

Quality Learning Assurance through Standard Course Syllabus Template

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Abstract

One important factor to enhance quality of higher education is by use of standard and effective templates for curriculum design. The program specification components can be viewed at three layers of specifications; the modules layer, the courses layer, and the units' layer. At the courses layer the curriculum is demonstrated by a number of courses that belong to each module where each course has a number of teaching units that typically given at one academic semester and it is usually considered as a single subject. The description that shows how each course at the curriculum composed from number of units and how each unit includes its subjects called the course syllabus (outlines or profile). It outlines the specific knowledge, personal qualities and skills to be taught, assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student's achievement. The course syllabus is a useful tool in order to obtain program accreditation. This paper will try to show the widely used templates for design or define the course syllabus. Many standard templates of course syllabus from international universities will be illustrated and compared in this piece of work. The purpose of this paper is to find course syllabus template that are suitable, informative and robust which perhaps could be used to design curriculum courses in Oman's higher education institutions in order of unify and simplify the program accreditation process that will be done by The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA).

Keywords: Curriculum Design, Degree Program Course Outcomes, Course Syllabus Templates, Course Syllabus Standard Templates.

INTRODUCTION

The strategic goal of the higher education institutions is to apply scientific research activities for developing and surpass in their main stream and graduate students with academic degrees in specific specializations (Entwistle, 2009). The visions, missions and objectives of the most universities are concentrated on how granting their students' academic degrees in a large variety of specializations and also to establish the Excellencies in their academic programs (Moonr, 2002). A specialization curriculum is a summarized characterization of the intentional learning outcomes for that

program degree, and show how its learning outcomes are achieved (Anderson & Hounsell, 2007).

The specialization characteristic ingredients can be classified at three layers of specifications; the modules layer, the courses layer, and the units' layer. Within the modules layer the curriculum is listed by a set of modules where each module is a set of courses, have the same objectives and learning outcomes and may be given in more than one specialization (Gosling & David, 2001). Within the course layer the curriculum is expounded by a number of courses that composed the module where each course described by a number of learning units covered at one academic semester and it is named as single subject (Moonr, 2002). Within the units layer the curriculum is demonstrated as a number of units which composed a specific course and each unit in its role is a number of topics course should cover. The detailed depiction that describe how the courses within the curriculum synthesized from number of units and what materials will be taken in each unit to compose specific subject called the course syllabus (outlines or profile) (Entwistle, 2009).

To gain a degree in a specific specialization the student must be succeed in all the courses listed within the degrees' study plan steps from "A" to "Z". According to that the educational institution should develop a specific study plan for each program degree. That study plan must be specified how to study the courses compose the degree semester by semester and the courses that must be finished to complete each level of the degree (Anderson & Hounsell, 2007). The study plan should be drawn according curriculum or degree program profile. The educational institutions have been designing and improving their curriculum according to their realistic environmental requirements (Entwistle, 2009). The sequence and the short description of each course appear at the degree's study plan. While the details for each course; including its materials, objectives, learning outcomes, teaching methods, evolution policy, and resources depicted within that course syllabus (Gosling & David, 2001).

The course syllabus can be considered as a contract between the student and the lecturer taught that course because it represented as a direct document that describe what happen in that subject during the whole semester. The syllabus should be written in a clear, informative, and simple format (Anderson & Hounsell, 2007). According to that the syllabus writing

format should be formal and use a specific template which is standard to help the student follow the subject in an easy way. It is essential that the university professors should be aware of the recent trends in course syllabus design and development. Recent course syllabus designs are focusing in the learning outcomes as a successful approach to develop the studying curriculums (Land & Meyer, 2005). The learning outcomes can be defined as a map that describes what students should understand and know after the completion the course within a used curriculum.

The process of developing a new specialization or improving an existing one requires writing or rewriting the curriculum according to a specific format or template especially at the syllabus level of the process (Kennedy & Declan, 2007). There are no standard course syllabus standard template used at the Oman's higher education institutions and this will be a very strong obstacle on the way of program accreditation process that will be done by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). This paper demonstrates and compares many of the standard templates from different universities around the world for the purpose of finding a template closely suitable for use in Oman higher education institutions.

This work uses the hypothetic deductive method hybridized with descriptive strategy to satisfy its purpose and reach objectives. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the standard modern syllabus templates and designate the best one that can be used to define the course units within the curriculum. The non standard diversity of course templates used in Oman higher education institutions will be mostly discussed in this research. Finding uniform, informative, reliable, simple, and well-documented course template is the objective of this work.

