

FUTURE TEACHING CONTEXTS: THE STUDENTS AHEAD

The challenge: course design and execution in a new environment. (for a full taxonomy of “situational” factors shaping course design see L. Dee Fink, Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2003), p. 69)

Factors:

- Individual, Departmental, Institutional, National/International

Individual

- What can you find out about the student body in general? Among the salient factors might be religious disposition (see the Walvoord study), age, socio-economic background, race, gender, etc. Institutional researchers, if you have them, can help here.
- Are there identifiable patterns in the enrollments of courses in your department (e. g. from certain majors)?
- What can you find out about the current “generation” of college students?
- They are very unlikely, as a whole, to be “in your image;” so how can you get a sense of audience?

Departmental

- Does the departmental have a clear sense of its own mission, either explicitly or implicitly?
- Does the department primarily conceive of itself as designing its curriculum for majors and minors or for the general student population?
- How many student enrollments does the department have every academic year?
- How many majors and minors does the department have in each graduating class, on average?
- How are teaching responsibilities (e.g. at various levels from introductory to advances, for seminars, etc) allotted in the department?
- Who, then, are you going to be teaching?

Institutional

- What is the institutional mission statement?
- What is the departmental mission statement?
- Is there a general education program, either in the form of a core curriculum, distribution requirements, or something else?
- **How does what you want to accomplish with your specific portfolio of courses align, or not, with those various expressions of institutional mission?**

National/International

- Are there trends in higher education that are indirectly or directly shaping your teaching environment (e. g. more contingent faculty and fewer tenure track faculty, emphasis on teaching online, emphasis on training for particular jobs; concerns about cost, accessibility, etc.)
- **How can you efficiently keep aware of such trends?**