

HERP PROJECT
CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING COMPONENT
LIBERAL ARTS CURRICULUM AND COMPETENCIES ACQUISITION
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INTRODUCTION

Liberal arts courses and programs enable students to think and learn across disciplines, literally liberating or freeing the mind to its fullest potential. The essence of such an education is not what you study but the result – gaining the ability to think critically and independently and to write, reason, and communicate clearly – the foundation for all professions.

The following paper will outline the meaning of a liberal arts education, but more importantly, the skills and competences that the learner will acquire and master throughout his educational journey.

LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

So, in a modern context, what is liberal arts education? There are now many subjects that fall within the broad scope of the category; a typical liberal arts degree program is interdisciplinary, covering topics within the humanities, as well as social, natural and formal sciences. There are differences in the particular subjects included in liberal arts degree programs at different institutions. However, the liberal arts spectrum is generally accepted as covering the following fields:

- **Humanities** – includes art, literature, linguistics, philosophy, religion, ethics, modern foreign languages, music, theater, speech, classical languages (Latin/Greek) etc.
- **Social sciences** – includes history, psychology, law, sociology, politics, gender studies, anthropology, economics, geography, business informatics, etc.
- **Natural sciences** – includes astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics, botany, archaeology, zoology, geology, Earth sciences, etc.
- **Formal sciences** – includes mathematics, logic, statistics, etc.

The term ‘liberal arts education’ can also be applied to the dedicated study of just one of the above subjects (for example, a student studying a BA in Philosophy could be said to be undertaking a liberal arts education). In general, however, the

term refers to degree programs that aim to provide a broader spectrum of knowledge and skills.

Liberal arts education will prepare the learner to think critically, examine the world around her or him, communicate effectively and adjust to changing situations. If the student would like to enter a professional field such as law or medicine, many liberal arts programs can prepare him or her to continue your studies in a graduate program.

A liberal arts education is by nature broad and diverse, rather than narrow and specialized. Choosing courses from many disciplines gives you a wide and useful education. It should give you a wide knowledge of subjects but helps you to choose certain areas for further study. At the same time, a liberal arts program usually allow for some degree of specialization in a major discipline or in a group of thematically-linked courses. By concentrating on a given subject, whatever it may be, you will go beyond the mere surface of things and gain a solid grasp of the core material in a given area.

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN LIBERAL EDUCATION

Courses and programs of study in liberal arts will prepare the student to gain further insight in a skill set or competencies that employers are seeking in today's world. Many of these skills are referred to as "soft skills" or employability competences that are so important for today's employees and those of the future.

First, a liberal arts education does provide you with tangible, practical skills that employers value highly. What is more, you will obtain skills and knowledge that are never obsolete. The world is changing rapidly and there may be a danger in preparing yourself too narrowly to fit a certain sector that may not even exist by the time you get into the job market. Meanwhile, the underlying skills, abilities and attributes fostered in the Liberal Arts program are always relevant.

Let us examine the key skills and competencies associated in liberal arts programs:

- Analytical and knowledge-building skills
- Effective oral, written and technological communication skills, including the art of listening
- Synthesis, evaluative and Critical thinking
- Critical and reflective reading
- Creativity
- Manage knowledge and information
- Problem solving
- Reading comprehension
- Cooperating and working with others and work in teams
- Sensitivity and appreciation of differences and other cultures
- Manage self, time and priorities
- Leading self, others and empower others
- Exercising independent judgment and ethical decision-making

- Openness
- Empathy
- Analytical and numerical skills
- Learning to learn

APPROACHES TO LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

While most universities offer liberal arts education, some HEI's specializes in liberal arts. These institutions concentrates their efforts and invest their resources in offering a liberal arts education, which is mainly interdisciplinary and multidisplinary education that is offered to students. In North America, liberal arts universities have more staff members dedicated to teaching full-time, rather than a combination of graduate student teaching assistants and research professors. Most liberal arts colleges are small and residential, with smaller enrollment and class sizes and a lower student-teacher ratio, with teachers becoming mentors and even research partners with their students. Another feature of liberal arts institutions is that they typically rely heavily on student participation and encourage a high level of student-teacher interaction, mentorship and collaboration.

