

Learning-Centered Teaching Rubric

(A voluntary, self-assessment tool©¹Developed by Phyllis Blumberg, Ph.D., University of the Sciences in Philadelphia)

Learning-centered teaching is a unified approach. To achieve learning-centered teaching all of the following practices as described by Weimer¹ in her book Learner-Centered Teaching should be an integral part of the education:

- *The functions of the content* in learning-centered teaching include building a strong knowledge foundation and to develop learning skills and learner self-awareness.
- *The role of the teacher* should focus on student learning. The roles are more facilitative rather than prescriptive teaching.
- *The responsibility of learning* shifts from the teacher to the students. Students take responsibility for their own learning. With students, faculty create learning environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning.
- *The processes and purposes of evaluation* shift from only assigning grades to also including constructive feedback and to assist with improvement. Learning-centered teaching uses assessment as a part of the learning process.
- *The balance of power* shifts so that faculty share some decisions about the course with the students such that faculty and students collaborate on course policies and procedures. Learning-centered teaching has an appropriate balance of power between the teacher and the students by giving students some control over policies; the schedule including deadlines; methods of learning; and methods of assessment but not the content of the course.

The glossary contains a further description of these practices.

For many educators moving toward learning-centered teaching requires significant adjustments and takes awhile. While we may strive to achieve a total learning-centered approach, it may not be realistic or obtainable in every course. Determining if a total unified learning-centered approach is appropriate for a particular course depends on the content, context and level of the course. However, implementing some of these practices indicates progress toward achieving the goal of an integrated learning-centered approach.

This self-assessment tool, using a scoring rubric, helps faculty to see incremental steps toward learning-centered teaching. A rubric is a written summary of the criteria and standards for each criterion that should be applied to evaluate the work ². The specific criteria or practices come from Weiner's ¹ learning-centered practices. Standards within each criterion of practice were developed through a series of group discussions with over 50 faculty developers at the annual POD meeting in Montreal in November, 2004 and faculty at the University of Sciences in Philadelphia.

This rubric can be used for formative assessment by faculty to determine their progress and where they might make further changes. Because each criterion lists several different approaches or methods, this tool explains various ways to improve one's teaching. Courses can be at different levels within each criterion. The rubric can be used for self-assessment or placed in a teaching dossier to show progress over time toward learning-centered teaching.

1. The learning-centered practices may not suit every course

Faculty who have used this tool have commented that that many of the most learning-centered levels in this rubric may not be appropriate for courses intended for beginning students. However, they feel that these should be goals for an educational program. Therefore, this rubric can be used to measure how learning-centered an entire educational program strives to be with the understanding that it is a developmental progression.

Educational programs should attempt to reach the highest level for all criteria for all students prior to graduation. In addition, the rubric can be used to communicate progress toward achieving a culture of learning-centered teaching within colleges or across a university.

People who have used this rubric in workshops feel that this is an excellent vehicle for fostering a discussion on learning-centered about different facets of learning-centered teaching. For example, such discussion often follows a question or a need for clarification about a specific point in the rubric. Faculty feel that a discussion following their completing the rubric considering one course gives them a better understanding of how they can teach using different learning-centered approaches that they had not considered before. It can also be used to help other faculty see how learning-centered teaching can be implemented incrementally.

Suggestions for use: Use one rubric form for each course or educational program to be assessed. For each specific sub-criterion, circle the appropriate level. Use of the final criterion or overall assessment is optional. A glossary defines some of the educational lingo. Specific implementation examples of some of these exemplary learning-centered practices are listed in the appendix. These examples should help faculty to determine if they can use the approach or if they are doing something similar.

All courses should not be expected to be at the highest standard in all categories with every criterion. However, it should be the goal for every course as much as possible. Faculty should consider the highest standard and then make a realistic and rational decision if the criterion is feasible or appropriate for a specific course. They may want to write a justification for why the highest level is not appropriate for that course, e.g., (class size, level, content). Also, in some cases, an entire sub-criterion may not be relevant for a particular course. Instead of rejecting a sub-criterion or the highest level outright, the faculty member should consider the criterion and form a rationale for why it is not appropriate for this course. This decision making process might help the faculty to see this course differently or potential areas of transformation for this course. Moving from one entire standard level to another may take several years, whereas moving from one level to the next on a specific method or approach in a course may be a realistic short term goal.

