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Course planning and administration by instructors: the Case of St. Mary's University College

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Abstract
The importance of a well thought course delivery that requires a thorough planning and strict execution thereof is reiterated by many to ensure the provision of quality education in higher learning institutions. The overall purpose the study is to examine the current course planning and delivering practices of instructors and come up with suggestions on possible options of action for the betterment of these practices towards enhancing the quality of education offered by the UC. The study was conducted based on the course plans prepared and distributed to students by the instructors, and feedbacks from students on their observation and perceptions about the course plans and implementation by the instructors during the course period. Therefore, samples of course outlines and students were used as data sources. The selection of samples was carried out through random sampling method where systematic and convenience sampling techniques were employed to pick the sample units. The systematic sampling was applied for students where every third student in the classroom was made to participate in the study as a respondent. In the case of course outlines, the convenience sampling technique was applied where 9 to 10 course outlines were picked randomly from each department. The study revealed that a planned course delivering is a commonly practiced task across all instructors, departments and mode of enrolments (regular and extension) in the UC. The course planning approach of instructors also took in to account most of the aspects that thought to be important by most authors referred herein, given the components incorporated in the course outlines. This, however, needs to be practiced on a standardized, harmonized and continuous basis. It should also be noted that the monitoring and evaluation of the practice is equally important, especially for the enhancement of the practices of planning for and delivery of courses by instructors thereby quality of education offered by the institution over time.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, course planning and delivery is the core task in teaching and learning that involves accomplishing a number of activities, which usually are interrelated. The teaching–learning process, being one of the major variables of education quality, has pre-defined objective and involves various elements and sub-processes which determine the achievement of the intended purpose. The instructor, the students and the course materials are the major among other elements of that system while planning for and execution of the course instruction is the sub-processes therein. Hence, the nature of the elements and the interaction among (the sub-processes) would be determinants of the outputs of the teaching–learning process which, in turn, determines the quality of education or the learning outcomes. Therefore, one of the important areas of institutional intervention for enhancement of education quality would be course planning and delivery exercises. This study is conducted with this understanding to explore the prevailing practices of instructors at St. Mary's University Collage.

OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the study is to examine the current course planning and delivering practices of instructors and come up with suggestions on possible options of action for the betterment of these practices towards enhancing the quality of education offered by the UC.
In specific terms, the work is aiming at:

- Examining the course offering plans of instructors;
- Identifying the drawbacks and strengths of the course offering plans of instructors;
- Assessing the implementation of the course offering plan by instructors and students;
- Suggesting possible options of measure for improvement of the course planning and delivering exercises of instructors.

SCOPE

The study, thematically, is concerned with exploring the practices of instructors in the course planning and delivering task at SMUC. In terms of time, the work is referring to the academic period of 2007/8. The study covered all fields (9 Departments in 4 Faculties) and levels (Undergraduate Degree, Diploma and TVET) of education offered by the UC in the full-time (regular) and part-time (extension) enrolments.

LIMITATIONS

The study is based on observations from course plans of instructors and feed backs of students, complemented with fairly extensive literature exploration. It, however, misses primary data from instructors with which the prevailing challenges of and opportunities for course planning and delivering task could have been discussed at various levels of operation – instructor, department and institution.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample units

The work, by and large, is intended to explore instructors' planning and implementation of course offering or instructional exercises. Hence, the instructor was considered to be the population unit of the study. The study was conducted based on the course outlines prepared and distributed to students by the instructors, and feedbacks from students on their observation & perceptions about the course outlines and their implementation by the instructors during the course period. Therefore, samples of course outlines and students were used as data sources.

SAMPLING

The selection of sample elements, both for the course outlines and students, was carried out through random sampling method where systematic and purposive techniques were employed to pick the sample units. The systematic sampling was applied for students of all programs, where every third student in each classroom was picked from departments until the desired sample size (15 %) was met. The purposive sampling technique was applied in the case of course outlines where 9 to 10 course outlines (2 from Degree, 1 from TVET and 1 from diploma program courses offered during each of the three semesters) were picked randomly from each department.

DATA COLLECTION

The study utilized both primary and secondary data from different sources. The primary data were collected from students. A structured questionnaire, incorporating closed- and open-ended items of inquiries, was used to acquire the data from this source. Hence, the primary data were both quantitative and qualitative types. The questionnaire, by and large, was used to capture the perceptions

and observations of students about the course plans and delivering exercises of instructors. The data capturing was carried out during the 4th quarter (2nd half of the 2nd semester) of the academic year to have more or less the picture of the entire academic period. Departments, on the other hand, were the sources of the sample course outlines from which secondary data were extracted for the purpose. In addition, various documents obtained from the UC and websites were explored as supplementary sources of secondary data.

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSES

The quantitative data, captured through the questionnaire and course outlines, were processed using a computer systems loaded with Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS). Such statistical processes as frequency and cross-tabulation were used to come up with measures of central tendencies and dispersions on the bases of which results were interpreted and described. The qualitative data obtained from students, on the other hand, were processed manually where recurring ideas were summarized and used to supplement and/ or triangulate with the results of automated processing mentioned above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Samples

The population size of the study is given by a total of 167 instructors employed by and served for the UC during the study period – irrespective of department, level (Undergraduate Degree, Diploma, TVET) and modes (regular, extension) of education involved in.

Students

The study treated a total of 496 sample students of both sex categories drawn from all programs of the seven departments in four faculties under full-time as well as part-time modes of study. As far as the sex composition of the respondents is concerned, females constitute 55.9 percent of the total, 59.6 percent of full-time, and 40.4 percent of part-time students sampled. The composition of respondents, with respect to the mode of study, is given by 58.5 and 41.5 percent for the regular and extension enrolments, respectively (Table 1). Regarding the field of study, Business Faculty shared more than ¾ of the total where Management, Accounting, Marketing Management, and Secretarial Sciences & Office Management (SSOM) Departments contributed 30.4, 28.8, 13.7 & 6.0 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, the Faculties of Law (12.1percent), Informatics (7.9 percent), and Teacher Education (1.0 percent) shared the remaining 21.1 percent of the total respondents (Table 1).

Similarly, respondents were differentiated by the duration of their stay at SMUC, given the number of semesters attended education. Generally, the number of semester reported by the respondents ranged between a minimum of one and a maximum of nine. The three most reported numbers, however, are two (26.0 percent), five (14.9 percent) and eight (14.3 percent). The three least reported, on the other hand, are seven, one and nine sharing 1.6, 4.1 and 7.6 percent, respectively.

Table 1 Respondents by field and mode of study

Field of study	Statistic	Mode of study		Total
		Regular	Extension	
Accounting	Count	91	52	**143 (28.8%)**
	% within Department	63.6	36.4	**100.0**
Management	Count	60	91	**151 (30.4%)**
	% within Department	39.7	60.3	**100.0**
Marketing Management	Count	43	25	**68 (13.7%)**
	% within Department	63.2	36.8	**100.0**
Law	Count	39	21	**60 (12.1%)**
	% within Department	65.0	35.0	**100.0**
Computer Science	Count	34	5	**39 (7.9%)**
	% within Department	87.2	12.8	**100.0**
Language	Count	5	0	**5 (1.0%)**
	% within Department	100.0	0.0	**100.0**
SSOM	Count	18	12	**30 (6.0%)**
	% within Department	60.0	40.0	**100.0**
Total	**Count**	**290**	**206**	**496 (100%)**
	%	**58.5**	**41.5**	**100.0**

Course outlines

The study also attempted to explore the practice of course instruction planning at various operational levels of the UC – Instructor, Department and the institution at large. To do so, a course outline was considered as a close representation of the plan for offering a given course.