Though the concept of liberal arts originates in Europe, today it's much less prevalent than in North America – though in recent years, liberal arts degrees have become more widely available. Most of Europe's countries now have liberal arts institutions which specialize in teaching at the undergraduate level. The trend is similar in Asian Institutions and has been adopted by most institutions throughout the world.

DESIGNING LIBERAL ART COURSES

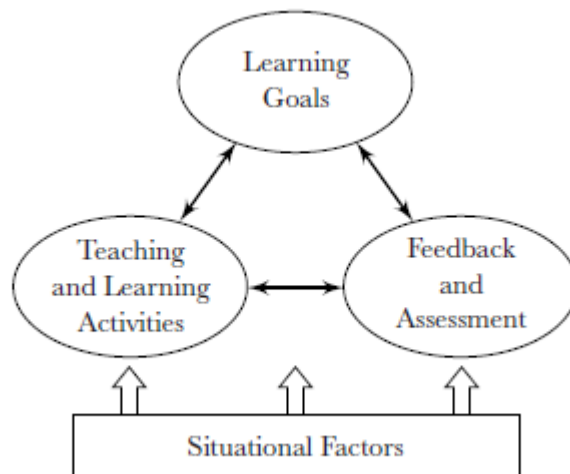
Teaching is a complex activity and many facets of HE professors and teachers can be divided into following for components:

- Knowledge of subject matter
- Design of instruction
- Teacher-student interaction (lecture, seminar, discussion and etc.)
- Course management.

The degree how these solved is crucial for students learning and achievements. Most universities set important goal to Их дээд сургуулиуд сэдвийн мэдлэгийг бакалаврын болон ахисан түвшинд өндөр түвшинд олгох зорилт тавьдаг. Teachers also have a chance to see new instruction methods and approaches through University teaching and learning center various activities. Since decisions about goals of curriculum and shape of knowledge and skill are responsibility of curriculum committees of School and Departments, decisions on design and management of instruction is full responsibility of faculty who teach the course. But for many faculties this responsibility is hard.

We follow Fink (2003) on designing courses. According to Di Fink, when professors face the task of putting together a course, they use one of two distinct approaches. The first, which is called the “list of topics” approach, is especially widespread among new professors who have had no training for this task, but it is also common among experienced professors. Here’s how it works: The teacher looks at the subject, creates a list of eight to twelve topics on it, and then proceeds to work up lectures on each topic. With the addition of a midterm exam or two plus a final, the course is ready to go. The list of topics may come from the teacher’s own understanding of the subject or from the table of contents of a good textbook. In extreme cases, teachers use the “two textbook” version of this process: they select one text for the students to read, usually one that is easy to grasp, and a second, more sophisticated text as a resource for their own lectures.

The alternative to this traditional, subject-centered approach, Di Fink developed a new method which is to take a learning-centered approach and put the course together systematically. In a process it is called “integrated course design.” It includes following components:



In order to design a course, the teachers must consider situational factors. Based on determined situational factors it can be determined:

1. What do teacher wants students to learn by the end of the course? (Learning goals)
2. How do we know the goal is achieved? (Feedback and assessment)
3. What students and teacher have to do in order to achieve the goal? (teaching and learning activities)

Finally the teacher has to integrate all the things to make them to support each other. Dee Fink determined three phases for course designing including **Initial**

phase (Building Strong Primary Components, Steps 1-5), **Intermediate Phase** (Assembling the Components into a Dynamic, Coherent Whole, Steps 6-8) and **Final Phase** (Taking Care of Important Details, Steps 10-12).

Here we look at Initial phase in more details. We refer Fink 2003 for more detailed discussion for other phases.

Step 1. Defining situational factors.

The initial phase begins by examining various situational factors and determining which of them may be significant in a particular course. In this step it should study basic characteristics of the current conditions and some additional factors which might influence the teaching and learning during the course. Teachers must answer the following questions.

