Writing a Successful USM Core Course Proposal

One purpose of the proposal and review process is to help faculty make the transition from thinking in terms of inputs (what the course will do) to outcomes (what students will do). This is why the CCC asks faculty to organize their proposals around the outcomes, and to describe assignments and activities students will do to achieve those outcomes. Many faculty members have described the process of proposal submission (and revision) as one that helps them make that shift from a long-time focus on what their course consists of to a focus on what their students will be able to do, know, etc.

Successful proposals provide concrete descriptions of the things students will do to achieve the outcomes. Such descriptions need not take up a substantial number of words. Indeed, if they are written carefully, they can communicate effectively and economically.

For example, consider the following fill-in-the-blank template some faculty have found helpful:

In (course name) students have the opportunity to achieve (outcome #) through a combination of course readings and written assignments. For example, students read (…..) and this focuses their attention on (key language from relevant outcome). This understanding is then applied in an (assignment) in which students (do something that allows them to achieve the outcome).

In this example, what I’m doing is explaining to the committee how the learning students do in the course directly relates to and allows them to achieve the outcome. I need to make this connection explicit. The Committee doesn’t know my course, I do. So I need to make them understand it better. That requires being very explicit and giving concrete examples. The CCC knows that students are not guaranteed to achieve the outcomes. The success of a proposal does not rest on that. It does rest on a reasonably clear description of how the learning experiences in your course give students the opportunity to achieve each of the outcomes.

Other tips:
For each outcome, describe an example of an assignment students will complete to achieve the outcome. Be as concrete and explicit as possible. Vague references to course readings and discussions don’t give the outsider a complete understanding of what students will be doing. Provide brief descriptions as illustrated above of the actual things students will be reading, writing, producing, performing, etc. and state how those learning experiences allow students to achieve the outcome you are addressing. An assertion that students will achieve an outcome is not compelling. A description of how they will do so is.

If your course involves advanced learning in terms of skills and or knowledge, be clear how your assignments get students from point a to point b.

If the proposal form specifies that you may select a subset of the outcomes then do so. A proposal is not more convincing just because it addresses all of the outcomes even though selection of a subset of the outcomes is allowed. A convincing proposal provides a thorough treatment of the outcomes addressed. This applies to proposals for International, Socio-cultural, Cultural Interpretation, and Creative Expression courses, all of which specify that courses must allow students to achieve one particular outcome and a selection of the other outcomes.