

Newlane Curriculum Development Manual

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Introduction

This curriculum development manual presents a theoretical background, and nuts-and-bolts instructions for building and reviewing curriculum for Newlane University. This manual is organized to first present the theoretical background and justification to the Newlane approach to building curriculum and to education generally, then to describe the organization of the platform and process for developing curriculum, then instructions for how to practically carry out each step in the curriculum building process to result in quality curriculum, aligned to the outcomes of other comparable programs, and making use of the powerful tools and materials at our disposal today.

Newlane Curriculum Overview

Newlane is a [mission-driven](#) online university. Our mission is "To make quality online liberal arts higher education accessible to anyone on earth by breaking down barriers of cost, schedule and geography." An important part of being an affordable online university is that this makes Newlane available and accessible to students across the globe who otherwise may not be able to complete college-level coursework because of geographic, scheduling, or financial constraints.

As an online university, we have strived from our inception to take advantage of the benefits of the online environment, including the ability to update curricula rapidly, to connect securely with students, assess mastery individually and rigorously, and to draw from the deep and growing well of available quality instructional resources.

We have designed our learning and mastery-verification platform to address traditional college-level criteria or benchmarks for learning objectives and the quality of instructional content as well as criteria for verifying identity and mastery. We have also designed our platform to optimize for the benefits and capabilities that are especially powerful in online environments, such as those noted above.

Distance Learning Curriculum Design Standards

Newlane references and adheres to the [curriculum design standards published by the AECT](#) and relevant sections of the [Higher Learning Commission: 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines](#) in our curriculum development. Our learning and mastery-verification platform is designed to optimize for effective distance learning. This focus extends from the modular and objective-oriented structure of our platform to our criteria to selecting instructional resources to our assessment process.

AECT Curriculum Design Standards Alignment

In our course and degree development and review process, we reference and adhere to these standards. In a general way, we address the standards articulated by AECT (Purpose;



Assumptions; Sequence; Activities; Resources; Application; Assessment; Reflection; Independent Learning; Evaluation) as follows:

Purpose. Effective course design begins with a clearly articulated purpose. This is the standard to which all other standards must align. Purpose may be thought of as two-dimensional: institution or instructor and student. The design should include both the purpose of the course as envisioned by the institution or instructor and the purpose as viewed by the student. As the purpose is articulated through goals and objectives, collaboration between instructor and student will set a firmer foundation than can be achieved through a one-dimensional purpose statement.

Each course is designed around course goals that articulate the purpose or intended learning outcomes of the course. The course goals are also aligned to degree aims, which articulate the intended learning outcomes of the degree program. All lesson objectives and instructional content in all courses are aligned to the course goals. The first review item from our Course Checklist form is Course Goals. Similarly, the first review item from our Degree Checklist form is Degree Aims. This suggests the priority of course goals (or degree aims) in the curriculum development process.

The End of Course Evaluation form includes these relevant prompts:

- How would you rate the clarity of the course goals and objectives? [Excellent - Poor]
- The objectives I was expected to master in this course were clear. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]

Assumptions. Course design must take into account assumptions that shape the purpose and subsequent course development. Most assumptions are based on students' prior knowledge and established understandings and skills. Articulating these content assumptions provides a starting point for new learning. Assumptions in the case of online learning also encompass students' ability to use delivery technology.

The Course and degree development process aligns with the sequence of comparable courses and programs. Moreover, the review checklist includes these relevant review items:

From the course checklist form:

- *Are the curricula and instructional materials appropriate (to the course/degree level and objectives), and sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated course goals?
 - Appropriate Check: Are the learning outcomes articulated in a way that conveys reasonable outcomes for the degree level?



- Comprehensive Check: Is it reasonable to expect that a student can achieve the learning outcomes only using the resources provided through the Newlane learning platform?