Criterion ↓; level of standard →	Employs learning-centered approaches	Transitioning to learning-centered approaches		Employs Teacher-Centered approaches
		higher level of transitioning	lower level of transitioning	
The Function of Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to building a knowledge base, the content allows students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ practice using inquiry or ways of thinking in the discipline, ○ learn to solve real problems, ○ understand the function of the content and why it is learned, ○ build discipline-specific learning methodologies e.g., how to read primary source material in the discipline ○ build an appreciation for value of content in this course • content can help students develop a scaffold for learning in the course • content is framed so that students see how it can be applied in the future • students engage in most of the content to make it their own (students transform and reflect on most of the content to make their own meaning out of it) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to building a knowledge base, the content allows students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ use inquiry or ways of thinking in the discipline with the teacher’s assistance ○ learn to apply content to solve real problems ○ help students to identify why the content is learned ○ use discipline-specific learning methodologies with the assistance of the teacher ○ or uses any 4/5 of the sub-criterion for the uses of content in the left column • students recognize there is more content to be learned • students transform and reflect on some of the content to make their own meaning out of some of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to building a knowledge base, the content allows students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ learn to apply content to solve real problems ○ or uses and 2-5 sub-criterion for the uses of content in the left column • students actively learn the material as it was given to them without transforming it or reflecting upon it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • content is used to build a knowledge base or solve problems • content is learned in isolation • content is learned without an emphasis on understanding or students learn the material in a superficial way without it having meaning for them; facts are memorized

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The Responsibility for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility is shared between the teacher and the students with the teacher providing opportunities to learn, ongoing assessment and feedback so that the students take responsibility for achieving the stated learning objectives • students develop learning skills for further learning (see the glossary for examples of learning how to learn skills) • students become self-directed, lifelong learners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ students become aware of their own learning, their abilities to learn • students can and do assess their own learning • students become proficient at self-assessment • students become proficient with all information literacy skills as defined by the Association of College and Research Librarians (www.acrl.org) (see the glossary for a listing of these) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher provides ongoing opportunities to learn for assessment and feedback so that students can accomplish the stated objectives • students develop some learning skills for further learning (learning how to learn skills) • students become self-directed learners in specific, prescribed areas i.e., learning to read assigned material <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ students become somewhat aware of their own learning, their learning abilities • students sometimes assess their own learning • students practice some self-assessment skills • students acquire most (4/5) information literacy skills as defined by the ACRL (www.acrl.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers assumes most responsibility for the student learning by providing detailed notes of content to be learned and reviewing the content to be examined while assisting students to learn the material and meet objectives • students develop few learning skills for further learning (learning how to learn skills) • some students may become self-directed learner, although it was not encouraged by the teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some students become somewhat aware of their own learning, or their learning abilities • students rarely assess their own learning • students do not value self-assessments • students acquire a few (2/5) information literacy skills as defined by the ACRL (www.acrl.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher assumes all responsibility for the students learning by giving them the content in a memorizable way, not requiring them to make meaning of the content and telling students exactly what will be on the exams • teacher examine exactly what was covered in class, only requiring students to recall information without learning how to learn it • students do not become self-directed, lifelong learners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ students do not become aware of their own learning, nor their abilities to learn • students do not assess their own learning • students do not value self-assessments • students do not acquire information literacy skills as defined by the ACRL (www.acrl.org)

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The processes and purposes of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessment is mostly integrated within the learning process integrates formative assessment (formative assessment is for the purpose of giving feedback and to foster improvement) with constructive feedback throughout the learning process uses peer and self assessment students have multiple opportunities to learn from their mistakes during the course and then can demonstrate mastery students are encouraged to justify their answers when they do not agree with the teacher's answers students and faculty agree on a time frame for feedback which is always followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessment is partially integrated within the learning process formative assessments is used; students are given constructive feedback along with these assessments some peer assessment is used students can demonstrate mastery after making mistakes students can justify their answers when they do not agree with the teacher's answers students and faculty agree on a time frame for feedback which is usually followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessment is minimally integrated within the learning process some formative assessment is used; students get limited constructive feedback peer and self assessment is not used regular (>2) assessments but no opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have learned from mistakes students can ask teachers why they got an answer wrong faculty tells students a time frame for feedback which is sometimes followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessment is seen as taking away time from learning uses only summative assessment (summative assessment is for the purpose of making a decision such as assigning a grade), with no constructive feedback peer and self assessment is not used, nor is it valued minimal (1-2 times) assessment of student learning; no opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have learned from mistakes, nor to show mastery teacher determines accuracy of answers, students cannot question teacher's authority faculty and students do not discuss a timeframe for feedback

