

Effective course planning and syllabus design for LAC, 02-04-08

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1. Getting started:

- List the main learning objectives: You (or the general course instructor) should list 3-5 objectives that students will achieve in this course. This may be a set of skills or competencies (textual analysis, critical comparative methodologies, or specialized vocabulary acquisition in the target language). Alternatively, objectives can simply list the new information and knowledge that students will acquire by the end of the course.
- Explain the conceptual structure of the course: This will help students understand your rationale for the order of topics covered, and help them comprehend the link between course materials and course content. LAC sections should match the assignments to the appropriate place in the English course syllabus, or at least to take topics up in the same order they come up in the course. When you cannot do exactly this, you should at least strive for a logical progression from assignment to assignment. You should try to make the LAC experience cumulative and coherent, whether topically or regionally.

2. Choosing instructional materials:

- If possible, include information that explains why these specific texts were chosen for this point in the course. It is also helpful to indicate, if possible, how each text relates to course goals.
- Choose materials based on their linguistic and cultural authenticity, but also for their relevance to course objectives. Assuming that you get a copy of the general course syllabus before the beginning of the semester (and unfortunately this is NOT always the case), you should look closely at the required readings for the general course to find instances when you might include (or refer to) LAC assignments. These will help LAC participants more readily relate what they learn in their weekly LAC meetings to the broader course content.
- Link teaching materials to your objectives. When choosing instructional materials, you need to ask yourself: can the learning objectives for the topic that week easily met? Or are they complicated higher-order materials? The conceptual difficulty in English directly affects the level and amount of reading/preparation in the target language. This is a time when it's useful to read some of the same source material in both languages (for example, Marx in German, Bourdieu in French, etc..., since for 100 and 200 level courses, these scholars' ideas can present challenges for 1st- and 2nd-year undergraduates in their own native language). Alternatively, read a foreign-language review of the English language material/author that is covered in the general course. But remember that most of the time, primary sources work better than secondary sources.

- Seek authentic materials. Do not select materials specially written for language students or non-native audiences. In particular, you should avoid language textbooks, which usually contain only highly edited and sometimes very unauthentic materials. If you do find something in a language text that seems authentic, use it in its original published form if at all possible. “Dumbing” down the LAC materials weakens the connections with the English-language recitation sections. Some types of texts, when read in the original language, provide an insight into the subject that cannot be achieved through reading a translation. Are these the types of texts that afford the greatest insights for students (both LAC and non- LAC)? This should be a key criterion in text identification and selection and can serve as a highlight in connections between foreign-language and English-language sections.
- Keep the big-picture in mind. As you select new materials when planning your LAC syllabus, always consider how they relate to previous assignments and, if possible, to the contents of forthcoming assignments. It's easier to keep track of where you are when you think periodically about where you've been and where you're going.
- Go beyond just texts. Don't just limit your instructional materials to the written text. There are some thought-provoking and accessible materials in the popular media (newspapers and magazines), or you may also be able to use governmental documents or other more specialized materials. Audio files played in class or made available online to students prior to class period can also help them to meet course objectives. There are hundreds of movies at the Media Resource Center in the Undergraduate Library, many either in other languages, dubbed or subtitled at the very least. Previewing these may take time while you're designing your syllabus, and ultimately you may only be able to use short excerpts. But incorporating non-textual learning materials can be a very enriching aspect of LAC instruction.
- Bibliography: Always give full citations of the sources of your LAC materials.

3. Specificities of a LAC syllabus:

- What's different? From the very beginning, students will be curious to know what is different or original about a LAC section. The premise of LAC makes sense to us instructors, but LAC is still a relatively novel concept in the university. So you should anticipate general questions about the specificities of LAC sections, and address those clearly and early on in your syllabus.
- Less is more! Assign moderate amounts of reading each week, but hold students accountable for doing it. Of course we are all tempted to assign 500 pages per class, since that's how much we all read. But be realistic! You can not assign everything that you want to cover; it's just not possible (these aren't masochistic graduate students!) You only have them for one hour a week, and on top of conveying the information and knowledge that they need to get if the section were in English, you must do this in a target language! Fortunately, LAC sections tend to have self-selecting, motivated students (and are usually less numerous than their English-language counterparts, in part because sections are capped at 20 and not 25 as in some departments)

- Not just words. You will need to explain that you will provide a weekly glossary for the specialized vocabulary or concepts in the target language that students may encounter in their readings, so that they won't have to spend as much time looking up words in their dictionaries.
- Offline and Online. Refer students to the website that you will provide for the LAC section, and if possible, anticipate creating symmetry between what students encounter on your syllabus and what students see on your website. In other words,

4. Final issues or questions:

- Keep some flexibility in your syllabus in case students' language abilities are not what you originally expected. You may have to reformat your course content in a LAC section for reasons that don't normally occur in English-language courses.
- Interconnectivity: If the main course instructor is open to the idea, can some non-English readings substitute required readings or be included in the syllabus as recommended? This would highlight the use and value of materials in languages other than English, and make LAC visible to all students from the outset.
- Accountability: Can LAC students share their insights with the professor and with other students in the course? If there are research projects in the larger class, can a formal, in-class presentation on what LAC students have learned be shared with the students in English language sections, thereby creating more 'cross-over' between course materials?
- Testing: Can multiple choice or essay questions from the LAC materials substitute some questions in the quizzes and exams of the general course (with the questions and sample answers provided by the LAC TA)? This of course would require the pre-approval of the course instructor, but would validate the relevance of the materials specifically addressed in LAC section. Can study guides accompany the target-language texts to enhance student understanding? If the English language sections also provide study guides to students, then these should be coordinated as much as possible with those of the LAC sections.