From the degree checklist form:

- Are Degree Aims appropriate to the level and type of degree described/awarded? (E.g., an Associate's degree should have aims that reflect introductory college-level understanding and skill. A Bachelor's degree should have aims that reflect advanced college-level understanding and skill in the degree field).
- List any courses that should have prerequisites, list appropriate prerequisites, and rationale for sequence including prerequisites (e.g. fundamental concepts are taught in one course that are assumed in another; background information assumed in one course are taught in another; a certain level of writing ability is assumed in one course that is taught in another, etc.)

We capture the assumption about the student's ability to use delivery technology in the required technology criterion for applying to Newlane. The criterion reads:

- Students must have access to a computer with a camera and microphone, and internet fast enough to handle live video conferences (30+ minutes).

Sequence. Learning opportunities must be sequenced in a manner that promotes efficient knowledge acquisition consistent with the prior-knowledge assumptions. Various models of sequencing—linear, spiral, scaffold, etc.— should be considered, and the course design should incorporate those strategies best suited to the content within the constraints of online delivery.

We address sequencing explicitly through our course and degree checklist forms:

From the course checklist form:

- Sequence Check 1: Based on the subject matter, does the sequence of lessons address prior knowledge required for any lesson?
- Sequence Check 2: Is the sequence of lessons an effective and efficient route to master the course goals?

From the degree checklist form:

- Sequence Check 1: Based on the subject matter, does the sequence of core to major courses address whether students require prior foundational knowledge to be successful?



- Sequence Check 2: Is the sequence of courses an effective and efficient route to master the degree aims?
- List any courses that should have prerequisites, list appropriate prerequisites, and rationale for sequence including prerequisites (e.g. fundamental concepts are taught in one course that are assumed in another; background information assumed in one course are taught in another; a certain level of writing ability is assumed in one course that is taught in another, etc.)

The End of Course Evaluation Form includes this relevant prompt:

- How would you rate the overall organization of the course? [Excellent - Poor]

Activities. Learning is achieved through activities both passive (reading, listening, viewing) and active (experimenting, rehearsing, trying). Activities should be chosen that best suit the content, students' levels of knowledge, experience, and ability, and online delivery constraints, particularly accommodating synchronous, asynchronous, and mixed course participation. Student self-selected or self-developed learning activities should be incorporated along with instructor-selected and instructor-developed activities, consistent with a two-dimensional purpose.

Each course, and most learning objectives include different modes for learning (e.g., reading, listening, viewing). Each course has at least one course project that challenges students to synthesize what they have learned in a novel media project (e.g., a written paper, a video, or slide presentation, etc.), and many lessons have active learning activities that challenge students to experiment with the lesson content.

Resources. A range of resources should be articulated to foster deep learning and extend course-centered experiences and activities. Resources should be multimodal to accommodate students' interests, understandings, and capacities, consistent with course content and technological accessibility. Resources should allow students to go beyond the constraints of the formal course structure to engage in self-directed, extended learning.

The Newlane platform is optimized to leverage the abundant high quality instructional resources available online, and to provide structure (by way of learning objectives) for creating or curating custom instructional content. Most objectives provide a variety of modes of relevant instructional media (e.g., relevant written articles, relevant instructional video lectures, or demonstrations, relevant interactive websites, etc.) Moreover, the Newlane learning platform is designed to be able to seamlessly integrate other modes of instruction as they become available (e.g., VR, etc.)

Application. Consistent with providing for active learning, students should have integral opportunities within the course design to apply new learning. Effective course design incorporates opportunities to practice newly acquired understandings and skills, both



independently and collaboratively. Online collaborative application opportunities should be developed using social media, and offline collegial groups also should be structured whenever physical proximity of students affords this opportunity.

Students have opportunities to experiment with newly acquired understandings and skills both independently, and collaboratively. Each course has at least one course project that challenges students to synthesize what they have learned in a novel media project (e.g., a written paper, a video, or slide presentation, etc.), and many lessons have active learning activities that challenge students to experiment with the lesson content.

Opportunities for independent and collaborative work takes place in Guided Courses which are scheduled throughout the year.

Assessment. Regardless of the model of sequencing learning opportunities, the sequence should include points of assessment for purposes of feedback and review, with instances of re-teaching as necessary for students to acquire full understanding. Formative assessment, whether formal, informal, or incidental, allows teachers and students to give feedback to one another and to review the operationalized design in order to revise the course design based on students' input with regard to knowledge acquisition and effective use of new understandings and skills.

