

## Book Review

***Blueprint For Learning:  
Constructing College Courses to Facilitate, Assess, and Document Learning***  
Laurie Richlin (2006). Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing

Review by

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*Blueprint for Learning: Constructing College Courses to Facilitate, Assess, and Document Learning* is an outstanding faculty development tool. It neither overcomplicates nor oversimplifies instructional design, and it provides numerous illustrations and references, making it a well-rounded tool. It would be best utilized as a study guide for faculty interested in engaging, learner-centered, accountable instruction.

*Blueprint for Learning* starts with a simple, often-ignored idea: the *hierarchy* of course design, starting with identifying the “big questions” related to a course, these leading to goals and objectives, consulting resources, planning learning experiences, planning assessment, and ending with analyzing results and seeking peer evaluation. Richlin emphasizes the relationship between objective-driven instruction and *formative* assessment. Her discussion of the relationship among objectives, content, and assessment is excellent. She asks instructors to ask themselves *why* the content matters, what big questions it addresses, what larger patterns it illustrates, and to remember that the classroom is an interpersonal enterprise. She provides examples of formative assessment, e.g. “one-minute papers.” Richlin integrates the revised (and much superior) Bloom’s taxonomy and includes well-designed graphics that allow us to see how this taxonomy plays into teaching and learning.

Richlin intelligently addresses the idea of learning styles, using the phrase *learning styles* very generically. The chapter on Grashna learning styles is particularly helpful; this model has students on a continuum from *avoidant* to *dependent* to *participant* to *independent* to *competitive* to *collaborative*, and those learning preferences match up differently with different teaching styles: *expert*, *authority*, *personal model*, *facilitator*, and *delegator*. A chapter on students’ approaches to learning argues that these approaches change throughout the undergraduate years.

Richlin addresses ethics, e.g. support for colleagues and appropriate relationships as well as the ethics of assessment. The last section is particularly worth sharing with all faculty, veteran or new. She addresses issues like privacy, openness, and grading involving information that students have truly had an opportunity to learn.

Richlin delves into the particulars of designing learning experiences, even to the point of guiding students in a metacognitive approach to reading, and the assertion that *all* instructors are teachers of writing within their discipline. The scenarios of

teaching and learning are engaging without being coy. She addresses the synthetic goals of undergraduate curricula, i.e. quantitative literacy and critical thinking, etc. Her section on the occasional advantage and frequent disadvantages of using Power Point is worth the cost.

Richlin makes an interesting assertion--that most instructors grade on a curve—but, in general, she does not support that practice. Richlin points out the direct connection between Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and test items and other means of assessment. She includes a brief overview of scoring rubrics and includes a generic, but generative, rubric for assessing class participation.

Richlin argues for the use of a course "portfolio" to show a faculty member's teaching effectiveness. Such a portfolio would include

- The "logistics" of a course—what, where, etc.
- The syllabus
- Attachments showing various lessons, assessments, etc.
- The choices made in determining the structure of the course, learning experiences, and assessments.

Richlin asserts that this approach is much more conducive to faculty growth than the traditional tenure/promotion process. This practice, if used along with formal observation and student feedback, would provide a more accurate and formative approach to faculty development and evaluation.

*Blueprint for Learning* concludes with a listing of learning resources and planning examples such as

- Principles for good practice, student-faculty contact, cooperative learning, feedback, etc.
- Psychological factors involved such as metacognition and social influences
- Syllabus design
- Teaching goals coded to Bloom
- Learning style inventories available on-line with scoring capacity at no cost
- Instructional script graphic organizer
- Course portfolio rubrics

This book would be an excellent instrument in faculty development, but best used in a structured "study group" with a seasoned facilitator working with new and interested faculty. Like any good textbook, it is a vehicle for discussion and exploration. Thus, it best serves the members of such a study group who can flesh out the points made. The visual elements are generally excellent; they are clean and open up the text in interesting ways.