

## Developing a Course Outline

**Slide 1:** Course Planning...If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

**Slide 2:** We can define a "course" as a well-defined part of a program curriculum that helps students achieve a specific set of learning goals. The length of a course may vary. In some states, the typical school year is 36 weeks composed of two, 18-week semesters. Some schools are on a block schedule in which the students may complete a full year of instruction in a limited number of courses in a semester. At the middle school level some agriculture programs have exploratory courses that may be only six or nine weeks in length. In a community college a semester may be 15 or 16 weeks long. As a result, the length of your courses will depend on your situation.

**Slide 3:** What exactly is a course plan? In Agricultural Education, the common term is a Teaching Calendar. I will use both terms interchangeably throughout the lesson. A teaching calendar includes information that links state and local requirements and community and student needs to the information that will be provided. You will see that a teaching calendar in some ways provides a transition between the overall plan for an agricultural education program and the day-to-day lesson plan you use for teaching. A teaching calendar also establishes a blueprint or framework for unit and lesson planning. You will be learning more about planning units and lessons in later parts of this series of courses.

**Slide 4:** The teaching calendar will contain some preliminary information. First you will provide some brief background information on your community, school, and students. It will include the course title, the state curriculum course number, and a brief course description. The body of the teaching calendar will consist of a unit outline and under each unit you will provide a competency list that specifies actual instructional content. An approximation of the time of year to teach each unit should also be included.

**Slide 5:** As an aside, if you add a little information to the teaching calendar, you would have a very nice syllabus to hand out to your students. In addition to the materials already in the Teaching calendar, your students might be interested in:

- The major assignments that will be required in the course,
- Your grading plan,
- Important class rules,
- Special requirements such as permission for field trips, lab fees, or if you require FFA membership upon enrollment of your agriculture class.

Your students would not need to have the background information section, so you might want to remove that section or at least modify it before handing it to your students.

**Slide 6:** What are some suggestions that you might think about for planning? You do have to do your homework. You want to make good use of references and resources, both in terms of printed materials and people. Often other teachers can be our best resources. Experienced teachers in your subject area may not have developed teaching calendars exactly like we are defining them here, but they are sure to have yearly or semester plans that might be helpful to you. You will want to consider state and local curriculum requirements as a foundation for your planning. Teachers and administrators at the state level and sometimes in your local district have done much work to prepare curriculum guides and frameworks. It is your responsibility to use these materials as a basis, and then adapt them as needed. It is important to review information about community and student needs. Don't be hesitant about getting something on paper. You can always change it. Teaching calendars often have to be changed just as daily plans do, but it is critical that you have one so that you have a blueprint to work from.

**Slide 7:** In a comprehensive curriculum planning effort, the first consideration is a needs assessment. You should find that as a relatively new teacher, conducting a needs assessment will not be your responsibility. This should already be completed. If you want to see the needs assessment data for your community, check with your local director of career and technical education or the guidance department at your school. A full needs assessment includes business surveys to determine occupational training priorities as well as a community survey to determine age and income information data for your community. Student interests are often surveyed to determine the kinds of courses and skill preparation that will be of interest to the students. Even as a beginning teacher, you may want to survey your students as you plan course content. Finally, the use of an advisory committee for your agricultural education program is very important in establishing what courses you should teach and what the content of those courses should be. Any of this information you have available will be summarized very concisely and used as the background information when you start writing your teaching calendar at the end of this lesson.

**Slide 8:** Before you begin course planning, you should secure a copy of the state approved curriculum framework for your course. You may have a copy in your department. If your department head does not have a copy, your Director of Career and Technical Education should have one. Also, a copy should be available on your state website. If designing a new agriculture course within your state, reviewing what other states have done for similar courses may come in handy.

**Slide 9:** Let's think about the key parts of a teaching calendar. This slide lists the key parts, as we are defining a complete teaching calendar. They include background information, a course description, course or instructional goals, an outline of units and the approximate dates for those units, a statement of instructional methods, a description of evaluation and grading systems, and a list

of references. We are going to discuss each of these in more detail and give some examples.

**Slide 10:** When you complete the lesson on unit planning you should be able to add some more details to your teaching calendar. These can include any teaching or student activities, resources utilized, equipment needed, and a closer more realistic estimate of time required and dates for each unit.