At the level of a student going through a course, the Newlane course checklist form includes these prompts related to assessment:

- Are the intended learning outcomes (i.e., course goals, and lesson objectives) measurable and attainable in an online, distance learning program? (By 'measurable', we mean that an expert can discern whether the relevant intended learning outcome has been mastered or not. By 'attainable', we mean that an expert endorses that a novice can master the intended learning outcomes through the resources provided in the program on the Newlane platform.)
- Are Formative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient?
- Are Summative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient?

At the course review level, we review each course and degree program using a course or degree review checklist form. Part of these forms provide for the reviewer to suggest improvements, even if the course is approved as is. These suggestions inform updates to the course or degree. We also ask students to complete an end of course evaluation form once they complete the course, and their feedback informs updates to the course or degree. We also provide opportunities for continual feedback from anyone participating at any point in the course as a course professor or student. We collect and organize this feedback and it informs course or degree updates.



Reflection. Effective course design must include opportunities for reflection as an extension of the Feedback/Review/Reteach standard. Reflection involves both instructor self-reflection and student self-reflection related to achievement of the purposes that have been articulated as the basis for the course. Such reflection is intended to deepen the learning experience and may serve as reiteration of purpose at key points during the course.

The Newlane end of course evaluation form includes these questions related to reflection:

- How familiar were you with this course's content prior to enrolling in the course?
- By the end of the course, I was confident I had mastered the course goals and objectives. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- Yes or No: Did you achieve, or will you have achieved upon completing your studies, the goals you had when you started the course? [Yes - No]
- How satisfied are you that completing this course has prepared you in some way for your desired "next landing" (whether that be a particular profession, an advanced degree, etc.)? [Very satisfied - Not satisfied]

Independent Learning. Effective course design incorporates opportunities for independent learning, both instructor- and self-directed. Online course development, particularly in the asynchronous mode, should epitomize independent learning, which should include opportunities for feedback, review, and reflection—all of which should resonate with the purpose.

The Newlane learning and mastery-verification platform optimizes for opportunities for independent learning. The learning objective-oriented structure of the platform provides the critical context for students to effectively and efficiently engage with instructional content, whether it is content Newlane has created or curated for a given objective. Our objectives give focus and direction so students aren't on a wild goose chase wondering what to look for in instructional materials. As students work through the course work, they pass through different steps of assessment: Self-assessment, Course exam, Faculty-reviewed project and Faculty-hosted Course Hearing. The first phase, Self-assessment, puts the students in the driver's seat of their learning. Students self-assess mastery when they are confident they have mastered a given learning objective.

Our end of course evaluation form includes these questions related to independent learning:

- How familiar were you with this course's content prior to enrolling in the course?
- How would you rate the learning materials used in the course?



- The course goals and objectives provided sufficient content/structure to enable me to learn from the provided instructional resources.
- By the end of the course, I was confident I had mastered the course goals and objectives. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- I was assessed on my mastery of the course goals and objectives, and felt I could use any instructional resources to that end.

Each course includes a project that is reviewed by a course professor according to a rubric. In order to pass a course, students also meet with a course professor in a live video chat (a “Course Hearing”) where faculty evaluate whether the student has mastered all the course goals and objectives or “not yet”. In these ways, students have many opportunities for feedback, review, and reflection aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

Evaluation. Course evaluation must be purpose-driven. Alignment with the purpose should be threefold: a) based on acquisition of new knowledge, understandings, and skills; b) based on instructor self-evaluation; and c) based on student self-evaluation. Multidimensional evaluation offers a fully articulated basis for judging the success of the course and the students as well as providing information that can help shape future iterations of the course.