Table 2 Distribution of sample course outlines by field and level of study

Department	Count	Proportion (%)			
		Degree	TVET	Diploma	Total
Accounting	9	66.7	33.3	0.0	**100.0**
Management	9	66.7	33.3	0.0	**100.0**
Marketing	9	66.7	33.3	0.0	**100.0**
SSOM	3	0.0	100.0	0.0	**100.0**
Law	10	60.0	40.0	0.0	**100.0**
Languages	10	0.0	0.0	100.0	**100.0**
Social Sciences	10	30.0	30.0	40.0	**100.0**
Math & Basic Sciences	10	60.0	40.0	0.0	**100.0**
Computer Science	11	54.5	45.5	0.0	**100.0**
All	**81**	**44.96**	**39.49**	**15.56**	**100.0**

Hence, a total of 81 course outlines were treated as samples for observation. The samples were drawn from the courses that were offered in the three (first, second and summer) semesters of the year by all departments under the three programs run by the UC.

The Course plan

The major role of instructors in higher education is thought to be the preparation and implementation of the course offering plan. A standard process of planning for and execution of course delivery involves the following steps (University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, n.d.):

- A statement of need - why is this course needed, by whom, for what
- Development of the goals of the course
- Designing instruction, teaching-learning activities and the student assessment tools to match these goals
- Delivering the course - implementation
- Using feedback to evaluate how well it went and where it can be improved
- Revising the course as needed, based on feedbacks and experiences.

This, by and large, is referring to the design, development and execution of a course outline. Course outlines, according to McGill University (2009), are intended to provide students with an overall plan for a course to enable them to function efficiently and effectively in the course.

A course outline can be divided into 7 major sections (Ibid):

General information: Number and title of course, number of credits; name of and access to the instructor; day, place and time of regular classes; prerequisites – particular courses, specific knowledge or skills a student should know before beginning the course (use of computer, ability to read architectural plans …); and calendar course description.

1. *Institutional policy statements*: The meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures; students' rights in the course; use of educational technologies like text-matching software to verify the originality of students' written course work; and advice on special needs like physical disability.

2. *Learning outcomes*: course objectives and the knowledge, competencies or skills students expected to have acquired by the end of the course.

3. *Course content*: a concept map or graphic representation of the content of the course including a description of the topics to be addressed in the course; the rationale for the sequence of the course; and course scheduling.

4. *Instructional method*: a brief description of instructional approaches that will be used during the course (lectures, seminars, laboratory or clinical activities, group projects).

5. *Course materials*: specific information should be provided about required texts including title, author(s), edition number and where they can be purchased or borrowed; additional handouts and other materials if they are part of the required reading; and suggested readings. It is helpful to the students to indicate the relationship of each reading to a particular topic in the course. This can be done by grouping them according to topic and/or class session; readings which have been placed on reserve in the library should be indicated; and any other requisites should be mentioned (computer, web access).

6. *Assignments and evaluation*: the description of how learning will be evaluated provides guidelines for students to structure and pace their study and to gauge their progress. Providing

explicit information about assignments and grading procedures will ensure consistent standards and avoid confusion and wrongly perceived injustice. Thus, it is important to include a description of the means of evaluation to be used in the course; a clear statement of what percentage of the final grade each assignment and exam will represent; the criteria and procedures for arriving at each contributing score; and the consequences of a delayed presentation or late paper.

Considering the major components above, the course planning exercise of instructors was examined with reference to the course outlines produced for the courses they offered. Generally, the elements that thought to be essential components of a course outline are observed being included in one or the other outline examined herein. However, a considerable level of variation was observed among individual course outlines within and among departments thereby in the institution at large.

General information

Taking the elements expected to be incorporated in the 'General Information' about the nature of the course, for instance, some 11 items were identified that need to be mentioned in the course outline (Fig. 1). Only 2.5 percent of the sample course outlines included all of the 11 items while half were missing information about nearly half (54.5 percent) of the items – number of contact hours, the course status (major, common, elective), co-requisite course, course delivery time, and the skills required for the course. In addition, the 'course description' and 'course objectives' are found to be the most common (observed in all sample outlines) items followed by the 'course code/ number'. On the other hand, the 'prerequisite skill' and the 'course output' were the least or hardly incorporated items in this category (Fig. 1).

The other elements of a course outline, under 'General Information', are related to the instructor. It is stated in the Faculty Hand Book (2007) that one of the most important tasks of students is to get to know as many instructors as possible during each semester at the UC…..a student can talk to an instructor after class or during office hours to clarify a point. The information about the instructor includes the name, means & addresses (e-mail, telephone, pigeonhole) of remote communication, office location and time for consultation. However, most of the sample course outlines were missing all of the information about the instructor mentioned above – 90.1 percent were without instructor name, 95.1 percent with no e-mail and/ or telephone address while more than 96.3 percent were missing the office location. None of them mentioned the time the instructor would be available for student consultation.

Figure 1 General information about the course presented in the course outlines
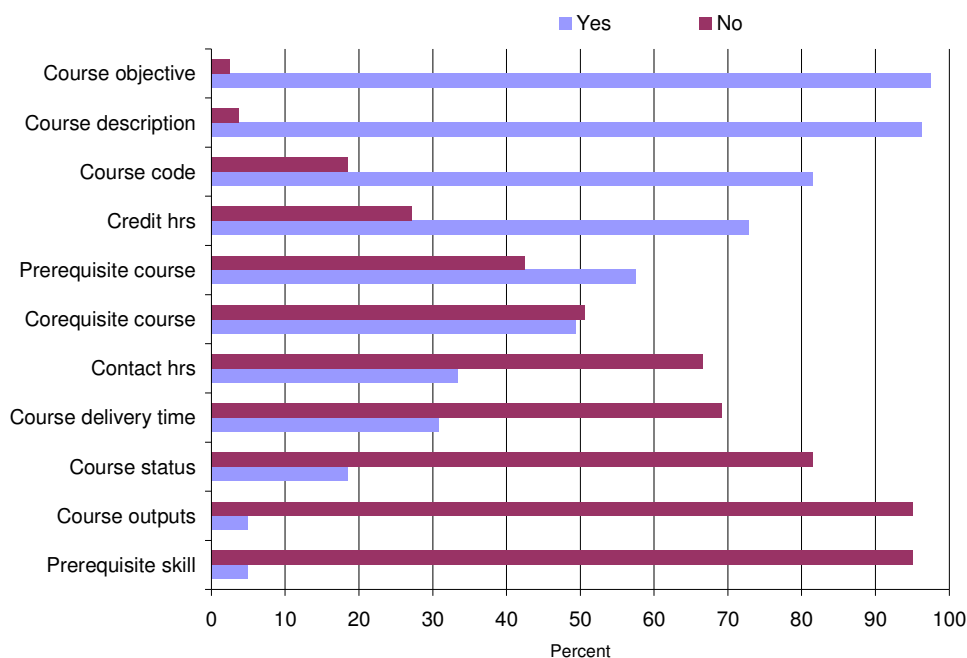
Institutional policy

The other category of information expected to be in a course outline is the institutional policy that students registered for the course are required to know right before and while attending same. Such policies could be of class attendance, plagiarism, delayed submission of assignments, cheating during and missing assessments, grading standard, and provision of services of special needs like physical disability as well as academic support such as tutorial. SMUC has developed and adopted policies, incorporating a wide range of issues related to students in the institutions in general and attending a given course in particular. The faculty hand book (2007) indicates that as part of its dedication to students' success, the UC is committed to providing high-quality academic advising, in order to assist students in the development and pursuit of academic objectives consistent with their life goals and the available opportunities at the UC.