Specific Context of the Teaching and Learning Situation

- How many students are in the class?
- Is the course lower division, upper division, or graduate level?
- How long and frequent are the class meetings?
- How will the course be delivered: via live classroom instruction, interactive TV, as an online course, or some combination?

Expectations of External Groups

- What does society at large need and expect, in terms of the education of these students, in general or with regard to this particular subject?
- Does the state or related professional societies have professional accreditation requirements that affect the goals of this learning experience?
- What curricular goals does the institution or department have that affect this course or program?

Nature of the Subject

- Is this subject matter convergent (working toward a single right answer) or divergent (working toward multiple, equally valid interpretations)?
- Is this subject primarily cognitive, or does it include the learning of significant physical skills as well?
- Is this field of study relatively stable, in a period of rapid change, or in a situation where competing paradigms are challenging each other?

Characteristics of the Learners

- What is the life situation of the students at the moment: full-time student, part-time working student, family responsibilities, work responsibilities, and the like?
- What life or professional goals do they have that relate to this learning experience?
- What are their reasons for enrolling?
- What prior experiences, knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the students have regarding the *subject*?
- What are the students' *learning styles*?

Characteristics of the Teacher

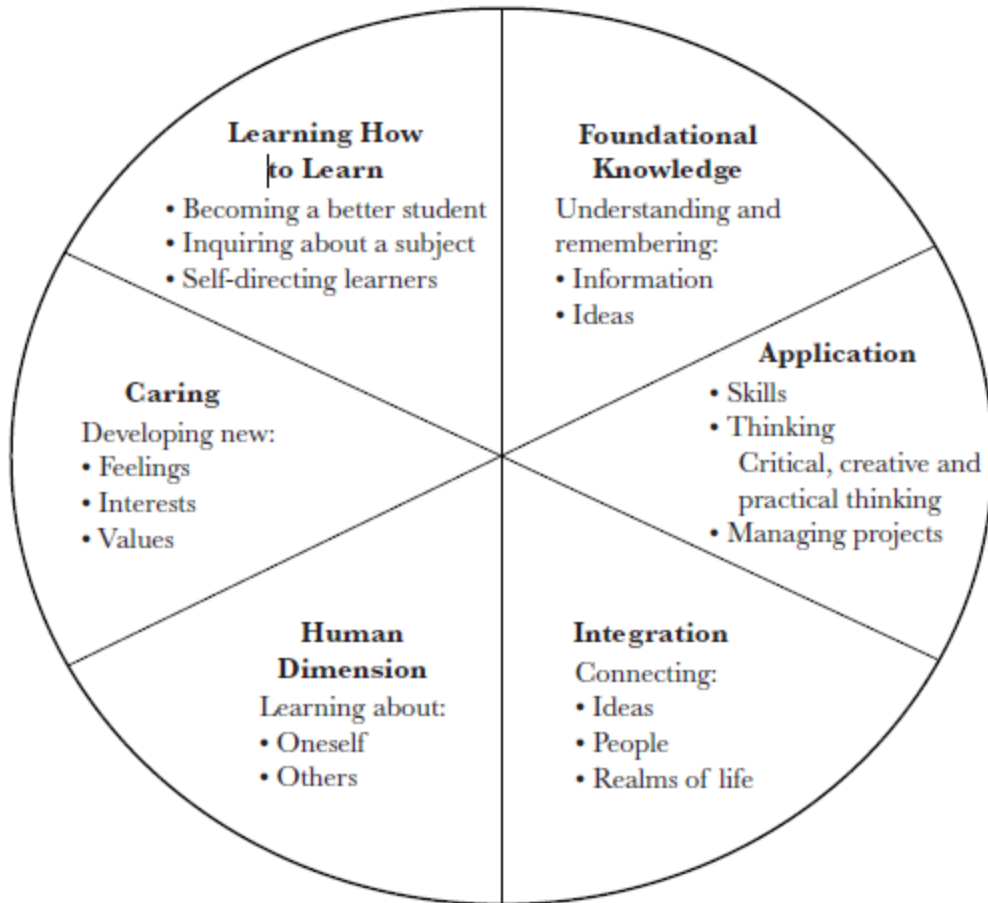
- What prior experiences, knowledge, skills, and attitudes does this teacher have in terms of the *subject* of this course?
- Has the teacher taught this subject before, or is this the first time?
- Will this teacher teach this course again in the future, or is this the last time?
- Does the teacher have a high level of competence and confidence in this subject, or is this on the margins of the teacher's zone of competence?
- What prior experiences, knowledge, skills, and attitudes does this teacher have in terms of the *process of teaching*? (That is, how much does this teacher know about effective teaching?)