The Newlane course checklist form is a rigorous, robust instrument for evaluating a course (see the course checklist form below). Like the entire Newlane platform, evaluation measures are oriented around learning objectives, whether at the degree, course, or lesson level. Accordingly, in order for a student to pass a course, a qualified faculty member must be satisfied that the student has mastered all the course goals and objectives. The faculty member explicitly notes this in their evaluation--they explicitly mark off each course goal, and they mark off that they have explicitly assessed any objectives that they have reason to believe the student has not yet mastered and they include notes to justify their overall assessment.

The Newlane end of course evaluation form also explicitly assesses this. See relevant prompts from this form:

- How would you rate the clarity of the course goals and objectives? [Excellent - Poor]
- How would you rate the overall organization of the course? [Excellent - Poor]
- How would you rate the overall pace of the course? [Excellent - Poor]
- How would you rate the learning materials used in the course? [Excellent - Poor]
- How would you rate the assessment activities used in the course? [Excellent - Poor]
- How would you rate the course overall? [Excellent - Poor]
- The course materials are up-to-date, comprehensive & useful. [Very strongly agree - Disagree]



- The course goals and objectives provided sufficient content/structure to enable me to learn from the provided instructional resources, or to seek out my own resources. [Very strongly agree - Disagree]
- The expectations for performance in this course were clear. [Very Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree]
- The objectives I was expected to master in this course were clear. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- By the end of the course, I was confident I had mastered the course goals and objectives. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- This course effectively facilitated my learning. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- I was assessed on my mastery of the course goals and objectives, and felt I could use any instructional resources to that end. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- All things considered, I was satisfied with my studies in this course. [Very Strongly Agree - Disagree]
- Please provide any other additional comments and suggestions for improvements on any of the above, or other comments or suggestions you have for improving this course or its delivery. [Written response field]

21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Alignment

Newlane University references and adheres to the *21st Century Distance Education Guidelines* (NC-SARA, NCHEMS, C-RAC, 2021) (henceforth: *Guidelines*) in the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of its distance education programs.

These guidelines, recognized by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and other regional accreditors, establish shared expectations for the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of distance education.

The HLC references these standards to evaluate institutional capacity, educational quality, and the integrity of distance learning programs.

The following sections describe how Newlane aligns with each of the major guideline areas, with contextual notes on their meaning in HLC's framework. (*Note: for the purposes of this document, we have omitted some parts of some sections that are not relevant to curriculum development. The Guidelines also include another section "Institutional Transparency and Disclosures" to which Newlane also aligns, but that alignment is outside of the scope of the Curriculum Development Manual, and so is also omitted in this document*).

1. Institutional Capacity

The Guidelines call for institutions to demonstrate sufficient capacity—financial, technical, and human—to deliver quality distance education. Institutions must show that their infrastructure supports secure and effective online delivery, that faculty and staff are qualified and supported in their roles, and that planning and evaluation processes ensure sustainability and continuous improvement.



Newlane Alignment:

Newlane demonstrates institutional capacity through systematic processes for planning, evaluation, and continuous improvement (SER Standard II: *Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning*).

Infrastructure and Resources:

Newlane's proprietary online platform provides secure, scalable delivery of courses, mastery verification, and live assessment. Systems are monitored for data privacy, accessibility, and stability (SER Standard XII).

Faculty and Staff Development:

Faculty and academic staff receive ongoing professional development in online pedagogy, instructional design, and assessment, as outlined in the *Faculty Handbook* and *Curriculum Development Manual (2025)*.

Equity and Accessibility:

The mission to "make quality online liberal arts higher education accessible to anyone on earth" orients Newlane toward course design and technology infrastructure that are inclusive, affordable, and globally available.

These practices align with Guidelines 1–7 regarding institutional preparedness, capacity, and continued investment in quality.

2. Academic Programs

The Guidelines call for distance education programs to maintain academic rigor, coherent design, and measurable learning outcomes equivalent to traditional modalities. Programs must be regularly assessed for effectiveness, and data must inform curricular and pedagogical improvement.

Newlane Alignment:

Curriculum Design:

All programs are structured around measurable *Degree Aims* and *Course Goals*, aligned to institutional mission outcomes.

Assessment Alignment:

Learning objectives are supported by formative and summative assessments (e.g., self-assessments, exams, faculty-reviewed projects, and live course hearings).