In specific terms, the UC has got policies related to assessment such as cheating in examination and its consequences, and make-up examination – when it is possible (missing regular examination due to health or other serious reason) and not (to raise grade point average), who is eligible (attended at least 80 percent lecture and 90 percent practical sessions), and how to request for (apply to the faculty Dean in collaboration to the department). There is also a grading policy adopted by the UC, according to Faculty Hand Book (2007), that shows how grades are assigned (A, B, C, D, P, AU, F, I, and NG), for what quality of work (Excellent, Good, Fair, Passing, Pass, Audit, Failure, Incomplete, and No grade), the values or points attached to (4.0, 3.0, 2.0, 1.0, 0, 0, 0, None, and None) and the passing and non-passing (F, I, NG) grades. Situations of that lead to the non-passing grades (especially, I and NG) in a course are also indicated, which are important for students to know.

As far as the examination of the course outlines vis-à-vis such institutional policies are concerned, only issues related to class attendance were mentioned by about a quarter (27.2 percent) of the samples while the associated academic services were observed in few (3.7 percent) and the issues related to assignment, invigilation, grading, and special needs were not found at all in any of the samples.
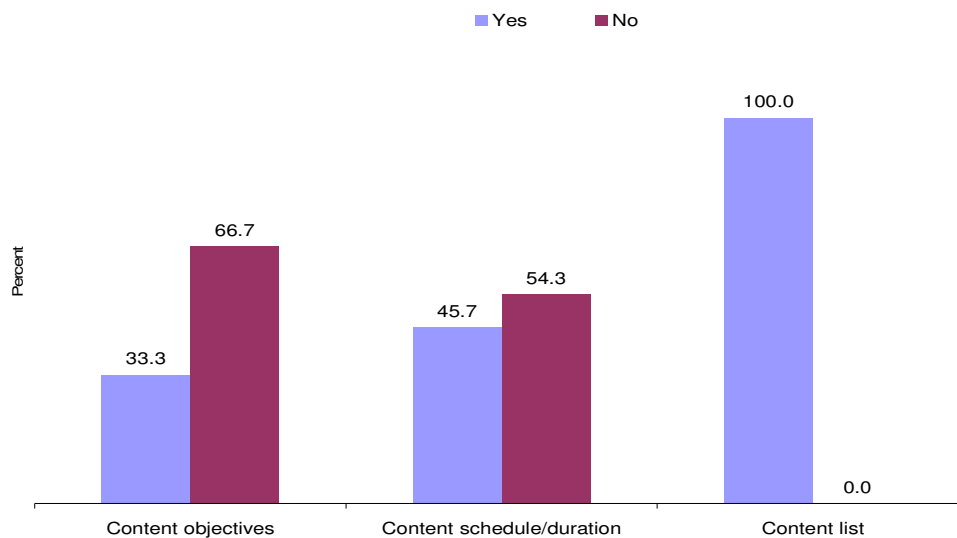
Course content

The course contents that instructors plan to offer was assessed in terms of how they are presented in the course outline, which included the list (major and sub), the logical arrangement, the objectives/ learning outcomes, and the schedule/ time allocation for the (major) contents.

As part of course planning, dealing with the course content is the most important aspect that requires thinking at the outset. This might be well noted by University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (n.d.) which says 'Before you immerse yourself in the day to day thinking of your courses, make a list of the big picture concepts that you want your students to gain in the course. In ten years when they have forgotten all of the details and most of the content, what do you want them to remember about this discipline? In addition, do you want them to acquire better thinking skills, be able to see connections, have a new set of skills, obtain new values, etc.?'

It would be worthwhile mentioning that the course content is a variable of the course outcomes or objectives. Wynne (n.d.) mentioned that while planning for the content, it is important to think about how the material can be organized and presented best so as to reach the proposed learning outcomes.

Fuhrmann and Grasha (1983), cited in Davis (1999), recommend identifying both content goals (for example, 'understand the key forces affecting the rise of Japan as an economic power') and non-content goals (like 'become a good team member and work collaboratively with other students' or 'learn to tolerate opposing points of view'). What do you expect from students? How will students demonstrate that they have mastered the goal? What will constitute acceptable performance? Designing course content, says Davis (1999), is somewhat like planning a transcontinental trip. First, list everything that you feel might be important for students to know, just as you might stuff several large suitcases with everything that you think you might need on a trip. Then severely pare down the topics you have listed, just as you might limit yourself to one or two pieces of luggage. Research shows that too much detail and too many topics work against students' learning the material (Beard and Hartley, 1984).

Figure 2 Items in the course outlines regarding the course content

Looking at the case herein, observation from the samples revealed that the course contents are identified and listed in the outlines of all the courses offered. However, the majority (66.7 percent) of instructors failed to state the content outcomes or objectives in their course outlines while half (54.3 percent) of them failed to show the content schedule or time allocated for the contents in their course outlines (Fig. 2).

Distinguishing between essential and optional materials in the course content would be important. As Davis (1999) says, basic material should be mastered by every student, *recommended* material should be mastered by every student seeking a good knowledge of the subject, and *optional* material should be mastered by those students with special interests and aptitudes. However, lectures and exams should focus on the basic elements of the course. Recommended and optional topics, labelled as such for students, can be included in lectures, supplementary materials, and readings. However, given the observation from sampled course outlines, none of the instructors at SMUC attempted to differentiate the contents of the courses they offered in to basic, recommended, and optional categories. It is also essential to devise a logical arrangement for the course content. It can be arranged chronologically, by topic or category, from concrete to abstract or vice versa, from theory to application or vice versa, by increasing level of skill or complexity, or by other schemes. Some courses demand a chronological sequence.

Table 3 Perception of respondents on the structure of the course content

	Topics in the course outline			
	Arranged logically		Identified as compulsory & optional	
Response category	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Always	89	18.0	42	8.5
Mostly	248	50.2	164	33.2
Sometimes	119	24.1	167	33.8
Rarely	27	5.5	49	9.9
Never	11	2.2	72	14.6
All	494	100.0	494	100.0

To explore the practice at SMUC, an inquiry was made to students who participated in this study regarding the logical arrangement of the course contents in the course outlines they received. As a result, more than $2/3^{rd}$ (68.2 percent) responded positively by reporting that contents were arranged logically mostly (50.2 percent) or always (18.0 percent). About $1/4^{th}$ (24.1 percent) of the respondents were caught in the middle and reported that contents were sometimes arranged logically. Meanwhile, 7.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they rarely (5.5 percent) or never (2.2 percent) observed the logical arrangement of the contents in the outlines of the courses they attended during the time referred herein (Table 3).