COURSE SYLLABUS STANDARD FORMATS

The main aim of the degree program is to award the learner a specific qualification. The degree program profile describes the program structure in such a way that consistency is assured within the total program, various phases of the program, and in separate program components. In general the degree program components can be viewed at three layers of specifications; the modules layer, the courses layer, and the units' layer (Gosling & David, 2001). At the courses layer the degree program is demonstrated by a number of courses that belong to each module where each course has a number of teaching units that typically last one academic semester and it is usually a single subject. And at the units layer the degree program is shown as a number of units that belong to a specific course where each unit is a number of topics that the course covers (Gosling & David, 2001).

The degree program components can be described in detail by the program curriculum or the profile. The curriculum describes the degree program from the modules layer to the

units' layer. Curriculum is used to focus on the general studying process and how to apply that process in the right way (Kennedy & Declan, 2007). The curriculum consists of various courses that are designed to gain a particular proficiency or qualification; while each course is designed and described by the course syllabus. The course syllabus refers to the content or subject issues, instructional strategies and evaluation methods used in the course. Course syllabus serves diverse duties. First and prime, it communicates faculty member instructions about learning and teaching to students. Syllabus also reflects learning outcomes, test plan, evaluation methods, attendance policy, teaching methods, learning resources, disciplinary norms, teaching style, and the way faculty work together to develop curriculum (Kennedy & Declan, 2007). In fulfilling the OAAA both academic and program accreditation requirements, the institution's responsibilities to external auditors, ministry of higher education rules, and other stakeholders, syllabus also play an important role in reflecting a vision of shared governance among faculty, students, and academic administrators across the university.

There are many templates that can be used to define the course syllabus. Each education institution may apply different template according to its learning vision or the curriculum template used to define its program degrees. But for standardization and accreditation purposes some countries and universities enforce unify course template for its degree programs. Many examples can be recognized about those modern standard templates such as: The Australian skills quality authority, California state university, Hon Kong university, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and IEEE Computer Society, University of Virginia, The center of academic excellence at Drexel university, and Koehler center of teaching excellence at Texas Christian University (TCU) templates.

As mentioned at the introduction of this paper; the descriptive strategy hybridized with hypothetic deductive method will be used in this work to satisfy its purpose and reach the objectives. The descriptive research strategy will be used to describe the above mentioned templates. The importance of concise description about standard templates is to provide this work knowledge required about components of each template and be able to compare between them on the this paper.

STANDARD TEMPLATES CONCISE DESCRIPTION

There are several modern standard templates used for defining the degree program curriculum at the course level. The degree program curriculum course syllabus is an important instrument for the sake of applying degree program accreditation. Accreditation process is increasingly concentrated on the learning outcomes at program level. This paper demonstrates and compares seven standard templates

that mentioned above. The seven standard templates will be listed and concisely described as follows:

- a) The Australian Skills Quality Authority Template (ASQA): As national regulator; ASQA makes sure that the quality and reputation of Australia's educational system is maintained through effective national regulation. To accredit any Australian high educational institution the ASQA enforce that curriculum of the institution at course level should be written according ASQA standard course template. The ASQA template contain the following fields: course classification information, course information (name of the qualification, nominal duration of the course, purpose of the course), course outcomes, course rules, assessment strategy, resources, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, units of competency (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2015).
- b) California State University (CSU) Template: The CSU policy on course syllabus and grading (section 241 at CSU academic policy manual) is fairly prescriptive, with requirements based on legal considerations, past experience with grade protests, and generally accepted good practice. The following template fields is intended to serve as a guide to prepare class syllabus in accordance with CSU policies: introduction and course description(course name, course number, number of units, time, location, brief course description), prerequisites, required textbooks and materials, course organization, examinations and major assignments, participation standards, grading policy, course goals and primary learning outcomes, assignment and examination schedule, course policies and safety issues, university policies, tentative course schedule (California State University, 2014).
- c) Hon Kong University (HKU) Template: HKU has adapted standards based assessment; so standards assessment as opposed to norm assessment can be applied. Course template has been established so that students are clear about what is expected of them. The components of the HKU template given by: course information (course title, course code, no. of credits, department, faculty, prerequisites, co-requisites, course coordinators, email, telephone no., learning hours, course type, academic year), course description, course objectives, guidelines on grading and standards of assessment, course content, course learning outcomes, course teaching and learning activities, course assessment method, course learning outcomes, essential readings, course policy, additional information (University of Hong Kong, 2010).
- d) Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and IEEE Computer Society Template: ACM and IEEE have a long history of sponsoring efforts to establish international curricular guidelines for undergraduate programs. ACM and IEEE template are written from a variety of viewpoints and in many voices. To allow easy comparison ACM and IEEE recommended this standard template. This template generalized models, artificially created from abstract features, and design from real courses. The template components are: course information, knowledge area, learning outcomes, course position within the curriculum, short description, format of the course, assessment methods, and textbooks and materials (ACM & IEEE, 2014).
- e) University Of Virginia (UOV) Template: To enrich the resources for measuring the impact of educational development work, UOV template have been created to assess the degree to which a syllabus achieves a learning orientation. The template provides qualitative descriptions of components that distinguish learning focused syllabus and uses a quantitative scoring system that places syllabus on a spectrum from content focused to learning focused. This template contain the fields: course title and number, professor information (office, phone, email, office hours, time), course description, learning objective, assessment and evaluation methods, course texts, schedule of reading and assignments, course policy, resources (University of Virginia, 2014).
- f) The Center of Academic Excellent at Drexel University (DU) Template: The DU template keeps the list of institution-wide requirements to what minimally constitutes a foundation for a learning-centered syllabus while supporting faculty members' ability to develop syllabus that work best for them within their disciplinary and instructional contexts. The template also supports Drexel University compliance to specific legal and Middle States accreditation standards. This course syllabus provides good clarification for faculty as well as students. The template composed from: course description, learning objectives, course requirements, class participation, weighted grading, grading criteria, reading assignments, and code of conduct (Drexel Center for Academic Excellence, 2013).
- g) Koehler Center of Teaching Excellent at Texas Christian University (TCU) Templates: This template was designed by TCU to help faculty create a syllabus that contains the most useful information to enhance student learning. The template includes: title of course (course number, credit hours, instructor information, office hours, office phone, and email), final exam date, required texts and additional resources and materials, course description, course requirements, prerequisites, course objectives, learning outcomes, teaching philosophy, instructional methods, course policies and requirements (grading, attendance policy, statement on disability services at TCU, and academic misconduct), getting help with TCU Online, TCU campus resources