Course Review:

Each course undergoes formal review using standardized checklists assessing purpose, sequencing, activities, and alignment to degree aims.

Feedback Integration:

End-of-course evaluations and student feedback inform course updates and platform



enhancements.

These processes directly align with Guidelines 10–13 concerning program quality, assessment, and data-informed improvement.

3. Support for Students

The Guidelines call for distance education programs to ensure equitable access to academic and non-academic support services. Student success and engagement depend on proactive advising, accessible learning technologies, and responsive academic support that meets students where they are.

Newlane Alignment:

Newlane provides accessible, multi-modal support designed for online learners (SER Standard IV: *Educational and Student Support Services*).

Academic and Technical Support:

Students have access to responsive chat support, faculty messaging within the LMS, and scheduled live meetings.

Guided Courses:

Synchronous “Guided Courses” and “Open Cohorts” allow for structured, peer-supported progress through coursework.

Faculty and Staff Training:

Faculty and staff are trained to connect students with advising, mentoring, and academic resources.

These structures meet Guidelines 14–17, emphasizing remote accessibility, continuity of support, and shared institutional responsibility for student success.

4. Program Review

The Guidelines call for institutions to systematically review and improve distance education programs. Reviews must incorporate data on student learning, satisfaction, and post-completion outcomes, and document how feedback leads to measurable improvements.

Newlane Alignment:

Newlane implements a continuous improvement cycle aligned with the guidelines’ expectations for evidence-based program review (SER Standard II).

Regular Review:

Courses and degrees are reviewed systematically through course checklists and advisory council evaluations.



External Feedback:

Student, faculty, and graduate feedback—collected through surveys and end-of-course evaluations—informs regular updates.

Documentation:

Improvements and updates are recorded in the *Institutional Effectiveness Plan* and shared in leadership and faculty meetings.

These processes align with Guidelines 18–19, ensuring regular external perspectives and documented improvements.

5. Academic and Institutional Integrity

The Guidelines call for institutions to demonstrate academic honesty, ethical conduct, and clear governance structures supporting distance education. Integrity includes transparency in assessment, protection of student privacy, and consistency in learning outcomes across delivery modes.

Newlane Alignment:

Newlane maintains clear standards for academic honesty, student identity verification, and institutional governance (SER Standards VI, VII, X, and XI).

Academic Integrity:

The *Student Integrity and Academic Honesty Policy* defines expectations and procedures for addressing violations, including appeals.

Governance and Oversight:

Distance learning operations are fully integrated into Newlane’s governance structure and overseen by the governing board and leadership team.

Public Accountability:

Learning outcomes, assessment methods, and degree aims are published on the website and in the catalog.

These practices address Guidelines 20–23, demonstrating Newlane’s commitment to academic integrity, transparency, and compliance with NC-SARA and HLC standards for institutional responsibility in distance education.

Newlane University’s curriculum and institutional systems are mission-designed for quality, integrity, and accessibility in distance education.

Newlane’s processes—spanning course development, student support, assessment, and continuous improvement—show alignment with the *Guidelines*.



Newlane Statement on Alignment to Recognized Frameworks for Online Learning

Newlane University strives to be a leader in offering quality online learning to a growing student population. We have deliberately designed our curriculum and learning and mastery-verification platform to optimize the online learning experience based on our experience working in, and developing online learning resources and environments, and through consultation with advisors. We also work to align with recognized frameworks for online learning.

Beyond alignment to the AECT standards and the HLC Guidelines, the Newlane curriculum philosophy and platform design bring together powerful learning theories and approaches, to make the most of the online learning environment. These powerful theories and approaches include Backward Design, Bloom's Taxonomy, Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance, Universal Design for Learning, and Competency-Based Education.

While we consider these recognized frameworks important touchpoints, they are secondary filters to our primary platform and institutional design. This is a statement of fact, but also an important distinction for a few reasons: 1. We brought our own framework to our design that addressed shortcomings of other platforms and frameworks in powerful ways that aren't recognized by other frameworks--such as tying lesson objectives to course goals, and course goals to degree aims, and building the platform around the learning objective as the basic unit (though we anticipate that our approach will be more common in the future). 2. No framework is perfectly aligned to our mission and target audience. 3. We anticipate more frameworks emerging over the next years and decades as we get a better sense for online learning across the globe.