Instructional methods

Among the major components of a course outline is the course offering method. This refers to the instructional approach adopted and applied during the course period. Apart from lecture, a lot is expected from the instructor and the students in a given course. According to University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (n.d), most of us plan courses in terms of how many hours the students spend in class. However, the unit that we should be using is learning time, not class time. The general wisdom is that for every hour spent in class students in undergraduate courses are supposed to spend 3 hours out of class. Therefore, for a three hour per week of classroom time, the students really should have 9 hours of learning time per week for that class. Now divide the 9 hours into what students can do on their own (often learned material), what should be done with others (such as discussions), what a teacher is needed for (answering questions, doing demonstrations, modelling problem solving).

The selection of appropriate instructional methods for each class meeting is also appreciated by Davis (1999). Instead of asking, says Davis, what am I going to do in each class session, focus on what students are going to do (Bligh, 1971). Identify which topics lend themselves to which types of classroom activities, and select one or more activities for each class session: lectures; small group discussions; independent work; simulations, debates, case studies, role playing; demonstrations; experiential learning activities; instructional technologies; collaborative learning work, and so on.

Table 4 Instructional methods identified in the course outline, by Department

Department	Instructional method
Law	Socratic method, lecture, reading, group discussion, case study, essay, individual and group works, presentation, internship, role play, workplace visits, project, independent work, pair work
Computer Science	Lectures, seminar, assignment, practical exercises, demonstrations, group discussion, group work, taking measurements, reading, demonstration, case study/ analysis, practical/ lab exercise, project, internship
Mathematics and Basic Sciences	Gapped lecture, group discussion, problem solving, cross over grouping, pyramiding, independent work, pair work, group work, brain storming, presentation
Languages	Lecture, discussion, presentation, reading, class work, homework, peer teaching, pair discussion/work, group discussion/work, assignment and reflection, critic, role play, comparison, problem solving, question and answer, modelling, portfolio
Social Sciences	Gapped lecture, group discussion, pair work, peer teaching, class discussion, reading assignment, presentation, project, role play, debate, brain storming, case study, textbook review, field visit
Management	Gapped lecture, group discussion, group assignment, individual assignment, presentation, field visit, guest lecture, case study, role play, question and answer, book review, panel discussion, project
SSOM	Nothing
Marketing Management	Lecture, guest lecture, presentation, discussion, field visit, seminar, reading, demonstration, project, practical exercise, internship, case study
Accounting	Lecture, group discussion, group assignment, individual assignment, illustration, case study, internship

For each topic, decide how you will prepare the class for instruction (through reviews or previews), present the new concepts (through lectures, demonstrations, discussion), have students apply what they have learned (through discussion, in-class writing activities, collaborative work), and assess whether students can put into practice what they have learned through testing, discussion, problem solving, and so on (Ibid). The instructional methods planned to be applied by instructors of the UC are summarized by department in Table 4.

Assessment methods

The assessment method to be used in the teaching–learning process is related directly to the output and outcomes of the course. University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (n.d) well described the relationship of assessment with the different aspects of a course at large. Are you writing low level objectives, yet expecting high level learning? Or are you writing high level objectives, and only examining for lower level learning? When you develop your materials for a course, be internally consistent. If you are expecting higher levels of learning, then make sure the students see that they will be examined/ evaluated in a manner that is consistent with higher level learning.

**Table 5 Taxonomy of thinking, learning outcomes and assessment method**

Competence	Skills Demonstrated	Question Cues
Remembering (Knowledge) Can the student RECALL information?	Observation and recall of information Knowledge of dates, events, places Knowledge of major ideas Mastery of subject matter	List, define, tell, describe, identify, show, label, collect, examine, tabulate, quote, name, who, when, where
Understanding (Comprehension) Can the student EXPLAIN ideas or concepts?	Understanding information Grasp meaning Translate knowledge into new context Interpret facts, compare, contrast Order, group, infer causes Predict consequences	Summarise, describe, interpret, contrast, predict, associate, distinguish, estimate, differentiate, discuss, extend
Applying (Application) Can the student USE the new knowledge in another familiar situation?	Use methods, concepts, theories in new situations Solve problems using required skills or knowledge	Apply, demonstrate, calculate, complete, illustrate, show, solve, examine, modify, relate, change, classify, experiment, discover
Analyzing (Analysis) Can the student DIFFERENTIATE between constituent parts?	Organisation of parts Seeing patterns Recognition of hidden meanings Identification of components	Analyse, separate, order, explain, connect, classify, arrange, divide, compare, select, explain, infer
Evaluating (Evaluation) Can the student JUSTIFY a decision or course of action?	Compare and discriminate between ideas Assess value of theories, presentations Make choices based on reasoned argument Verify value of evidence Recognise subjectivity	Assess, decide, rank, grade, test, measure, recommend, convince, select, judge, explain, discriminate, support, conclude, compare, summarise
Creating (Synthesis) Can the student GENERATE new products, ideas or ways of viewing things?	Use old ideas to create new ones Generalise from given facts Relate knowledge from several areas Predict, draw conclusions	Combine, integrate, modify, rearrange, substitute, plan, create, design, invent, what if?, compose, formulate, prepare, generalise, rewrite

Source: Wynne (1999)

Higher level evaluations might include multiple choice questions, involving problem solving based upon a scenario, student reports, presentations, asking student to graphically or pictorially represent a concept or develop a schema for organizing the major topics of the semester, essay questions, critique primary literature in the field, etc. Many of these techniques can be streamlined in the time required for correcting. In the 1950's Benjamin Bloom created a taxonomy, which is revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), for categorizing levels of thinking (Wynne, 1999). The taxonomy provides a useful structure in which to categorize learning outcomes and, subsequently, assessment questions.

Introductory courses may have outcomes at the initial levels of abstraction, whereas accredited and certified courses would be expected to have more complex outcomes at higher levels of abstraction (Wynne, 1999). Table 5 shows the levels of abstraction in the order of the revised taxonomy with the original categories printed in brackets. Regarding the methods of assessment practiced at SMUC, observations from the sample course outlines indicated that it is one of the most commonly considered items in the course plan of instructors. Of the entire sample outlines, 92.6 percent incorporated the list of assessment methods, 70.4 percent attached values to the respective assessment method while only 8.6 percent presented the schedule for the assessments using those methods (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 Items about instructional and assessment methods in the course outlines
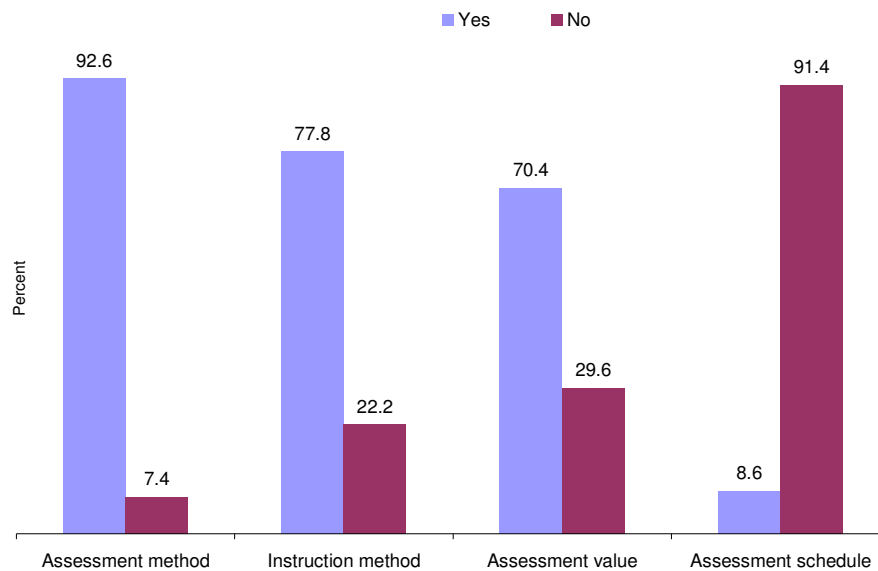
The commonly planned assessment methods at SMUC, given observations from the sample course outlines, were summarised by Department in Table 6.