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The Balance of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course content: content is largely determined by faculty; but faculty encourages students to explore additional content • students are encouraged to express alternative perspectives whenever it is appropriate • grading: The quality and quantity of the students' work determine what grade they will earn. • Assignments can be open ended (e.g., projects) or allow for more than one right answer, if appropriate • Aspects of most classroom management policies, assessment methods, methods of learning & deadlines are negotiated with the class at the beginning and adhered to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students take advantage of opportunities to learn and understand consequences of not taking such opportunities, i.e., missing class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course content: content is determined by faculty, students choose paper topics (with permission) • students can express alternative perspectives whenever it is appropriate • grading: allows students to drop some assessments <u>and</u> demonstrate mastery through another means • assignments can be some what open ended or allow for more than one right answer, when appropriate • aspects of some policies, assessment methods, methods of learning & deadlines are negotiated with the class at the beginning & adhered to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ attendance options are available for some classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course content: students offer insights/ feedback on the content of the course • students infrequently can express alternative perspectives • grading: allows students to drop one assessment but they cannot demonstrate mastery another way • assignments are not open ended, but teachers will accept an alternative answer when justified • aspects of a few policies, assessment methods, methods of learning & deadlines are negotiated with the class at the beginning & adhered to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ students may miss a few classes without penalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course content: content is entirely determined by faculty with no input from students • teacher controls perspectives expressed even when alternative perspectives are acceptable • grading: all performance, assignments count • assignments are not open ended and only one answer is judged to be correct • instructor does not adhere to policies • all policies & deadlines mandated by instructor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ attendance at classes is mandatory

Use of this overall criteria rubric is optional

Criterion ↓; level of standard →	Employs learning-centered approaches ^	Transitioning to learning –centered approaches		Employs Teacher-Centered approaches
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<p>Overall assessment: a unified learning-centered approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to determine the overall level within each practice criterion: >75% of the sub-criterion are at the level or higher, otherwise score the overall level one lower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all 5 of the above learning-centered practices are an integral part of education as indicated by scoring at employs learning-centered approaches on all 5 practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> three of the five learning-centered practices are an integral part of the education as indicated by scoring at employs learning-centered approaches on 3 practices or scoring at the higher level of transitioning on all 5 practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two of the five learning-centered practices are an integral part of the education as indicated by scoring at employs learning-centered approaches on 2 practices or scoring at the higher level of transitioning on 3 practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only one practice is learning-centered as indicated by scoring at employs learning-centered approaches on 1 practice or scoring at the higher level of transitioning on 2 practices

^While we may strive for this highest standard, it may not always be obtainable.

Glossary

Five best practices for learning-centered teaching:

- The function of content: Approaches that do not separate learning strategies from content are learning-centered. The functions of the content in learning-centered teaching are: to develop a knowledge base; to practice using the inquiry or ways of thinking skills of that discipline; to apply these knowledge and skills to solving problems; and to learn the discipline.
- The role of the teacher. With learning –centered approaches, the instructor has created an environment that fosters students learning; accommodates learning styles; motivates students to accept responsibility for their own learning; and encourages students to succeed.
- The responsibility for learning. Students take responsibility for their own learning; and engage with the content. Faculty create constructive classroom climates and allow for logical consequences if the students do not take responsibility for their own learning.
- The processes and purposes of evaluation include assigning grades and to provide opportunities for improvement to further learning. Evaluation activities should be used to promote learning and to develop self- and peer assessment skills. Learning-centered teaching uses assessment as a part of the learning process through formative assessment, self and peer assessment.
- Learning-centered teaching has an appropriate balance of power between the teacher and the students by giving students some control over the policies; the schedule including deadlines; methods of learning; and methods of assessment but not the content of the course. Teachers control less, but students are more involved in their own learning.

- Formative assessment is for the purpose of giving feedback and to foster improvement.

- Summative assessment is for the purpose of making a decision such as assigning a grade.

