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From the Editor:

20 February 2003

'Learning Matters at Lingnan' are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.



A Matrix for Curriculum Review

All too often we find ourselves fiddling with the content and syllabus when it comes to curriculum review. The need for curriculum review is made more urgent and needed as a result of the University's plan to reduce credit hours and give students more responsibility for their own learning. In a nutshell, the overriding direction is *for teachers to teach less, but students to learn more.*

How to achieve this? By merely reducing the amount of content covered in a course even with a chainsaw does not at all serve the purpose. We need to look at our aims and objectives and the delivery of the course; in particular, to re-examine its teaching methods. We may start by trying to rewrite our courses in terms of learning outcomes. Sometimes we used phrases like 'students will be encouraged to appreciate...', but neither we nor the students had a clearly articulated set of criteria for what would constitute proof of 'appreciation'. This is not just a matter of vocabulary, of tinkering with verbs. It makes us think carefully about what we are delivering in terms of students' abilities. That is the first stage.

The second stage is to map out the educational aims of the course into four sections: **knowledge and understanding; academic, professional and technical skills; general or transferable skills; and learning experiences.** For each of these areas, we need to devise a list of outcomes that pertains to the discipline as it is taught here and practised in the workplace, which, also needs to match nicely with the list of transferable / core skills that was identified for the whole institution.

For example, if transferable / core skills like problem solving and critical thinking are desirable attributes of our graduates, it is imperative to make sure that these skills are taught and assessed in courses that combine to make up the liberal arts curriculum.

Having defined the outcomes and skills that are delivered by the course as a whole, we then trace which have already been taught and assessed. You may then want to supplement or replace those with other skills that a revised course should / could deliver. To try to see where you are, you then plot the skills or outcomes onto a two-dimensional matrix – all the skills taught and assessed on the left-hand side and all the content areas along the top; if a particular skill is taught or assessed, you simply put a blob in the box. Let's take the area of the general / transferable skills as an illustration which is more interesting.

	<i>Content areas / topics covered in the course</i>									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Learning and Transferable Skills Taught</i>										
Report Writing										
Presentation										
Independent Research										
Problem-solving										
Group Work										
Critical Thinking										
<i>Learning and Transferable Skills Assessed</i>										
Report Writing										
Presentation										
Independent Research										
Problem-solving										
Group Work										
Critical Thinking										

With the help of the matrix, you will be able to trace the profile of skills that students should have acquired. Having mapped out the list of skills for the course, we now need to revise the matrix and work back from it to review the content and to create a logical structure of skills for teaching and learning through the course.

By doing this, we will not only achieve the purpose of revisiting the course content and trimming it as a need to reduce credit hours, but also justify the teaching and assessment of certain concepts in the course by rationalising their importance to contributing to the educational aims and objectives of the curriculum.

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