Faculty Guide to Individually Designed Learning Contracts

This document is an overview of the process the MA program uses to work with students on an Individually Designed Learning Contract (IDLC). The instructions are general in nature, and hence meant as a guide. Please contact an MA faculty advisor with any specific questions pertaining to a contract you are working on.

Step One:

The process begins when you are contacted by an MA student asking you to facilitate a course. Students are referred to faculty who hold the Higher Learning Commission and Regis approved credentials to teach a specific course. This usually means that the faculty member has earned 18 or more graduate credits in a discipline or area of study. It is possible however that you may not feel qualified to oversee a course, or you may feel that you are not the best match for the student. If you are contacted by a student and feel, for any reason, that you are not the best person for the course, please let the student know. The Faculty advisor will help the student locate another facilitator. If you feel you are a good fit with both the course and the student, then you will begin working on a learning contract.

Step Two:

You can access the IDLC online in a PDF file, which can be printed out, filled out manually and mailed in, or we can email you a copy in a word document, which you can fill out and send in electronically. There are several mandatory elements in the learning contract that you must fill out collaboratively with the students, as well as several informational elements that must be left in.

Once you have the form, work with students to fill out the following sections: course description, course objectives, required text, course content outline, course assignments, and Percentage or points per assignment. Each of these sections is discussed below.

Course Description

This section should capture the focus of the course. Students can refer to their program learning goals or degree plan to fill out this section. They may have found a course at another institution that they wish to use as a model. Such a course may be used if permission is obtained. It is possible that a similar course has been created in the past. Please contact one of the faculty advisors so see is a learning contract might be available.

Course Objectives

This section requires the joint effort of the affiliate and the students. Students should clarify what they wish to accomplish and learn based on their degree plan and learning goals. As an affiliate faculty you should use your judgment as to what this course should contain. As you design the objectives, as well as the assignments (below) please use the terms analyze, evaluate and synthesize. These are the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy of learning (attached) and reflect the type of learning expected of Regis graduate students.

Required Text

The text selection is up to the faculty; however, students may have suggestions. Please assign at least one text. Try to be selective in this area. Asking yourself the following questions might help with your decision:

- 1. What type of text truly contains the content that the student needs?
- 2. What text supports graduate level work? What text is written by reliable sources?
- 3. Is the student better off accessing online sites and current journals in conjunction with the reading?
- 4. What set of resources reflects the most current thought in the field?

Course Content Outline

This section should reflect the information covered in the chosen texts. You can list the chapter headings if you wish. If the course content will include material other than that found in the textbook, please list that content as well.

Course Assignments

This is the area that is often the most challenging for a graduate faculty to complete. There are many types of assignments that you can use to assess and evaluate student learning. At the graduate level it is more useful to think of the assignments as learning tools. This means that any assignment you give should increase students learning in the process of completing the project. Remember to think in terms of analysis, evaluation and synthesis when creating assignments.

It is also helpful to reflect on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory and incorporate the five doorways to learning. These doorways can help us decide on appropriate learning activities that allow students to learn the most effectively using their own "intelligences." Raymond Wlodkowski calls these "entry points" for learning. Listed below you will find each doorway with examples of learning activities.

Foundational learning explores the philosophical facets of a concept. Assignments for this doorway might include readings from the text; review of an article from a peer-reviewed journal; annotated bibliography; critical review of opinion based articles; or reflective journal about assigned readings.

Narrational learning occurs when a concept is described using words in either an oral or written format. Assignments for this doorway might include research papers; literature reviews, oral presentations; electronic presentations; or oral or written reports about interviews.

Experiential learning occurs when a concept is developed through direct experience. Assignments for this doorway might include service learning projects; direct observation reports, designing a workshop or presentation; or designing an improvement plan.

The Logical-Quantitative doorway utilizes deductive or inductive reasoning using numbers and/or patterns. Assignments for this doorway might include Critical analysis of a research report (quantitative or qualitative); analysis of anecdotal information; analysis of a story or book that may contain patters; utilization of fractals; or utilization of two-dimensional or three dimensional design techniques.

Finally, the esthetic doorway challenges students to develop a concept using artistic, sensory or creative abilities. Assignments for this doorway might include evaluation of a play, concert, opera or other artistic event; creation of a graphic display to convey a concept; utilization of collage, mixed media, or other fine art techniques to solve a problem; or creation of a marketing campaign using visual images and products.

There are obviously many other types of assignments based on the discipline that you are working in. Feel free to expand this list and share your ideas with us.

Be as specific as possible when you are designing the learning experiences. Make sure you clarify your expectations for all assignments. There are a few common elements that are part of Regis that you will need to include. Make sure that learning contract explains the substance you expect in the assignment. Set and explain your standards for critical analysis, evaluation or synthesis. Please ask that all written assignments use APA format. Clarify the minimum and maximum length of written assignments. Finally, make that due dates are clearly understood. While these dates are not required in the learning contract, you should be in agreement with students about when each activity is due. Spread the due dates over the term so you can give feedback about one assignment before the student turns in the next assignment.

Percentage/Points per Assignment.

Affiliate faculty members determine the weight (or points) of each assignment. You can think either in terms of percentages or points, whichever is easier for you. This is a means for you to establish the relative importance of each assignment in the total grade for the course.

Step Three:

Complete the Learning contract with all the above information. Make sure you reach agreement with the student on the assignments, points, and due dates. **Step Four:**

Send the learning contract to the student's advisor. Make sure you save a copy for yourself and that the student has one. You can send this in electronically or print it out and send it snail mail. As a general guideline, the advisor should receive the learning contract 30 days before the course is going to start. Please contact the students' faculty advisor for additional information of timing.

Step Five:

The MA faculty committee will evaluate and approve the learning contract. All courses must be substantive, rigorous graduate level learning experiences. Individually Designed Learning Contracts are evaluated and approved by a faculty committee made up of the four permanent MA faculty members. Each

contract and assignment is evaluated by this committee suing the following questions:

- 1. Are the learning activities clearly connected to the goals and outcomes of the course?
- 2. Is graduate level thinking, writing, or presentation skills required in assignments?
- 3. Do the assignments require crucial analysis, synthesis, or complex problem solving?
- 4. Is there enough volume or depth in written assignments to allow students to demonstrate their thinking and writing skills?
- 5. Are key concepts explored and evaluated in a substantive manner?

Step Five:

After the learning contract is approve, Regis administration will register the student for the course. You will receive a letter of appointment in the mail after the drop date.