**Table 6 Assessment methods stated in the course outline, by Department**

Department	Assessment method
Law	Class attendance, class participation, essay, case assignment, project, homework, quiz, test and exam
Computer Science	Assignment, quiz, presentation, case analysis, project, lab assignment, test, exam
Mathematics and Basic Sciences	Class work, class participation, home work, self assessment, peer assessment, assignment, oral questions, test, exam
Languages	Class participation, checklist, project, self assessment, peer assessment, portfolio, practical exercise, test, exam, group critic, group demonstration
Social Sciences	Individual assignment, group work, presentation, class participation, quiz, test, exam, attendance
Management	Class attendance, class participation, class work, quiz, test, case study, group assignment, term paper, presentation, exam
SSOM	Class work, assignment, project, quiz, exam
Marketing Management	Class attendance, class participation, class work, quiz, homework, project, case study, assignment, presentation, test, exam
Accounting	Class attendance, class participation, assignment, case study, project, class work, test, exam

Course materials/ references

Identification and presentation of the reference materials for a course is the other important aspect of the course planning process. While talking about selecting textbooks and readings, Davis (1999), emphasises on choosing textbooks and reading assignments that reflect the course goals. The textbook exerts a greater influence on what students learn than the teaching method (McKeachie, 1986 cited in

Davis, 1999). It might be essential to explain to students how the readings relate to the course goals and classroom activities. Some faculty assign texts that repeat material covered in class or vice versa in order to reinforce the content. Some readings may be assigned to elaborate on the lectures by providing applications and examples. Some readings may be intended to convey additional material or contrasting points of view (Davis, 1999). As far as the experience of instructors at SMUC is concerned, the identification of reference materials was assessed with respect to presentation of the list in the course outline, pointing out the textbook, indicating those available at the libraries of the UC, and differentiating in to required, recommended and optional materials.

Figure 4 Items in the course outlines regarding the course reference materials
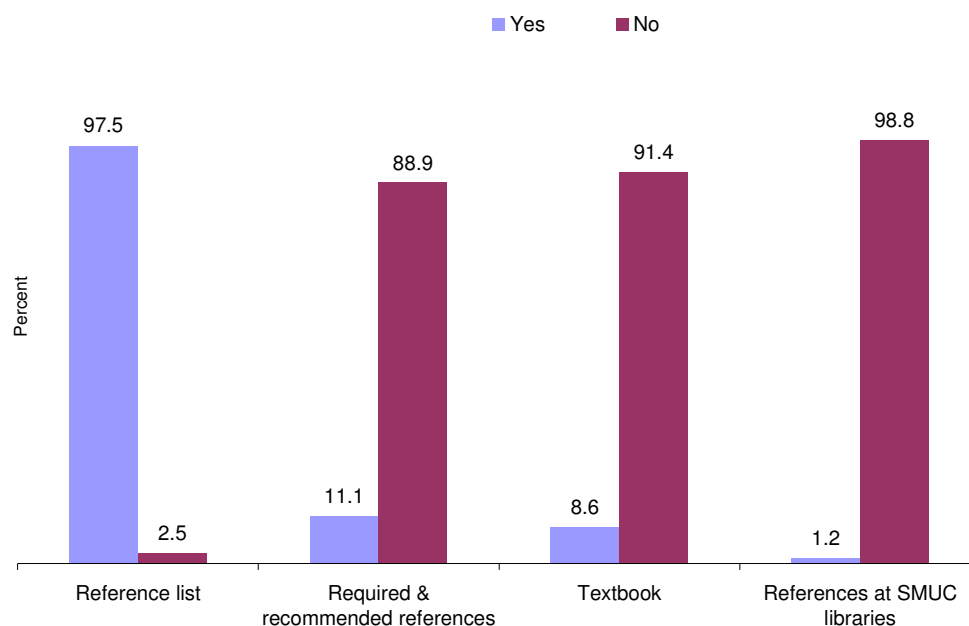
Observations from the sample course outlines indicated that the big majority (97.5 percent) of instructors included the list of references in their course outlines. However, about 1 of the 10 (11.1 percent) instructors presented the list by classifying the materials in to required and recommended reference. Further low proportion (8.6 percent) of them indicated the textbook of the course while none of the instructors pointed out the references that were available at the libraries of the UC (Fig. 4).

Various authors suggest considering a range of criteria in selecting readings. If several textbooks, reports, or articles are appropriate to your course goals, select among them by judging the following (Lowman, 1984; "Selecting a Textbook," 1987; Wright, 1987 cited in Davis, 1999):

- Accuracy and currency of content
- Coherence and clarity of content
- Level of difficulty and interest for students (challenging but not inappropriately difficult)
- Cost/ availability – choose less expensive work if it is of comparable quality, limit the cost by placing some works on reserve in the library
- Size – heavy large texts are hard to carry

Inquiries were made to students regarding the reference materials that were listed in the course outlines they received during the period referred herein. The result indicated that about a third (30.3 percent) of them said that they rarely or never saw the materials classified in to basic, recommended and optional references. About a fifth (18.5 percent) of them indicated that the references listed in the course outline were rarely or never available at the libraries of the UC while 14.0 percent responded that the references listed were rarely or never up-to-date or recent editions (Table 7).

**Table 7 Perception of respondents on the structure of course references**

| Response category | References listed in the course outline are | | | | | |
| | Identified as basic, recommended & optional | | Available at SMUC libraries | | Up-to-date/ recent edition | |
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Always	55	11.1	41	8.3	46	9.3
Mostly	187	37.7	238	48.0	261	52.8
Sometimes	104	21.0	125	25.2	118	23.9
Rarely	47	9.5	67	13.5	38	7.7
Never	103	20.8	25	5.0	31	6.3
All	**496**	**100.0**	**496**	**100.0**	**494**	**100.0**

Diversifying the mix of texts and articles, in addition to books, is important not only to widen the options but also to make familiar with contemporary knowledge. Advanced courses, says Davis (1999), typically include journal articles, essays, research reports, or photocopied course readers. But even in lower-division courses, students should have an opportunity to read at least a few recent publications or journal articles. In this regard, the sample course outlines from Department of Law were found ahead of others by incorporating a wide range of mixes as well as classifying them in to required and recommended materials. The task of organizing the course materials is beyond identifying and listing out the reference materials in the course outlines. The most important aspect is ensuring the availability of those materials to students sufficiently and timely. It would be necessary to communicate the store and libraries to check the stock, identify shortage, order the books early and anticipate follow-ups. Davis (1999) suggests double-checking on the progress of the order with the bookstore a month or so before the term begins. Once the books have arrived, check back with the bookstore to see how many copies there are. Furthermore, according to Davis (1999), it is important to place materials on reserve before the term begins or package reserve materials for students to purchase. Consult with campus librarians about the procedures for putting materials on reserve. Let students know in which library the readings are located, the time they are available for use, the number of copies on reserve.