for students, course schedule, and TCU mission statement (Texas Christian University, 2013).

STANDARD TEMPLATES ANALYSIS

Course syllabus outlines the specific knowledge, personal qualities and skills to be taught, assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student's achievement. In this part of the work a summarization and comparison will be made between the seven standard templates. The comparison is made by comparing the relevant sections in each template. According to individual component comparisons the total comparison results can be drawn. For the purpose of analysis and evaluation eight common sections are selected to be the primary components of each course standard template. The following points show the common sections used for comparing the seven standard templates (Moonr, 2002):

- A) The general information section: At this section the template give succinct knowledge about the course.
- B) Course description section: Offer a brief course description and explain how the course fits into the curriculum.
- C) Course objective section: The knowledge should students have learned or what should they be able to do when they complete the course.
- D) Learning outcomes section: Describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of this course.
- E) Course format section: Explain how students should proceed through the course and structure of the lectures, lab sessions, and discussion classes.
- F) Course time table: This section includes a tentative schedule of topics covered, exam dates (including the date and time of the final exam), and assignment due dates.
- G) Assessment methods: Provide information about the main assessment methods in the course and the grading policy.
- H) Teaching resources: This section includes textbook, handouts, and additional materials. This may include software that students may need to complete course requirements.

The individual analysis of each standard template and the total comparison results can be listed within Table 1. The comparisons result between the seven templates will be made according four features; the rank of conciseness, the grade of clearness, the amount of information, and the international stage. For easiness, the features will be graded in two values; Realized (R) and Unrealized (U). The total comparisons result between the seven standard templates can be illustrated in Figure 1.

CUSTOMIZE STANDARD TEMPLATE

The comparisons between the seven standard templates have been shown that templates have insufficient scores at field of Omani standardization requirements because it's informality unification. To satisfy the objectives of this work in finding course syllabus template that is suitable for program accreditation requirements of OAAA; the hypothetic deductive method will be used to satisfy that purpose and reach the objectives. The hypothetic deductive method will be used to prove the hypothesized customized standard template. The hypothesis of this work is "The Eight Sections Template (EST) is more suitable for the Omani Higher Educational Institutions as program accreditation course template tool".

The eight sections template contains all the common primary components of each course standard template. The detailed components for the EST can be given by:

- A) The general information section (institution's logo, institution name, department name, course code, course name, academic semester, credit hours, prerequisites, sessions time, session location, instructor name, office hours, web site, email, and office location).

TABLE 1. SEVEN TEMPLATES ANALYSIS.

