

The ToolBox

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A Teaching and Learning Resource for the Faculty of Indiana Wesleyan University



Teaching A La Carte

Imagine that you are extremely hungry and have just been given the opportunity to partake of a meal at one of your favorite restaurants. The food at this eatery is extraordinary! You have decided to throw caution to the wind and ignore the everyday concerns about calories, fat content, and carbohydrates. As the waiter approaches, you struggle with what to order because there are several items on the menu that you really enjoy. You hesitate, and then describe your dilemma to the waiter. Much to your surprise, he invites you to simply pick and choose from a variety of meal options based upon your own personal preferences. Let the meal begin!



Consider this illustration in relation to course design and student learning. As teachers, we all strive to provide instructional opportunities that will maximize the degree to which our students gain new information, understanding, skills, and concepts. Quite often, however, course syllabi reveal a “one-size-fits-all” mentality. Although we know that each of our students learn differently and bring varied levels of competence and skill to the classroom, everyone is required to do identical assignments and tasks over the course of a semester.

There is an alternative—teaching a la carte! In this approach to course design:

- Individual differences are acknowledged
- The demonstration of learning can occur in a variety of ways
- Students are provided with an opportunity to select their own learning activities from a menu of choices

The implementation of teaching a la carte requires three easy steps.

Step One

Identify those basic learning activities and course requirements that you believe all students should complete. Examples might include reading the assigned text, class attendance, engagement in classroom discussions, or participation in tests, quizzes, and examinations.

Step Two

Create a “menu” of additional learning activities that students can choose from as a way of demonstrating their learning and as a way to apply the information that they are gaining through their reading and participation in class. A sample listing of potential menu items has been provided on page two of this issue of the ToolBox.

Step Three

Assign point values to the various required and optional experiences that will comprise your assessment system. For example, based upon a 1000 point system, students would be presented with the following alternatives:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| • Readings in textbook | 100 points |
| • Class attendance | 100 points |
| • Quizzes | 100 points |
| • Mid-term examination | 100 points |
| • Final examination | 100 points |
| • Performance contract (i.e., items that students select from the menu) | 500 points |

Under this proposed arrangement, students can select several activities that total 500 points (or more if they so choose). At the end of the semester, the total number of points that students accrue (from required and selected items) will determine their final grade in the course.

Sample Learning Menu

The following is a list of potential items that could be included in a learning menu (along with some ideas regarding point values based upon a 1000 point scale). Each of these items have been field tested. The reader will need to judge the relevance of these activities to their own discipline or the degree to which they should be modified.

Interviews of Professionals in the Field (200 points)

Interview a minimum of three professionals currently employed in the human services field (e.g., teacher, social worker, psychologist, probation officer). Prepare a summary of your interviews, synthesizing the data obtained and generating relevant conclusions and observations.

Research Paper (200 points)

Write a research paper on one of the following topics (or one that is pre-approved by the instructor) Your research paper should be five or more pages in length (word processed, 12 pt. font, double spaced, 1 inch margin on top bottom and sides). Include a reference page citing a minimum of six references from the professional literature (with emphasis on articles appearing in refereed journals). A rubric will be provided to specify guidelines and grading expectations.



Video Reviews (200 points possible)

Watch eight videos/DVDs that relate to the topic/content of this course. Provide a written review of each video/DVD using the approved format.

Read One of the Following Books (200 points possible)

Write a three-page essay containing the following components: 1) Basic thesis of the book, 2) A section of the book that had the greatest impact on you as a person, 3) Applications and connections to your life, and 4) Implications of this book for your vocation/career.

Shadow a Professional in the Field (200 points possible)

Shadow a professional in the area or field of human services that you are considering as a focus for your vocation/calling. Journalize your experiences and those insights.

Develop a resource notebook (150 points possible)

Develop a resource notebook of materials that will be useful to you. The resource notebook should be a minimum of 100 pages of content selected from a variety of sources. Organize these resources with topical dividers.

Share A Motivational Thought (150 points)

As a means of integrating your personal narrative with your new knowledge and information, prepare a motivational comment for presentation to the class. The presentation should be 5-7 minutes in length and may take the form of a story, illustration, interpretive reading, song, dramatic presentation, etc. Make a connection between course content and your personal story. A rubric will be provided.

Create a PowerPoint Presentation (150 points)

Take some aspect of course content and develop a PowerPoint presentation that illustrates an important principle or concept. The presentation can only include a total of no more than 10 pictures and 25 words. Be creative.

Provide Volunteer Services (150 points)

Provide 15 hours of volunteer services related to course content. Maintain a journal describing the nature of your volunteer services and the things that you are experiencing and learning.

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Editor: Brad Garner
Telephone: 765.677.2452
E-mail: brad.garner@indwes.edu

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Indiana Wesleyan University
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