Perception of Students about the Course Plan

Providing students with a course outline is an old culture of HEIs, as it is confirmed by this survey where 99.4 percent of the respondents reported that they received same at least for some of the courses they attended. But the important point might be the extent to which the course outline is serving the purpose it is intended for, which is largely dependent on the utilizability (completeness, clarity & practicality) of the course outline and the utilizing ability (awareness & skill) of students.

**Figure 5 Perception about the importance of course outline**
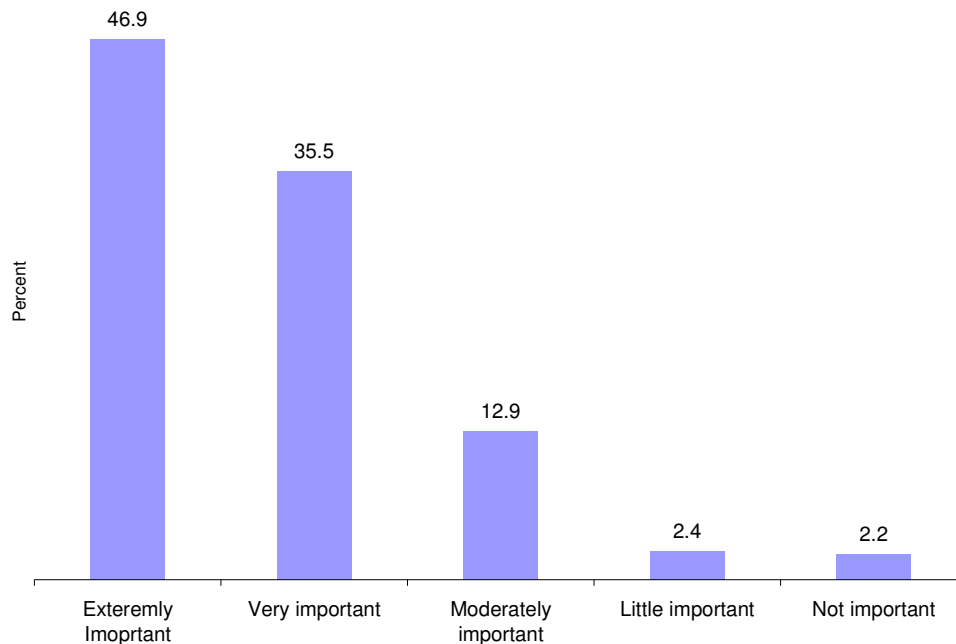
Therefore, exploring the perception of respondents about the importance of a course outline in general, in the learning process during a given course period, was attempted by pausing such questions as 'How important is a course outline for a course you are taking?' And, they were left with a five-scale response options between the lowest of 'Not important' and the highest of 'Extremely important'. Accordingly, as it is depicted in Fig. 5, the majority (82.4 percent) of the respondents highly acknowledged the importance a course outline at large with an 'Extremely important' (46.9 percent) and 'Very important' (35.5 percent) response. However, a significant proportion (17.6 percent) of them rated between 'Moderately important' and 'Not important'.

Figure 6 Perceptions about how informative were the course outlines
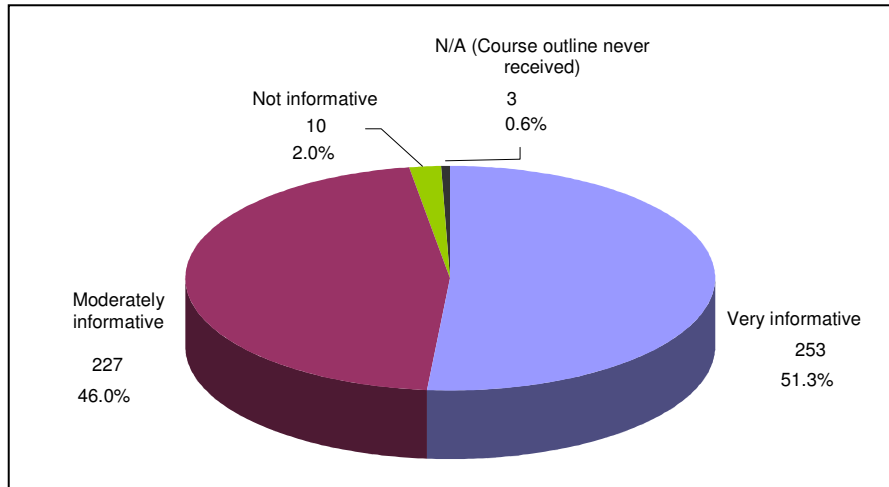
Similarly, respondents were asked about their general view regarding how informative were the course outlines they received for the courses they registered during the last academic year. 51.3 percent of them responded that the course outlines were very informative and 46.0 percent said that they were moderately informative, while the remaining 2.6 percent reported either the course outlines to be non-informative or never received a course outline for any of the courses they attended (Fig. 6).

Figure 7 Perception about the importance of major components of course outline
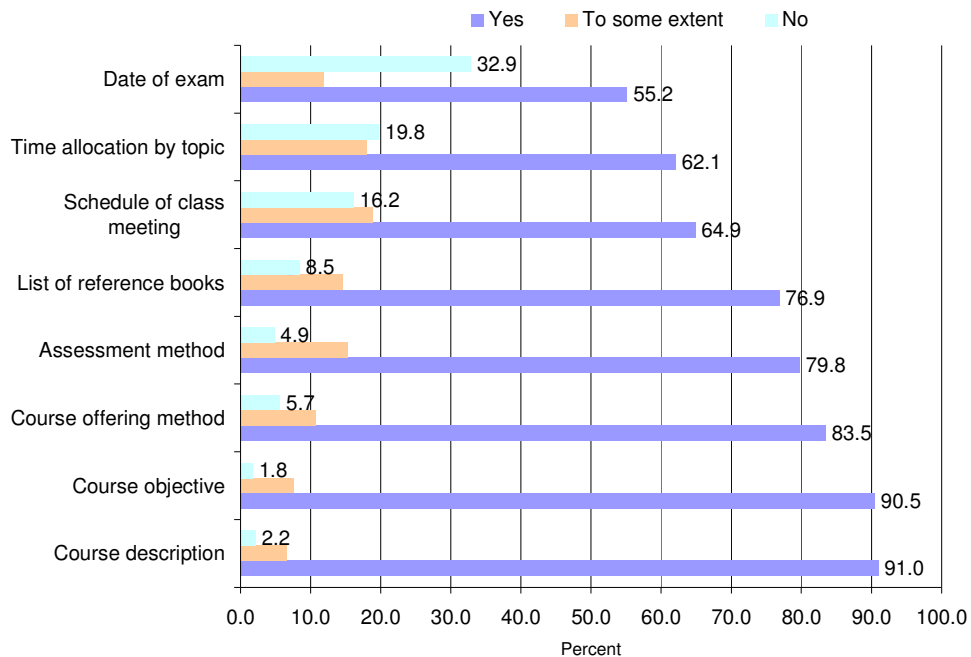
Generally, among the major components of a course outline, the course description (91.0 percent), the course objective (90.5 percent), the method of course offering (83.5 percent), assessment method (79.8

percent) and the reference materials (76.9 percent) are perceived by students as the top-five in the order of importance (Fig. 7).

