WRITING A COURSE AT USQ

When writing a course at USQ there are three main *products* that are usually generated as outcomes of this process:
- the Course Specification
- the Study Material (referred to as 'course content' on the course website)
- the USQ StudyDesk (the course website).

This guide provides information about the preparation and submission of the Course Specification, Study Material and USQ StudyDesk.

1. The Course Specification

The course specification is a *de facto* contract between the university, the course team and the student.

Submission requirements
Course specifications are due before the production of the Study Materials and USQ StudyDesk.

Learning and teaching issues
The course specification provides information to prospective students and other stakeholders including staffing, pre-requisites, a synopsis, a list of course (learning) objectives, assessments and other details about what is to be covered in the course [1. See Course Specification Guide – TBA].

As part of completing the course specification you are outlining a broad plan of what students must know and do and the end of the course, how they will demonstrate this, and the sequence of study that will enable them to expand their knowledge of your discipline.

Start with your course objectives, and use these as the basis for your design of assessments and teaching activities, as well as any technologies you might use [2. See Course Design Guide - TBA]. Follow these specific learning and teaching design steps for the Course Specification:

- identify and write course objectives [3.See Writing Learning Objectives flyer]
- decide how you will assess these objectives [4. See Assessment Checklist].
- provide a knowledge-based structure of what is to be learned by outlining a list of modules in the order they are to be studied
- identify which USQ graduate skills will be assessed in your course. Graduate Skills can be defined as forms of learning other than content knowledge required by students to succeed in their studies (eg. communication skills).
- These graduate skills should appear initially amongst your course objectives, and also against items in your course specification assessment table [5. intro and Stage 3 of Graduate Skills Mapping template] [6. Look at examples among current course specifications].
- For any assistance with graduate skills please contact your LTSU faculty representative.

Suggestion
Sometimes you are required to complete a Course Specification before you have had time to think in detail about what you want students to learn. In such cases, describe how students will be assessed in general terms: for example, whether the assessment is a written assignment, an oral presentation, group assignment or exam. You can provide more detail in the Study Material and on StudyDesk. Just remember that whatever detailed assessment you ultimately choose should still enable students to demonstrate the types of learning described in your course objectives.

2. The Study Material (Introductory Book and Study Book)

Course materials at USQ generally include the following:
- Introductory book
- course modules related to the topics in course specification
- module readings (to be submitted to the faculty Materials Development Officer (MDO))
- Additional resources including learning activities, assessment exemplars, marking sheets and rubrics.

Publishing requirements
Course materials need to be produced with the use of the ***Integrated Content Environment (ICE)***.

This is the software package ***used at USQ to produce course materia***ls using word-processor templates and styles and a web-based application for file management, content rendering to HTML and export for online, CD or print delivery modes:

- You can submit earlier and have your course materials converted into ICE by DeC, or you can submit later and enter your materials directly into ICE yourself [7. see Course Material Timelines page for details)
- If you choose to author ICE materials yourself you will need to enrol in an ICE training course [8. See Professional Development homepage for available sessions]
- There is also an online Professional Development resource for ICE [9.See ICE page within Division of ICT Services].

Submission requirements

- All new material must be submitted electronically, preferably by email, except for material that has to be scanned.
- Your Materials Development Officer (MDO) can supply you with templates to assist you.
- Once submitted, materials are formatted in DeC and returned for proofing.

Submitting selected readings and other copyrighted materials
- All course readings are stored in DiReCt (Digital Resource Collection) in the USQ Library. For DiReCt contacts and Frequently Asked Questions, click on this link or contact or your faculty MDO.
- Please provide a full reference for any new reading.
- If the resource is available in the USQ library we source and scan it for you.
- If unavailable in the USQ Library it can either be sourced through an inter-library loan which may involve a cost or you can provide a copy.
- Please note that not all material from the Library databases can be copied but can be accessed through a hyperlink or *permalink* in the course materials.
- DeC applies for permission to reproduce material that falls outside our Copyright Licence. This may incur a fee which is paid by the faculty.

Proofing

- A proof will be sent to you in a DeC production envelope. (If there is a CD or online offer for the course you will also be emailed a URL giving access to the proofing site.)
- Check the PROOF copy.
- Mark any corrections clearly in **red** on the proof copy. For the electronic proofs of the CD/online versions email any formatting problems/requests to your MDO. (At this stage changes to content can still be made.)
- Return the PROOF copy in the envelope to the MDO.
- Indicate if a 2nd proof is required.
- The MDO will check the final print proof and send the materials to printery.
- The MDO will sign off on the CD master before replication and web version before uploading to the StudyDesk. (At this stage it is expected that there won't be changes to content.)