Because of our experience with online learning resources and environments as we designed and developed our platform, our platform and curriculum starts out closely aligned with recognized frameworks. We are mission-driven, so our mission takes precedence over alignment to frameworks. But to the extent we can, we work to bring our platform and school in alignment with recognized frameworks as they emerge, though there will likely be a lag from when the frameworks are introduced to when our alignment is complete.

Because of these reasons and more, we are treating our alignment documents as living documents. While we are satisfied that we are in full alignment with very nearly all standards in the referenced frameworks--and our selected frameworks bring the weight of associations involving many schools, vs. a framework from a single university, we also recognize that this is terrain that is rapidly changing and evolving.

Here is a summary of our alignment to the Higher Learning Commission Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-Line Learning). For each framework, we give several sample standards and describe our alignment. Where applicable, we also include a sample standard that we can meet more fully, and have slated an update priority.



Philosophy of Learning and Instructional Design

The philosophy of learning at Newlane draws from several sources that range from basic principles of learning to philosophical approaches to education. Key among these sources include Backward Design, Bloom's taxonomy, Universal Design for Learning, and Competency-based learning. More on the influence of each of these below. To say the Newlane approach draws on these different influences, does not mean that we routinely defer to these, or that we pick and choose different sources for different curricular or platform design decisions. Instead, we view our platform as a culmination of many diverse approaches to education, that together can make more than the sum of their parts to increase the quality and accessibility of education better than any single influence could.

Backward Design

(see [here](#))

Newlane aligns with Backward Design theory as articulated by Wiggins and McTighe: "One starts with the end – the desired results (goals or standards) – and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip students to perform" (quote from [here](#)) Accordingly, the Newlane learning platform is designed around learning objectives, or intended learning outcomes, that specify what the learner outcomes look like ('the end--the desired results'). Assessments are directly tied to these outcomes so that passing a course means demonstrating mastery of the course goals and objectives. The curriculum is flexible (see below under Universal Design for Learning), and always evolving, but when a course is published, the course review committee for that course signs off that the provided instruction is suitable and sufficient for students to master the course goals and objectives.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Benjamin Bloom, editor of the era-shaping text: *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* is the namesake of "Bloom's taxonomy". In 2001, this taxonomy was revised by a group of educators with the title *A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*." Though the revision expands on, rather than contradicts the ideas of the original publication, Newlane more closely aligns with the revised version. This taxonomy organizes learning into different levels that describe what the student is able to do. The basic levels in this taxonomy are: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create. In each of these levels, specific terms further articulate what is, or should be happening, or what the student outcomes look like. For example, under *Remember* would fall terms like: *recognize*, and *recall*. Under *Understand* would fall terms like: *classify*, *explain*, *summarize*. Under *Analyze* would fall terms like: *organize*, *categorize*, etc.

Newlane embraces Bloom's taxonomy as a primary influence as we articulate Degree Aims, Course Goals, and Lesson Objectives. How we articulate our objectives reflects terms associated with different levels of Bloom's taxonomy. In a given course, and moving from the lesson to the course to the degree level, our learning objectives cover appropriate levels of this



taxonomy. We also sequence the objectives to build on each other toward higher levels on the taxonomy.

For example, in the level 100 course: “Introduction to Philosophy” early objectives include:

- List The Broadest Traditional Subfields In Philosophy, As Articulated By The American Philosophy Association.

And

- Identify Conventional Aims And Approaches Of Philosophical Inquiry.

These would both fall under the *Remember* level (there are also objectives in this course that would fit in different categories).

In the advanced course, Kant, one of the course goals reads:

- Contextualize Kant and his appearance in the history of philosophy, and why he is considered a central figure in Modern Western philosophy.

Another lesson objective from the Kant course reads:

- Explain The Meaning And Significance Of Kant's 'Synthetic A Priori' Knowledge.

