

Practical Application

Context Description

I currently work at Syracuse University (SU) in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA), which specializes in instructional design for higher education. The office headcount is seven permanent workers and more than ten interns, including me. They are instructional designers, graphic designers, data scientists and educational technology specialists. The office focuses on managing Syracuse University accreditation and supports SU to success in assessment, program review, strategic planning and course feedback projects. IEA also provides consultations for operation success and operational support for strategic initiatives of Academic Affairs. My instructional design intern position focuses on blended learning and the design/development of instructional materials.

Current Project

Performance problem: Undergraduate students struggle with the course choice for their studies and lack knowledge regarding the course content to know what to expect from them.

This problem is important to resolve, as students' inability to choose a course and connect it with each other makes their undergraduate program longer and makes them pay more for their program as they are unable to complete the major without courses connected to each other, and advisors are not always available for them to help with the program structure.

In order to solve this performance problem, our team works with Syracuse University Senate and Ad Hoc Committee on a Shared Competencies project. Students' performance will help to meet the Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation. It has been an ongoing project since 2013, and by now, the University Senate has approved six Shared Competencies, and faculty have tagged their learning outcomes to the course level.

Key six Shared Competencies include:

- Ethics, Integrity, and Commitment to Diversity & Inclusion;
- Critical & Creative Thinking;
- Scientific Inquiry & Research Skills;
- Civic & Global Responsibility;
- Communication Skills;
- Information Literacy & Technological Agility.

The course learning path will help students to choose between tagged courses and connect them with each other, opening opportunities for collaboration about course design and curricula, also it will help the university reach a campus-wide set of undergraduate student learning goals.

Right now, the project is in the stage of Course Tagging. The deadline for Tagging was September 1, and now our team approves the tags faculty added for the courses or asks them to work on their tag selection better. Once we go through the tags, we publish them on the website. There are 600 courses, each with three titles maximum, that need to be checked.

Application of IDD&E principles

The project is based on the ADDIE Model and applies IDD&E principles to address the performance problem.

Analysis: To analyze the problem Rossett's Purpose-based Training Needs Assessment Model was chosen.

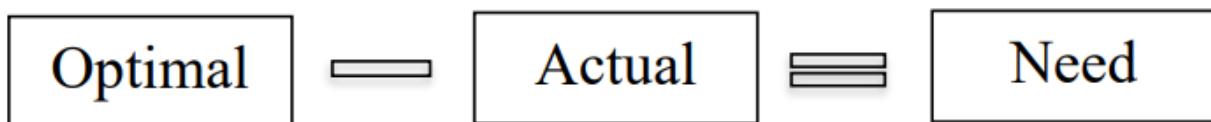


Figure 1. Purpose-based Training Needs Assessment Model. Adapted from Rosset, (1987), p.16

Optimal Performance: 80% of undergraduate students should be able to choose courses for their program to complete their undergraduate program in 4 years.

Actual Performance: Only 45% of undergraduate students graduate in 4 years of study (Marcus, 2021).

Need: To give students knowledge and instruments so they would be able to choose appropriate courses for the program completion in 4 years.

Possible causes: Data analysis has shown that students lack knowledge of major requirements while developing a course schedule that produces an enriching learning experience toward program completion.

Design:

This phase helps to make practical decisions based on the performance analysis. An appropriate decision for this problem has been searched throughout 2013-2017 years and approved by the University Senate and it is the Shared Competencies. They serve several main objectives formed using S.M.A.R.T. criteria:

- To highlight key knowledge domains and skill set students can expect to learn in a course.
- To enable students to see, reflect on and explain connections between individual courses, assignments, and experiences.
- To suggest useful language and highlight tangible examples to discuss during their job or graduate search processes.
- They aid students in navigating various New York State, external accreditation, and major requirements while developing a course schedule that produces an enriching learning experience (Shared Competencies Course Tagging Toolkit for Existing Courses, 2021).

After the objectives were identified, the instructional strategies and resources were set. By looking at other institutions that have already implemented the Shared Competencies strategy, such as Columbia University, in collaboration with the University Senate, the SU university competencies were established, based on the university goals and mission.

The instructional strategies at this stage also include designing appropriate training for professors to teach them how to tag courses appropriately, and such resources included the Shared Competencies Course Tagging Toolkit for Existing Courses as well as the Course Tagging Working Session. The assessment strategies were presented as assessing their course tagging by the IEA instructional designers and forming a data chart on the website with approved and submitted tags and individual feedback for each professor.

Development:

As the instructional designers in our team are subject matter experts regarding this issue as well, the IEA team has worked on the learning content (the Toolkit and Working Session) to make the Course Tagging process easier for professors. These materials were based on the other institutions' experiences and developed using storyboards. The Toolkit is presented with 14 pages explanation of why the university requires Course Tagging and Practice materials on Course Tagging. When Course Tagging and the Working session is a 19 min webinar that compliments the Toolkit and gives more context about the project itself and practical materials on good and bad course tagging as an example for faculty members. Once the Course Tagging is implemented and evaluated, the students' learning materials should be developed using storyboards with a detailed explanation of each piece of the instructional materials with objectives, deliverables, resources and content points.