**Slide 11:** First of all, we'll think about the background information for your plan. When you develop your plan, you will write a summary of the background information that is important for your situation. First, outline what you have found, in terms of curriculum materials, related to this course. Does your local area have its own curriculum? What state curriculum guides or competency lists are available and to what extent did you use them in planning this course? In exploring various Vocational Curriculum and Resource Centers and other websites, what pertinent materials did you find? Are there national or industry standards that relate to the subject of this course? Any references you actually use will be included in your reference list at the end of the course outline, but here you will also indicate any resources that you would like to purchase when funds become available. Another segment of the background information relates to your community. In a paragraph or two, describe the community served by your school. Include such things as population trends, major employers, and employment supply and demand. Your school would be another part of the description of the background information. Briefly explain the school setting for which this course is planned. How would you characterize the students, the facilities, and the financial resources of the school? What facilities can you utilize in your agriculture program (such as greenhouses, shops, etc.)? Does the school use regular or block scheduling? Then another factor would be the students. Describe the students who would be enrolled in this course. Think about such factors as their age, gender, ability level, socioeconomic status, and their goals for future education and employment. This background information will set the stage for the course that you are planning. This sounds like a lot of information, but a concise treatment of all of should fit on a single page.

**Slide 12:** The next key aspect of your teaching calendar would be a course description. This description states the overall purpose of the course and briefly describes the content. Course descriptions are usually only a few sentences in length so it is important to emphasize the key factors. The course description might indicate the relationship of this particular course to the total program or other courses within the program. For example, are there courses that a student is required or recommended to have before taking this one? State guidelines provide you with descriptions that you can use or adapt for your course description. Your principal or vocational director should have a copy or it can be found on-line. This guide includes descriptions of approved courses in each content area. The same information will often be included in the guides that are specific to each subject. Localities may adapt the course titles, but you should

easily be able to find the description that relates to the course you are planning. That description may also need to be adapted to fit the specific content of your course. Course descriptions are often used in promotional materials that might be given to students or parents. This might include a catalog of course descriptions that is distributed before students enroll for the next year or a brochure about your program that is sent home to parents. Depending on the intended audience, the course description may be reworded to best communicate the information that is important.

**Slide 13:** This slide show a sample course description for a course titled: "Introduction to Leadership." This course provides the student with knowledge and skills needed for effective leadership. It is recommended for juniors and seniors in your agriculture program, such as your older officers. It is required that they have effective writing skills before enrolling in the class. Basically, this description tells the purpose of the course, what the students will learn, what age group can enroll, and what the prerequisites are. It is very simple and straightforward. As you might expect, not all course descriptions are this brief.

**Slide 14:** Another important aspect would be the course or instructional goals. In this, you will indicate major areas of content in the course, in terms of what the students will know or be able to do. Your local or state curriculum materials may serve as the source for the content areas to include in your course. The key here is that you are specifying broad student tasks, not what you, as the teacher, will do. Unlike developing competencies and performance objectives, these goals do not have to be directly observable or measurable student behaviors. These are your general objectives for the student, so we would expect them to be somewhat vague. By now you may have practiced writing performance objectives, so do not confuse course goals with these.

**Slide 15:** Let's look at some examples for our Introduction to Leadership Course: "Plan and organize the activities of an organization". This could be an organization such as FFA or 4-H but do not have to be listed. "Demonstrate effective public speaking techniques". You are not listing how this goal will be accomplished just that it will need to be demonstrated. In the next lesson on Unit Planning, you will be writing complete performance objectives based on your course goals.

Before going on, I need to explain some terms that I have been using interchangeably and that may be causing some confusion. In career and technical education, we use the term "Duty Area" to refer to a set of closely related "Competencies. But, duty area is a term associated with competency based education. Teachers and administrators outside career and technical education generally use a discipline based approach to curriculum so they will probably not be familiar with the term duty area. They will understand what a unit is. To accommodate people whose approach to curriculum is discipline based, we generally refer to the duty area as a "Unit." IN CBE we refer to a single task

that we teach the student to perform as a competency, or task. Again, teachers outside our field use a discipline based curriculum and they will use the term lesson to refer to a single piece of instruction. To accommodate those differences, we will adopt the terms "Unit" and "Lesson."

**Slide 16:** This next step is going to be tricky. The state curriculum framework I referred to earlier may or may not list duty areas. If your curriculum framework lists duty areas, you can start with those and modify the list to meet your local needs. If it does not, you may need to skip to the next step and develop your competency list first and organize them into units. Regardless of whether you work up a list of units from the competency list or take the list of units from the curriculum framework, you will need to develop an outline of the units you will teach in the course. A unit is a major block of instruction. It is a broad content or skill area that normally includes a number of separate, but closely-related lessons. A unit is typically two to three weeks in length, although that varies greatly. In a block schedule, a unit may be only a few days or a week in length because you are covering two or three times as much each day. Many teachers have a test the end of each unit, so you want a manageable length for evaluation. If you have a unit that is eight weeks long, for example, you might need to divide it into two or three sections for testing purposes. Once you have listed the units you need to teach, you should try to sequence them in the order that you will need to teach them.