Comparison Feature	The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)								Total Number of R
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
									11/32
Concise	U	U	U	U	U	U	R	R	
Clear	U	U	U	R	U	R	R	U	
Informative	R	U	U	R	U	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	U	U	U	U	U	R	U	
California State University (CSU)									
Concise	R	U	U	U	R	R	U	R	19/32
Clear	R	U	U	R	R	R	U	R	
Informative	R	U	R	U	R	R	U	R	
Internationality	R	U	R	U	R	R	U	R	
Hon Kong University (HKU)									
Concise	R	R	R	R	U	R	U	U	19/32
Clear	R	R	R	R	U	U	R	U	
Informative	R	R	R	R	U	U	R	U	
Internationality	R	R	R	R	U	U	U	U	
Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and IEEE Computer Society									
Concise	R	U	U	R	U	R	R	R	20/32
Clear	U	U	U	R	U	R	R	R	
Informative	U	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	U	U	R	U	R	R	R	

University Of Virginia (UOV)									
Concise	R	R	U	U	U	R	R	R	19/32
Clear	R	R	R	U	U	R	R	R	
Informative	U	R	R	U	U	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	R	U	U	U	U	R	R	
The Center of Academic Excellent at Drexel University (DU)									
Concise	R	R	R	R	U	R	U	U	17/32
Clear	U	R	R	U	U	R	R	U	
Informative	R	R	R	U	U	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	R	R	U	U	U	U	U	
Koehler Center of Teaching Excellent at Texas Christian University (TCU)									
Concise	R	R	R	R	U	R	U	U	19/32
Clear	R	R	U	R	U	R	R	U	
Informative	U	R	U	R	R	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	U	

EIGHT SECTIONS TEMPLATE ANALYSIS

To prove or disprove this research hypothesis; the Eight Sections Template (EST) should be submitted to the same analysis approach used with the seven standard templates for the purpose of comparison between them. The individual analysis of EST and the total number of Realized (R) are listed within Table 2. The total comparisons result between the seven standard templates and the suggested template can be illustrated in Figure 2. The total comparison results are 24 R from 32 for the EST template and 20 R as a higher score for the seven standard templates.

TABLE 2. EIGHT SECTION TEMPLATE ANALYSIS.

Comparison Feature	Eight Sections Template (EST)								Total Number of R
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
Concise	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	24/32
Clear	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
Informative	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
Internationality	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	

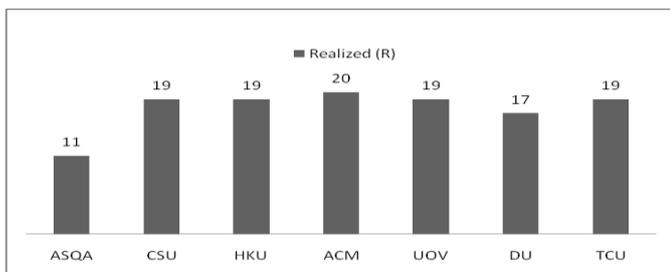


Figure 1. Seven templates comparison.

- B) Course description section (what the course is about and provide a description of the knowledge in which students will be learned).
- C) Course objective section (explain what the course is designed to achieve).
- D) Learning outcomes section (what the learners will know and able to do at the end of the course).
- E) Course format section (teaching methods the students should use to proceed through the course).
- F) Course time table (the course units aligned with time and the assessment dates).
- G) Assessment methods (what will be the marks values and weightings for assignments, activities, and examinations).
- H) Teaching resources (a brief description of materials used including textbooks, programming languages, environments etc.).

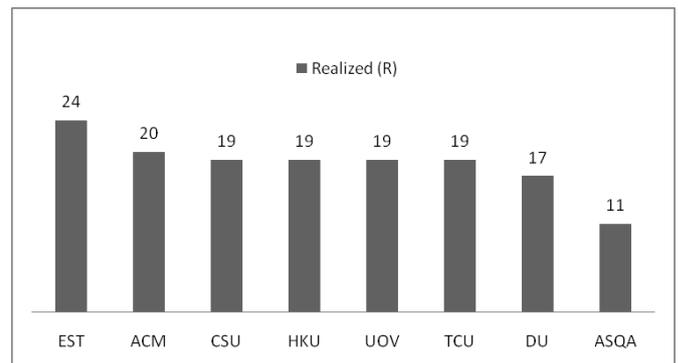


Figure 2. The seven templates compared with EST.

CONCLUSION

Standard course templates are very important for many purposes such as the ability of comparing equivalent degree programs offered by different higher education institutions and also for the sake of quality accreditation process. The total comparisons results from the previous section show that the EST has higher grades than the seven selected standard templates and also the EST template has more Omani orientation because it is customized and designed for the Oman’s education institutions. According to the above results the research hypothesis “The Eight Sections Template (EST) is more suitable for the Omani Higher Educational Institutions as program accreditation course template tool” is proven. The EST as a course syllabus template are suitable, informative and robust. With more future researches the EST perhaps

could be used to design curriculum courses in Oman's higher education institutions in order of unify and simplify the program accreditation process that will be done by (OAAA).

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