Implementation of the course plan

The potential role of the course outline in facilitating the teaching – learning process is beyond considerable level. However, reaping the maximum benefit thereof might be a subject of various factors including the nature (quality) of the course outline itself, the awareness of students about it and the commitment of instructors to abide with. Hence, the practice of instructors and students in the application of the course outlines was examined with reference to the major components.

Application of course outlines by instructors

The practices of instructors in implementing their course offering plans was explored indirectly through observations and perceptions of students regarding instructors' utilization of the course outlines while offering them the courses. Hence, inquiries were posed to sample students regarding such variables as following the course or class meeting schedule, applying instructional and assessment methods, content coverage by instructors as per their plans or course outlines. When students were asked whether or not instructors, in most cases, were presenting themselves at class meetings for instruction as per schedule of the courses they attended during the period this study referred to, the majority (57.1 percent) responded positively. The proportion of negative responses or deviation from schedule reported (31.0 percent), however, is considerable where most (22.9 percent) of which was for staying behind schedule (Table 8).

Table 8 The practices of instructors in applying course schedule

Inquiry	Statistic	Response						
		Always	**Mostly**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**	**N/A**	**Total**
Do instructors cover (at least the compulsory) contents in time?	Count	47	356	50	25	16	0	**494**
	%	9.5	72.1	10.1	5.1	3.2	0.0	**100.0**
	Statistic	**Yes**		**No**			**N/A**	**Total**
				Ahead	**Behind**	**Both**		
Do instructors mostly keep pace with the schedule of class meetings?	Count	282		40	113	153	59	**494**
	%	57.1		8.1	22.9	31.0	11.9	**100.0**

In the mean time, the remained 11.9 percent of the students couldn't respond because they perceived no class meeting schedules were in the course outlines they received or not provided with the course outlines at all (Table 8). Regarding course content coverage by instructors, which is strongly associated with the above variable, only 9.5 percent of the respondents acknowledged the complete coverage of the course contents by the instructors while 71.1 percent of the responses were affirmative in the case of most courses. Those respondents who said the complete coverage of contents were in some or rare cases or not at all accounted for 18.4 percent, which seems significant (Table 9).

Table 9 Instructors' application of instructional and assessment methods

Inquiry	Statistic	Response						
		Always	**Mostly**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**	**N/A**	**Total**
Do instructors apply all methods of teaching stated in the course outline?	Count	38	276	122	32	13	15	**496**
	%	7.7	55.6	24.6	6.5	2.6	3.0	**100.0**
Do instructors apply all methods of assessment in the course outline?	Count	52	278	117	35	2	12	**496**
	%	10.5	56	23.6	7.1	0.4	2.4	**100.0**

Utilization of course outlines by students

Course outlines, although important for the efficacy of instructors too, are meant principally to help students as a guide for tracking the flow and studying the contents of the courses. However, making use of the course outline would raise the question of its availability in the first place. Hence, an inquiry was made to the respondents (students) on the degree of availability of course outlines for the courses they attended during the period referred herein.

**Figure 8 Response on the availability of course outlines**
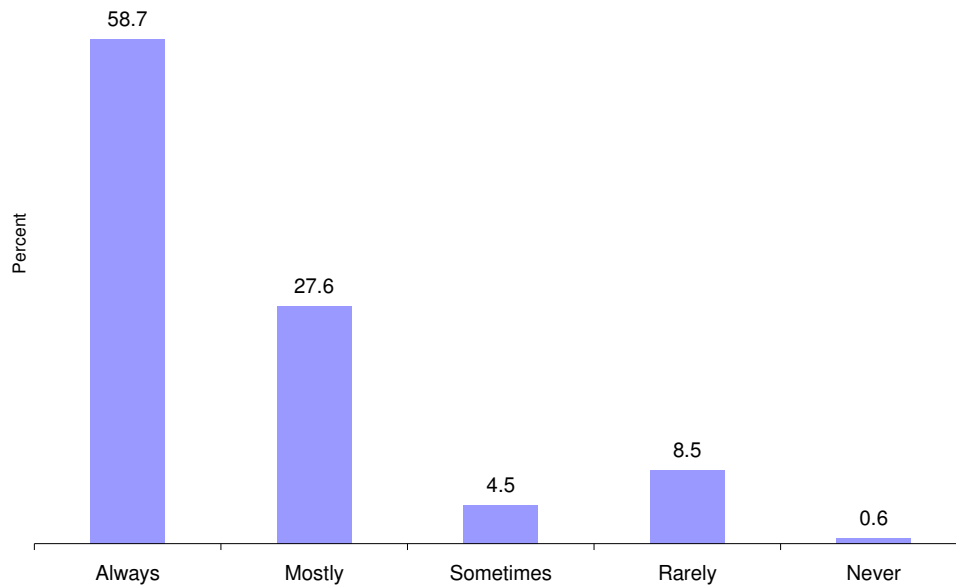
The majority (58.7 percent) of the responses indicated that course outlines were available for all the courses attended while about a quarter (27.6 percent) of them said that it was available for most of the courses. Meanwhile, those who reported unsatisfactory access to the course outlines (sometimes or rarely or never available for the course attended) were considerable with a share of 13.6 percent (Fig. 8). Even if the course outlines were made available, their utilizability could be affected by the quality (clarity, sufficiency and accuracy) of information therein. One of the common drawbacks of the course outlines students were provided with, according to the respondents, was unavailability of the listed reference books in the libraries of the UC (reported by 31.4 percent of respondents). It is also observed

from the sample course outlines that nearly all (98.6 percent) of them failed to indicate which of the references listed were available at the libraries of the UC and didn't inform the whereabouts of any of the reference materials.

When asked what they did to deal with the absence of the references from the libraries of the UC, 47.3 percent of the students responded that they depend entirely on the lecture notes while 52.6 percent of them tried to find the materials from somewhere else. Course outlines are thought important by students because they help them to track the progress of the course instruction. However, sometimes the course outlines fail to serve this purpose effectively when instructors fail to cover part of the course contents they planned or incorporated in the course outline. Students responded differently when they faced such a situation. Most of the respondents who encountered this situation indicated that they read by themselves (59 percent) to cover entirely or the compulsory part alone (48.7 percent) while the other 41.0 percent ignored it entirely (Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Practices of dealing with the course contents instructors failed to cover during the course period
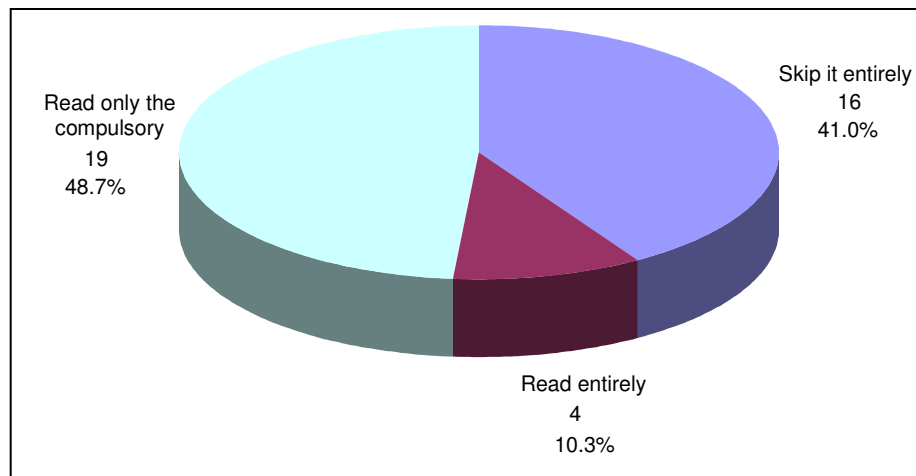
The failure to complete the course contents as per the schedule preset thereof was reported by respondents from all departments, though variation is observed among. Generally, the proportion of respondents who reported encountering such a situation is averaged to 7.9 percent and exhibited a range of 15.5 points among departments – with the highest of 20.0 percent for Languages and the lowest of 4.5 percent in the case of Marketing Management (Table 10). As to the reaction of students to the failure of instructors in covering the contents at the right time, the majority of students in most of the departments preferred skipping the uncovered contents entirely while those of Marketing Management (100 percent), Law (80.0 percent) and Accounting (83.3 percent) Departments tried to cover at least the compulsory contents by themselves or through reading (Table 10).

