



3.4.2 Designing learning opportunities: The big picture

University teaching is more than classroom or online interactions with students. The larger picture, the one of great interest to universities and students, is the quality and success of the overall program (North America) or course (UK). Quality includes not only the support for learning offered within the program/course and across the university, but also the broad opportunities the institution provides in terms of intellectual and social climate. These diverse influences on quality are why universities have program/course directors, program committees, student selection panels, assessment panels and regular reviews of their programs and facilities. So, while you may initially be asked to teach a number of courses, relatively quickly may be expected to take on other kinds of educational responsibilities, e.g., program convener, teaching committee member or course reviewer. Such positions are often for a set time period and are considered as a form of institutional service. They are a good opportunity for you to contribute to ensuring the quality of student learning and influencing the nature of your program/course.

Ginger, for example, really enjoyed program planning and design and was happy to invest in this type of service to her institution:

So in terms of curriculum ...the ministry ...indicated that we [could] lengthen our program, so this [wa]s an opportunity ...to redesign our program and in redesigning it I ha[d] a number of ideas about the flow of the program, what required courses should be, and I ha[d] an interest in that, which I don't see that my colleagues do. I look at the big picture of the program, whereas my other colleagues tend to look just at the area in which they are teaching.

Even if your primary focus is on the module level, teaching requires a significant time commitment for not only class time but also design and assessment of successful learning experiences. Trustworthy assessment is particularly important since assessment judges the quality of student learning and provides grades which are the currency of education – enabling students to progress from module to module and to be competitive for further study or employment. Unfortunately, teaching is often a neglected area of conversation for early career academics. We recommend that you seek out a range of opportunities to develop as a teacher, e.g., professional development workshops, teaching committee work and collaborative team teaching and/or assessment. These are natural fora for learning how others approach the tasks you are learning to carry out and will help you to develop an appreciation of the big picture beyond the boundaries of your own classroom.



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