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), and to thinking about assessment, or how you will know whether students have achieved the outcomes.

This is why the CCC asks faculty to organize their proposals around the outcomes, to describe assignments and activities students will do to achieve those outcomes, and to describe specific assessment related to the 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, and clear descriptions of how student learning will be assessed in relation to the outcomes.

**Assignments:**
For each outcome, describe an example of an assignment students will complete to achieve the outcome. Be as concrete and explicit as possible.

**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, the writer explains to the committee how the learning students do in the course directly relates to and allows them to achieve the outcome. This
connection should be made explicit, since reviewers are not themselves familiar with the course or assignments.

General references to course readings and discussions don’t give the reviewer 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 in question.

[Please note- The International, Socio-cultural, Cultural Interpretation, and Creative Expression requirements allow for a selection of a subset of the outcomes. Be sure to select the outcomes your course aligns with best.]

**Assessments:**

For each outcome, describe how student learning will be assessed in relation to the outcome (i.e., how you will determine the extent to which the outcome has been achieved).

All USM faculty engage in some form of assessment of student learning when they give exams, assign papers, projects, or presentations, etc. And all USM faculty assess student learning by grading or otherwise evaluating student performance on those assessment mechanisms. For a Core proposal, faculty are asked to describe how they will assess student achievement of the Core outcomes in question, in addition to any course-specific objectives being assessed. Faculty members’ existing assessment strategies probably do a good job assessing course outcomes; they will likely require modification to be applied to Core outcomes.

**Example:** A faculty member uses a participation record to assess student participation in class. The record tracks participation in relation to frequency, preparedness and relevance, and the faculty member assigns a value of 1-4 (low to high)). This method allows the faculty member to track student participation in terms of quantity and quality, which then allows the faculty member to assign points and a final participation grade. If the faculty member wants to use this record to assess student achievement of learning outcome 2 of the international
requirement (demonstrate knowledge of another culture or cultures) at least one additional dimension will need to be added to the record (e.g., contribution to discussion applies appropriate knowledge of cultures other than the U.S.). This dimension could still be scored using the same method (low to high) as the other items the faculty member is already tracking.

Example: A faculty member uses a standard rubric to assess student writing on a particular course assignment. The rubric is based on the standards for competence contained in USM’s College Writing Grading Criteria. If the assignment in question is also intended to engage students in a specific Core outcome or outcomes, the rubric will likely have to be modified to assess student achievement of that outcome. To do this, the faculty member can add additional “rows” to the rubric (i.e., additional evaluation criteria) that directly relate to the Core outcomes they are assessing.

Supporting materials: Proposal forms request accompanying documentation, either an existing course syllabus or, for courses in development, a course outline or draft syllabus. In addition, copies of assignments and assessments referred to in the proposal are helpful (since reviewers are not themselves familiar with the course or assignments) and should be included as part of the proposal.

Additional information:

For more information on assessing Core learning outcomes, visit https://usm.maine.edu/core/usm-core-learning-outcomes.

For information on the rubrics the CCC uses to assess course proposals, visit https://usm.maine.edu/core/core-curriculum-committee and click on any of the proposal forms.