectively structure and provide interim tasks for larger assignments
    - LL6.1.2. Share time estimates to help students manage their time
    - LL6.1.3. Share exemplars to inform student work
  - LL6.2. Provide students with opportunities to self-assess their work and process
    - LL6.2.1. Integrate structured peer review into projects and papers
    - LL6.2.2. Prompt reflection on preparation for exams and assignments using a cognitive wrapper
    - LL6.2.3. Prompt self-assessment with reflective assignments

## Promoting Active Learning

Active learning engages students in activities beyond listening and note-taking. Active learning strategies have been shown to increase student engagement and learning.

- AL2. Teaching Powerful Note-Taking
  - AL2.1. Motivate students to take notes
    - AL2.1.1. Provide research supporting the benefits of note-taking
    - AL2.1.2. Provide opportunities for students to use their notes
  - AL2.2. Provide practices to support note-taking
    - AL2.2.2. Provide an organizing framework to help focus student note-taking
    - AL2.2.3. Include focus questions for readings and lectures
- AL3. Using Groups to Ensure Active Learning
  - AL3.1. Facilitate effective active learning groups
    - AL3.1.1. Share the purpose
    - AL3.1.2. Prepare students to work in teams
    - AL3.1.3. Ensure accountability with deliverables
    - AL3.1.4. Share technology for effective collaboration
  - AL3.2. Implement active learning techniques
    - AL3.2.1. Use a Think-Pair-Share

- AL3.2.2. Facilitate a Jigsaw
- AL3.2.3. Create a role-play
- AL3.2.4. Assign group member roles