Table 10 .The practices of students to deal with the contents not covered by instructors during the course period, by department

| Department | Statistic | Measure to cover the topics not covered in class | | | | Total |
		Skip all	Read all	Read only the compulsory	N/A	
Accounting	Count	2	2	8	131	**143**
	% within Dept	1.4	1.4	5.6	91.6	**100.0**
Management	Count	6	0	5	140	**151**
	% within Dept	4.0	0.0	3.3	92.7	**100.0**
Marketing Management	Count	0	2	1	63	**66**
	% within Dept	0.0	3.0	1.5	95.5	**100.0**
Law	Count	1	0	4	55	**60**
	% within Dept	1.7	0.0	6.7	91.7	**100.0**
Computer Science	Count	4	0	0	35	**39**
	% within Dept	10.3	0.0	0.0	89.7	**100.0**
Language	Count	1	0	0	4	**5**
	% within Dept	20.0	0.0	0.0	80.0	**100.0**
SSOM	Count	2	0	1	27	**30**
	% within Dept	6.7	0.0	3.3	90.0	**100.0**
All	**Count**	**16**	**4**	**19**	**455**	**494**
	%	**3.2**	**0.8**	**3.8**	**92.1**	**100.0**

Mean while, covering all of the contents (that instructors failed to do so) through reading was reported by small proportion (10.2 percent) of respondents who were concerned with the failure of instructors to cover the course contents. Similarly, those respondents were found to be from few departments – Accounting (16.7 percent) and Marketing Management (66.7 percent) Departments only (Table 10).

Table 11 . The practices of students to deal with the contents not covered by instructors during the course period, by mode of study

| Mode of education (Division) | Statistic | Measure to cover the topics not covered in class | | | | Total |
		Skip all	Read all	Read only the compulsory	N/A	
Regular	Count	11	1	6	272	**290**
	% within Division	3.8	0.3	2.1	93.8	**100.0**
Extension	Count	5	3	13	183	**204**
	% within Division	2.5	1.5	6.4	89.7	**100.0**
Total	**Count**	**16**	**4**	**19**	**455**	**494**
	%	**3.2**	**0.8**	**3.8**	**92.1**	**100.0**

Looking at the problem of instructors' failure to cover the course contents at the right time with respect to the mode of education, the situation of extension enrolment (10.3 percent) was more pronounced than the case of regular (6.2 percent). And, the students who tried to cover (at least the compulsory) contents, left out by the instructor, through reading were more in the extension (76.2

percent) than that of the regular (38.9 percent) program. Most (64.7 percent) of the full-time students preferred to skip the course contents that instructors failed to cover (Table 11)

CONCLUSION

The importance of a well thought course delivery that requires a thorough planning and strict execution thereof is reiterated by many to ensure the provision of quality education in higher learning institutions. This, however, needs to be practiced on a standardized, harmonized and continuous basis. It should also be noted that the monitoring and evaluation of the practice is equally important.

The study revealed that a planned course delivering is a commonly practiced task across all instructors, departments and mode of enrolments in the UC. The course planning approach of instructors also took in to account most of the aspects that are thought to be important by most authors referred herein, given the components incorporated in the course outlines. However, a considerable degree of variations is observed in the course planning exercise among instructors at large and, hence, within and among departments. This is exhibited by the difference in the template used for and items incorporated in the course outline. The variation is also seen in the course delivering exercise due obviously to difference in the plan mentioned above and deviation from the plan as it was perceived by students.

The difference in the content and structure of the course outlines that were produced by instructors could be attributed largely to the absence (or failure to make use, if there) of a standardized template for course planning both at faculty/ department and institution levels. Meanwhile, the deviation of the course delivering exercise from the plan could be a result of absence or lenience of monitoring of the undertaking at large. The lack of standard and homogeneity of the course plans of instructors and departments, with respect to basic components, together with failure to abide with the plan while course delivering influenced the quality and applicability of the course outlines negatively, given the challenges that students faced regarding course content coverage and access to reference materials among other things. In regards to the applicability of the course outlines, the awareness about the importance and the skill of utilization of course outline by students might be critical as it is observed in the importance attached to the components thereof by students. The course description and objectives/ learning outcomes are among the major components of the course plan since concerned with what that course is all about, why it is necessary (justification) and what is to be acquired from. This study disclosed that this is well taken by nearly all instructors. However, the more important point is the clarity of the message therein to the students, especially in the cases of common and elective courses. A respondent from SSOM who returned the questionnaire back with a question why she is required of taking calculus might be evident for this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is the first of its kind in the institution and so is the methodological design adopted. Apart from the limitations mentioned herein, the scope of the study is thought to be shallow in depth and narrow in breadth. Hence, the output of this work needs to be handled with caution. It is advisable to

undertake the study at a Faculty level because, for one thing, faculties are the first and foremost concerned bodies to know about the prevailing situation and monitor the issue. Secondly, it would be easier to examine the subject in more detailed scope than when it is done at institution level. Among the aspects that students require to know and found undermined by instructors were those in the category of 'General Information' about the course. One of them was information regarding the instructor – name, office location, means of remote communication, and consultation hours. These are critical to help students who are in need of the academic support of instructors in a specific course, as it is clearly stated in the faculty hand book of the UC.

As far as the institutional policy is concerned, there might be a number of issues that students would require of knowing and respecting. There could be also a number of ways for the UC to make students know about them. However, there are some policies directly related and specific to courses that students need to be reminded about whenever they register for a course, like the importance of class attendance which was observed in most of the course outlines examined herein. Mentioning in the course outline about issues of assessment such as missing, make-up, cheating, and late submission; of grading like valuation rules and what leads to I or NG; as well as support services available for academic and physical disabilities in brief (and where to find the details) would be necessary. Failure to cover the course contents by the instructors as per planned schedule or at the right time of the course period is thought to be requiring serious attention for at least two points: leading students to unnecessary and unbearable burden to cover by themselves, and shortfall in knowledge/ skill of students thereby challenge for employability at workplaces since they mostly ignore those contents. For remedy, monitoring of instructors, prioritizing the contents by differentiating in to compulsory and recommended, and revision of course contents could be points to consider.

Regarding the course references, it is important to consider distinguishing the text, required and recommended books or materials, the timeliness, the availability in the libraries of the UC, and the location (in and out of the UC) where students can look for and get them.

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