Syllabi Analysis Project Process

1. Defining the project

Goals and Objectives - What is it that you are attempting to accomplish through reviewing syllabi? What is it you want to understand or learn?

Outcomes - What will you do with what you have learned? How will you apply or make use of your knowledge?

Scope - How many syllabi and from what time period will you need to analyze to meet your goals and objectives and enable you to carry out your outcomes? Generally, syllabi from an academic year (fall and spring semesters) should be sufficient to gain an understanding of the department.

2. Preparation

Pick a department / major / program or other defined set of syllabi to review - Consider access. Are the syllabi you seek to review readily accessible to you? This may be through a public posting such as the department website or arranged privately by talking with the department head and others.

Select your team - Consider recruiting a sufficient number of people to conduct the reviews, their expertise, and diverse perspectives.

Present your project to the department and ask for permission (even if the syllabi are publicly accessible you should explain the project you are conducting and ask for permission before beginning your work).

Obtain the syllabi (as full a set as possible). Note gaps that cannot be filled. Note: the department’s administrative assistants often collect syllabi for the department. They may be able to help you obtain the syllabi or ascertain how complete your collection of syllabi may be.

3. Conduct the Analysis

Conduct a first round of reviews - The first stage of employing grounded theory is to individually identify the key elements of the data that was collected (course syllabi in this case) and to mark them with a series of codes. Read each of the collection syllabi. Make brief notes as to what stands out to you. Think about what the professor is trying to accomplish and articulate in the syllabus. Then translate your notes into codes. A code is essentially a word or short phrase that gets at the essence of what you have observed. A code can be taken verbatim from the syllabi or generated by the reviewer.

Discuss the individual findings of the first review as a group - Once each team member has completed the first round of reviews, you will need to come together to discuss your coding collectively to begin
developing a shared understanding. Review each of the syllabi you reviewed and discuss what codes you developed and where you applied them. What did each person see as the key elements? What made them key for the team member? Be sure to take notes regarding these discussions so that you can refer to them later if needed.

**Generate the coding schema** (second round of reviews) - Once you have gone through and discussed all of the syllabi under review, each member of the team should go back and review the syllabi again. Start the coding process again only this time begin to group the codes into concepts, elements that share sufficient similarities that allow them to be grouped together.

**Discuss the individual findings as a group** - As in the discussion for the first round of reviews, this discussion will help to develop a shared understanding of what the key elements are and how they are connected. Come to a shared understanding of what codes and categories you will be using and how you will define them.

**Apply the coding schema** (third round of reviews) - Review the syllabi and assign codes one final time. If possible, group similar concepts together to form categories. In grounded theory, categories are used to generate a theory. Here we are less concerned about generating a theory as we are about capturing key elements, connecting them in meaningful ways and using the findings to inform the foundations for meaningful discussions with faculty about student learning.

4. **Write up the Findings**

After you have completed your analysis, write up a brief narrative for each of the categories, concepts or codes that you identified. This should include what the instances of the code mean and how each instance is connected with the others you identified. Pay particular attention as to where and how the different syllabi develop or build off of the key elements that you have identified. This may occur as courses progress from introductory (100 level courses), to intermediate (200-300 level courses) to advanced (400-500 level courses). It may also occur amongst courses that are required for the major, courses that are on a specific subject or sub field, or courses that are taught by one professor.

5. **Plan your discussion with faculty.**

Prior to the meeting, determine your desired results from the discussion. Keep realistic goals in mind. Remember that this is an additional opportunity for you to learn more from those who developed the curriculum you are analyzing!