Implementation:

The dissemination plan for the Shared Competencies project has already been created and right now it includes 7 stages, where one of which is Course Tagging. The project at this stage focuses more on the faculty members but the final goal is to teach students how to effectively chose the courses and decrease the time that takes them to graduate.

Shared Competencies Timeline

Full Implementation of the Shared Competencies in 2024	
2013-17	✓ RESEARCHING GEN. ED. APPROACHES
2018	✓ COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATIVE LEARNING GOALS/SHARED COMPETENCIES APPROACH
2018-23	✕ PLANNING/PILOT TESTING
2019-21	✓ PROGRAM MAPPING
2021-23	✕ COURSE TAGGING
2023	□ TAG PUBLICATION
2022 onward	✕ LEARNING OUTCOMES REVIEW

Note. Timeline of the Shared Competencies project by IEA

The resources for Course Tagging are published on the website and are presented by an online webinar that can be played or stopped at any time, as faculty members may not have time to attend an online meeting with the Course Tagging explanation. The facilitator for this video was Ann Mosher, a faculty member in the Department of Geography and the Environment and Chair of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee of Shared Competencies. At that time, I was a part of the team who worked on the instructional materials to be released.

Also, this stage of the project requires establishing the roles of the instructional designers in charge, technical staff, and evaluators, and analyzing the troubleshooting in case any issue arises.

Once the stage of the Course Tagging and their publication passes the learning outcomes review should include the students' training to introduce the tags for them using the same strategy for implementation.

Evaluation:

For this project, multiple evaluation methods should be implemented. Formative evaluation of the professors was used during the pilot testing of the Course Tagging while developing the instructional materials whilst formative evaluation of students will be developed using the survey with multiple choice as well as the

open-ended questions so students could give their opinion on the Shared Competencies and how IEA team could improve them to make more useful for students.

Summative assessment also will be conducted on multiple levels. First, the course tagging data should be analyzed: what is the percentage of the approved tags versus submitted (data analysis), and what is the percentage of the professors who overall are satisfied with the project (survey/interview/focus group). Once the project is implemented on the students' side, their opinion on the Shared Competencies should be gathered through focus groups, interviews and survey questions. Later on, after several years after the program implementation, the information regarding the degree completion rate per year as well as the time that it takes students to compete in a program should be gathered to check how successful the Shared Competencies project has been. Continuous improvement of the project based on the faculty and students' reviews is required to reach and outstand the project's goal.

Knowledge Gained

Throughout the project, I am working on my ongoing professional development as an instructional designer. I am **enhancing my communication and interpersonal skills** as we meet weekly with my team and discuss the progress that is being made in data interpretation and visual design, contact faculty members if there is something unclear about their course tagging or help them to tag a course. As we worked on data interpretation, I also gained **research practice skills**.

Our team was working on data visualization for faculty members and **identified tech resources** to provide them with the results of the Course Tagging. Also, while checking the tagged courses, sometimes the tags need to be **modified** to meet the Shared Competencies plan. I also **created an instructional tutorial** for faculty, so they could watch the webinar and tag the courses with no external help. We are **critiquing and finalizing** the Course Tagging materials, which also gives me more ID competencies.

At this time, we're evaluating the implemented Course Tagging by my faculty members and creating a digital report with data visualization. In addition, I am working on **analyzing, summarizing and reporting implementation and evaluation data.**

My position is not in charge, but I still show **leadership skills** by managing Course Tagging reports and **showing my initiative** where needed.

Reflection

I started working in the IEA in January 2022, and by that time, I had studied in the IDD&E program only for one semester (and I started feeling confident only by the end of the spring semester.) So naturally, I felt anxious once I started working there because I lacked instructional design skills. But step by step, with the supervision of Amanda Sanguiliano, Laura Harrington and Fresenai Afeworki, with their feedback on every video, report, guide or one-pager I developed and remade based on their feedback, I started growing up as an instructional designer and becoming more confident in what I do.

At the same time, in the Spring semester, we started learning more about the Instructional Design process, models, human performance analysis and Evaluation, which gave me more understanding of instruments that may be used in Instructional Design and principles I can implement in my work. After three months of working in IEA, we had a private conversation with my supervisor. I received positive feedback regarding my work, which helped me think better about myself as a professional.

In the Shared Competencies project, I learned a lot of Instructional Design related skills and, more importantly, gained valuable experience in working in teams, working with reports, communicating with faculty and visualizing data. I am also working on Planning and Self-Study and Faculty Portfolio projects. In November, I will start working full-time in IEA and plan to join a Strategic Planning project to work more with qualitative and quantitative data.

The competencies I learned both throughout the project and IDD&E program

helped to build my professional identity as an instructional designer ready for new challenges and with theoretical knowledge for any type of performance problem and practical one for Higher Education related projects. However, I can always start working on something else and not be anxious about novelty as I already have a knowledge base that can help me to succeed as a professional in the field.

References

Marcus, J. (October 10, 2021). Most college students don't graduate in 4 years, so the government counts 6 years as 'success'. News.

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