After examining the situational factors there might arise some constraints for teachers. If the current course is a basic for some other course of higher level, then it should be examined the characteristics of teachers who teach the higher level course. Moreover in the case when the motivations of students are not so high, then it should be taken into account and teachers have to think approaches and techniques to motivate students.

After the situational factors studied teacher need to define learning goals.

Step 2. Learning goals.

After collecting and analyzing the information about the current situation the teacher have to answer the question what the students will learn after the course. People who use content-centered approach usually say, in one way or another: "I want students to learn about (or to master) topics X, Y, and Z." This is an understandable response, but it is not the best place to use one's content expertise. It usually lead to the learning which corresponds the lower level of Bloom's taxonomy. In this case teachers never ask him/herself the questions like "what influence does this course will still have after 2-3 years" or "is there any difference between students who studied this course and one who didn't study this course". Creating a list of topics won't give you what you need to create more significant learning experiences for students. Instead of making a list of topics, use a learning-centered approach and identify what students should get out of the course. This is where the taxonomy of significant learning developed by Dee Fink (2003). The taxonomy consists of six categories.



Basic feature of this taxonomy is that all teaching and learning activities must have active characteristics. In other words one certain learning activity will/must support other or next activities.

In order to check whether these six categories included in defining learning goals Dee Fink also developed a set of key questions as follows:

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- What key *information* (facts, terms, formula, concepts, relationships. . . .) is important for students to *understand and remember* in the future?
- What key *ideas* or perspectives are important for students to understand in this course?

APPLICATION

- What kinds of *thinking* are important for students to learn here:
 - *Critical thinking*, in which students analyze and evaluate?
 - *Creative thinking*, in which students imagine and create?
 - *Practical thinking*, in which students solve problems and make decisions?-
- What important *skills* do students need to learn?
- What *complex projects* do students need to learn how to manage?

INTEGRATION

- What *connections* (similarities and interactions) should students recognize and make...

- Among ideas *within* this course?
- Between the information, ideas, and perspectives in this course and those in other courses or areas?
- Between material in this course and the students' own personal, social, and work life?

HUMAN DIMENSION

- What can or should students learn about *themselves*?
- What can or should students learn about understanding and interacting with *others*?

CARING

- What changes would you like to see, in what students *care* about, that is, any changes in their. . .
 - Feelings?
 - Interests?
 - Values?

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

- What would you like for students to learn about. . .
 - *How to be a good student* in a course like this?
 - *How to engage in inquiry and construct knowledge* with this subject matter?
 - *How to become a self-directing learner* relative to this subject? That is, have a *learning agenda* of what else they need and want to learn and a *plan* for learning it.

Step 3. Feedback and assessment.

In a traditional content-centered course, two mid-terms and a final exam are usually considered sufficient to give feedback and have an information for the teacher to determine whether the students “got it” or not. But in a learning/learner-centered approach for a more sophisticated approach to this aspect of course design is needed. A set of feedback and assessment procedures collectively known as “educative assessment” is needed to go beyond “auditive-type assessment” (that which is designed solely to give the teacher a basis for awarding a grade). Educative assessment actually enhances the quality of student learning.