Please contact your [faculty MDO](#) for further assistance with publishing, submitting and proofing Course Materials and resources.

Learning and teaching issues

Introductory book
This provides the student with vital information about the course. It includes:

- An **introduction** that includes information about the course and course team, administration requirements, textbook details and references; how students can approach their learning in the course; which parts of the course StudyDesk students should access.
- a schedule of **course modules, readings/activities and assessment**
- An **assessment section** that provides more detailed information about assessment, including assessment guidelines **a**nd assessment criteria; when students should begin planning their assessment tasks [10. See Criterion-Referenced Assessment Flyer].

You may also like to use this section to outline your expectations about how students will engage with various aspects of the course, such as, online discussions, learning activities etc.

Course Modules
These include:

- clearly defined module-level learning objectives that are related to course objectives: what should students know or be able to do by the end of each particular module [See learning objectives flyer 1.]
- definitions of key disciplinary terms, concepts and theories
- relevant learning activities, such as quizzes, review questions that develop and test what students need to know in order to successfully complete your course
- learning activities to build the academic and graduate skills students require to complete their assessment tasks (eg. going to the library website and finding a particular source, or summarising a particular reading) [11. See Developing Students' Academic Skills flyer]
- module specific reading resources and/or lists.

Principles to consider when writing your course modules

- Sequence your modules so that they begin with introductory, foundational knowledge, including ideas, concepts and theories that students will require to understand more complex material covered in subsequent modules.
- Avoid using large blocks of text but instead 'chunk' information into smaller, more easily accessible pieces, and include activities for students to apply new knowledge
- Shorter (2 – 3 minute) audio or video files that focus on developing specific knowledge or skills are more effective for students; use questions to direct student attention to key points
- Avoid producing long PowerPoint lecture slide-shows. Module summaries, course textbooks or readings can cover the same information more effectively.

Suggestion
The Study Materials are only one component of your course materials. Think about what you are providing there and how it relates to other teaching materials such as course lectures, tutorial and/or online activities, discussion forum topics, and set readings. Ask yourself: do any elements overlap unnecessarily with what is provided in lecturer materials or readings and; do Study Materials content and activities directly relate to what students must know and do to succeed in your course?

3. The USQ StudyDesk

Administrative requirements

- All staff listed in the Course Specification will automatically have access to their respective courses in USQ StudyDesk [12. see the USQ StudyDesk section on the Staffroom community site].

- The following document provides you with **a baseline** for what should appear on StudyDesk, and what your responsibilities as course examiner are [13. See Minimum Service Standards for Courses document].

Learning and teaching issues

The course USQ StudyDesk is an important learning and teaching space especially, but not exclusively, for external students for whom it is a kind of classroom. How you structure what appears on StudyDesk, and how you plan and manage student-content, teacher-student, and student-student interaction is important for student success in your course [14. See Technology Enhanced Learning Guide for further ideas - TBA].

Choosing a structure for your USQ StudyDesk site

A StudyDesk site contains a number of pre-formatted elements, including a 'useful link' column on the left-hand side of the page, and tools column on the right. Aside from these elements, you will need to decide how to structure your webpage. This might include the following:

An Introductory section with the following:
- Welcome message
- A section about who you are – this can include a photo
- A section that explains how to contact course team members, and even how long students will wait for responses to their questions [See Minimum Service Standards for Courses].
- A section addressing administrative issues.

A section for general course forums, including:
- News about the course
- A forum for students to introduce themselves, such as an informal chat or 'coffee club' forum
- General questions or issues with the course
- A forum for each assessment item.

A section that provides some kind of structure for the semester:
- Structured by module or topic, or
- Structured by week
- Includes posted lecture slides and other relevant materials
- Includes a topic specific forum for external student discussions [15. see copy of sample StudyDesk page - TBA].

Suggestion

We know from higher education research that students, including external students, learn best when they are part of a **learning community**. This requires reasonably frequent interactions between the lecturer and the student, and between students. Think about ways you can encourage this interaction. Are there components of your assessment scheme you could dedicate to rewarding student participation in class or online (eg. in class seminars, online quizzes or assessed student forum contributions)?

Please contact your faculty Learning and Teaching Representative for further assistance.

SH Nov 2010