Next we develop the competency list. As a general rule, we think of each competency as a lesson. You will find later that very often you may combine several competencies into a single lesson, but for the sake of the teaching calendar, we will think of a competency or standard as a lesson. Here you will go to the state curriculum framework if there is one available. The framework provides an extensive list of competencies for the course. You will find that the competency lists can either be too long to teach in one unit or not long enough. You can adapt them to fit into your program. If your state has a list that list the competencies as either essential or recommended, it is important that you start with the list of essential competencies as you develop your course outline. Start with the essential competencies and add others to meet your local needs. The additions will come from the student needs assessment the community needs assessment. The best source of this kind of input is your advisory committee. As you work with the competency list, it may become clear that some of them are so closely related that you will want to teach them as single lessons. At this point you might combine or edit the competencies because from now on you will want to think of them as lessons. Now you will need to organize the lessons into the appropriate units. You may need to modify the unit outline you developed before to accommodate your lessons.

**Slide 18:** Sequencing the units and lessons involves several factors. One factor is sound pedagogy. Often there are specific reasons that a student needs to learn one area of content, or a set of skills, before another is introduced. Some of

the principles involved might relate to moving from the simple to the complex, or from the concrete to the more abstract. Another factor would be logistics. Some considerations involve very specific things such as facilities and equipment. For example, you may have one laboratory that two different classes of students need to use for part of course. The sequence of content in the classes can be varied so they aren't using the laboratory at the same time. The time of year may also be a factor. If you're teaching a horticulture class, the order of the units might depend on the growing seasons for different plants to be studied. In your unit outline, it is important to include approximate dates for each unit. We know that school schedules often change because of things like snow days and other unpredictable events. If you have an approximate teaching calendar, adaptations can be made as necessary throughout the semester or year. Finally, there is one more point to make. A unit is normally taught together, but that is not always the case. Sometimes lessons in a single unit must be taught at different times. You should try to avoid that situation because the unit needs to form a single, cohesive set of lessons. But, if lessons must be separated in time for some legitimate reason, do not hesitate to do so.

**Slide 19:** This slide shows a sample section of an outline. There are two units here: one of which covers elements of public speaking. Within that, the major concepts will be preparing and delivering an oral speech, participating in a paneled discussion, etc... This unit will be followed by a unit on parliamentary procedures. This unit includes planning an agenda, managing meetings, using actions and motions, etc... There are a few concepts included within each unit to clarify the content. This will often help to determine a realistic sequence. If you just had the unit titles, it wouldn't seem to matter if you taught parliamentary procedures before public speaking. By indicating the concepts included, it is clear that learning the basics of public speaking can be applied to a parliamentary procedures, for example a more efficient parli-pro team.

**Slide 20:** The last component of your course outline is a listing of the references you used in developing the outline. This is something you develop as you go along. Any time you refer to a curriculum framework or a curriculum guide, or a textbook, add it to the references list. You will want to list curriculum guides, textbooks, and other resources that you used both in planning and in teaching the course. Include complete bibliographic information for each reference. This would include the author or the agency that developed the material, the date of publication, that title of the piece of material that you are using, the city where it was published, and the publisher. For the appropriate format to use, you can see the references listed in the course materials for these courses as an example, and you can also refer to the Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association as a resource. It is important that we are ethical by recognizing all of the sources of information we have used. If we are adapting a course outline developed by another teacher, be sure to give appropriate credit to that teacher. Indicate clearly the parts of your outline that came from another individual or a

printed resource. This reference list will actually go in the background information section at the beginning of the course outline

**Slide 21:** In review, a course is a well-defined part of a program curriculum that helps students achieve a specific set of learning goals. The length of a course may vary. In most states, the typical school year is 36 weeks composed of two, 18-week semesters. A teaching calendar indicates the background information on the course, course description and a listing of the units and lesson in the course. It includes a rough estimate of the time required for each unit and lesson and roughly when during the year the unit and lesson will be taught. You may find that not all the lessons in a unit are taught together. It also includes a listing of the references you used in developing the teaching calendar.

Now you have a major practical exercise to complete. Be sure that you have available the curriculum framework for your program before you begin the project. You can find the assignment located under assignments for the week titled Course Plan.