A so called Forward-Looking Assessment incorporates exercises, questions, and/or problems that create a real-life context for a given issue, problem, or decision to be addressed. To construct this kind of question or problem, the teacher has to “look forward,” beyond the time when the course is over, and ask: “In what kind of situation do I expect students to need, or to be able to use this knowledge?” Then, create a question or problem that replicates this real-life context as closely as possible. The problem also should be somewhat open-ended and not totally pre-structured. If necessary, certain assumptions or constraints can be given, in order to be able to assess the quality of student responses.

There is a famous example of Dee Fink to illustrate the above mentioned distinction between assessment and feedback in two different teaching methodologies. The example was drawn from the course when Dee Fink taught on world geography. In this course students have studied a unit on Southeast Asia. A backward-looking assessment would ask students to tell what the differences are in the population and resources of the various countries in that region. In a forward-looking assessment question, The teacher would ask them to imagine that they are working for a company that wants to establish itself in that region; the company wants the students' opinions on which country has the necessary political stability, purchasing power for their product, prospects for economic growth, etc. This kind of question asks students to imagine a situation where they could actually use what they have learned.

Teachers should explain clearly the criteria and standards that will be used to assess student work. Teachers need to ask themselves, and then share with students: "What are the general traits or characteristics of high quality work in this area?" These are the criteria for evaluation. Then, on each of these criteria, how good does the work have to be, to be acceptably good or exceptionally good? The answers to these questions reveal the teacher's standards. It is also important for teachers to create opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment. Later in life, students will need to assess their own performance, and they should start learning how to do that while in the course. You may want the class to do this initially in groups, and later individually. Somewhere along the way, students need to generate—and perhaps discuss—appropriate criteria for evaluating and assessing their own work.

As the students work to learn how to perform well, teachers need to provide feedback. High quality feedback will have the characteristics of "FIDeLity" feedback:

Frequent: Give feedback daily, weekly, or as frequently as possible.

Immediate: Get the feedback to students as soon as possible.

Discriminating: Make clear what the difference is between poor, acceptable, and exceptional work.

Loving: Be empathetic in the way you deliver your feedback.

Step 4. Teaching/Learning Activities

Often as college teachers thinking about what should happen in a course, we have used the traditional pattern of "lectures and discussions." Some courses are heavy on lectures; others lean more toward discussion. But to create the kind of significant learning advocated in Step 2, we will need new tools, new kinds of teaching and learning activities. Where can we find these? We need to understand, and then learn, how to incorporate more active learning into our courses. The study and research in recent years strongly suggest that in an active learning comparing with passive learning, the students learn more and retention rate is much higher.

What is an active learning? Active-learning advocates Bonwell and Eison (1991) describe active learning as “[involving] students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.” By “doing things,” they are referring to activities such as debates, simulations, guided design, small group problem solving, case studies, etc.

We also discussed in detail on active learning in our joint paper in Amarzaya-Vienneua(2016).

Step 5. Integration

This is a final step of INITIAL DESIGN PHASE. In order to complete this initial phase, you need to check how well these four components are aligned by following questions:

Situational Factors

- Assuming you have done a careful, thorough job of reviewing the situational factors, how well are these factors reflected in the decisions you made about learning goals, feedback and assessment, learning activities?
- What potential conflicts can you identify that may cause problems?
- Are there any disconnects between your beliefs and values, the student characteristics, the specific or general context, or the nature of the subject in relation to the way you propose to run the course?

Learning Goals and Feedback & Assessment

- How well do your assessment procedures address the full range of learning goals?
- Is the feedback giving students information about all the learning goals?
- Do the learning goals include helping the students learn how to assess their own performance?

Learning Goals and Teaching/Learning Activities

- Do the learning activities effectively support all your learning goals?
- Are there extraneous activities that do not serve any major learning goal?

Teaching/Learning Activities and Feedback & Assessment

- How well does the feedback loop work to prepare students for understanding the criteria and standards that will be used to assess their performance?
- How well do the practice learning activities and the associated feedback opportunities prepare students for the eventual assessment activities?

As mentioned before we just gave brief discussion about initial phase. For other remaining two phases please refer Fink (2003).

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