- learning skills for further learning, or learning to learn skills include:
 - time management
 - metacognition (thinking about ones learning while learning or monitoring the process of learning)
 - self-monitoring
 - ability to define what to learn
 - ability to plan and operationalize learning

- ACRL’s information literacy skills include:
 - framing the research question
 - accessing sources
 - evaluating sources
 - evaluating content (the learner reads the material with understanding, incorporates selected information in his/her knowledge base and value system)
 - using information for a specific purpose
 - understanding issues affecting the use of information, observing laws, regulations and institutional policies.

Appendix-Examples of some specific implementations of the transformed level of learning-centered criteria. Implementation of an example does not mean the entire approach has become learning-centered. These examples are given to help faculty see how they can implement more learning-centered approaches.

1. The Function of Content

- students engage in the content and in the ways of inquiry of the discipline
 - faculty model how to create a concept map of the material and then the students practice creating their own with new concepts

2. The Role of the Teacher

- utilizes multiple techniques appropriate for student learning goals
 - adapts teaching and learning activities to different learning styles such as visual or auditory learners
- provides different types of resources or different levels of resources that students can learn from
- an example of total alignment among the objectives, teaching/learning methods and assessments is where the course has lofty goals of higher learning, and the students learning activities help them master these goals and the assessments require students to use what they learned in situations like what professionals in the field do requiring problem solving, synthesis and evaluation of a new real situation (they would not be are given multiple choice examinations that test recall and some application, but not synthesis or evaluation)

3. The Responsibility for learning

- students become proficient with information literacy skills as defined by the Association of College and Research Librarians (www.acrl.org, acrl.org) including the ability to define what to learn, the ability to seek, use and evaluate effectiveness of resources, knowing how to access information, evaluate it and use it and use information to solve problems, using information illegally, ethically and morally, and knowing when a question has been answered
- students become self-directed, lifelong learners
 - faculty explicitly model their own thinking processes for solving problems or critical thinking for the students; the students then solve problems on their own
 - faculty explicitly model how to plan and implement a project including time management skills; the students the plan another project
 - faculty mentor students while doing research together; the students demonstrate that they have gained research skills, techniques and insights into research design
 - faculty explicitly model approaches to patients or clients; the students then demonstrate these approaches on their own with patients or clients
- students develop learning skills for further learning (learning how to learn skills)
 - faculty provide skeletal outline to help beginning students organize material and learn how to take notes; the students then develop a new set of notes on another topic using a similar organizational system
 - metacognitive skills involve thinking about one's own thinking process or about one's own learning and involves monitoring one's own understanding
- while the level of responsibility for their own learning changes throughout higher education, even the most beginning students can acquire a responsibility for learning

4. The processes and purposes of evaluation

- Students have opportunities to show that they can and do learn from their mistakes
 - Use of student exam responses and patterns to learn from their mistakes
- Peer assessment
 - Peers assess student presentations by answering the following questions:
 - What could the presenter do to improve the presentation?
 - What did you learn?
 - What was not clear?
 - What was the take home message?
 - Peers assess student drafts of papers using the same scoring rubric the faculty will use, allow time for student to improve their papers before handing in to the faculty for summative grading
 - Peers can assess each others assignments by answering the following questions:
 - What was the main thesis of the paper?
 - What were the author's main points?
 - What was the most confusing?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the author's positions? Why?
- Peer assessment on quality and quantity of contributions of peers to group projects
 - Instructor assigns a preliminary group grade for a group assignment. Individuals within a group may receive more or less points than the group grade depending on the feedback given by their peers.

5. The Balance of Power

- Faculty and students form a learning partnership
- Course content: Content is largely determined by faculty; yet faculty acknowledges additional content exists so that students are also encouraged to pursue their own interests that are relevant to the course
- Students can determine what work they will do and what grade they will earn through contract grading whereby more and better work equals a higher grade
- Students can choose the type of assignment they will do or the students have choices within an assignment
- Aspects of most classroom management policies, assessment methods of learning & deadlines are negotiated with the class at the beginning & adhered to
 - Windows of opportunity to take exams, hand in assignments (i.e., date due within 1 week period)
 - For less transformed learning-centered approaches: Individual students can change test date, assignment due dates with a valid reason

References

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2. Walvoord BE. (2004) *Assessment Clear and Simple*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Association of College and Research Libraries (2000). *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*.
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