These would both fall under the *Evaluate* level (there are also objectives in this course that would fit in different categories as well).

Universal Design for Learning

(see [here](#))

Newlane embraces Universal Design for Learning by providing clear learning objectives, within which we also typically provide several different instructional resources for students to reference in order to master the objectives (e.g., an instructional youtube video--plus all of the instructional videos can be played at different speeds, and many include subtitles; an article from an academic journal or an entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, a website created by a Philosophy professor, etc.). The clear guidance of our objectives makes it straightforward what the student needs to learn.

On assessments, we typically provide more than one option for projects. For example, a student can write a paper, or create a video or other presentation. Students self-assess mastery of each objective, they also complete a computer-scored test and an oral exam.

Competency-based Education

(see [here](#))



Newlane incorporates a competency-based approach to education. Passing a course means demonstrating mastery of the course goals and objectives. The curriculum or coursework at Newlane University is organized around discrete learning objectives that detail the intended learning outcomes, such as: “Explain the process of photosynthesis.” or “Retell the Allegory of the Cave from Plato’s Republic.”, etc. Passing a course means satisfactorily completing a course project, and demonstrating mastery of all the course goals and objectives.

Our model of Competency-based education resonates with this definition provided by the University of Wisconsin Flexible Option:

In competency-based education, it’s about what you know and are able to do, not how long it takes you to master the course materials.

In the traditional higher education model, you must spend a fixed amount of time in the classroom – usually fifteen week semesters – regardless if you know the material and want to move ahead, or if you don’t quite grasp it and need extra time. **We believe that not all student learning can – or should – fit within a rigid timetable.** [emphasis in original]

Competency-based education turns that traditional model on its head. Your progress through your coursework is based on your ability to prove you have mastered *competencies*—the skills, abilities, and knowledge required in an area of study. You do this by passing assessments after you’ve reviewed the learning resources. However long it takes you to master the material is unique to you.

By centering mastery of course goals and objectives as the measure for completing a course, our model of competency-based education is at once more rigorous in determining mastery, more flexible for students, more focused on what we believe education should be focused on, and provides for more meaningful educational records.

The Newlane platform is designed with a focus on competency-based education. In order for students to pass a course, they must complete several phases of assessment, each phase is focused on mastery of the course goals and objectives, and as students move through the phases, the assessment becomes more objective (as opposed to subjective) in verifying that students have mastered the course goals and objectives. Passing a course at Newlane is unambiguously bound to demonstrating mastery of the course goals and objectives.

The steps of assessment are: **Self-assessment:** During this step, the student self-assesses their mastery of the course objectives. **Computer-scored exam:** The student then answers computer-scored questions directly tied to each of the course objectives. Students must score 100% in order to pass, but they can take the exam as many times as they need. The exam is progressive: each successive attempt only asks about objectives the student has missed in previous attempts, though students can also reset the exam to cover all objectives again.



Course project: At this stage, the student completes a course project (e.g., a paper, narrated slide presentation, or video). The project is reviewed by a faculty member using a rubric, and students may submit revisions as needed. This allows faculty to provide feedback, catch misconceptions, and guide students toward reviewing specific course sections before moving forward. **Course hearing:** In this step, the student meets in a live video chat with a professor. The professor verifies that the student has mastered each of the course goals and objectives, and can ask open-ended or follow-up questions. If the professor identifies gaps in mastery, they direct the student to review and then return for another hearing. Students may have multiple hearings, receiving additional feedback along the way. In this way, both the project and the hearing act not only as summative assessments but also as formative checkpoints, helping ensure students receive faculty input throughout the learning process. Once the professor is satisfied that the student has demonstrated mastery of all goals and objectives, they sign off, and the student record reflects successful completion of the course. (See more in the Assessment Phases section below.)

Influential Texts

While the Newlane learning platform has been influenced by numerous prominent trends, frameworks, and texts in educational design, theory and practice, some of the core texts that have had a direct, practical influence on our curricular or platform design, or learning philosophy include Ralph Tyler's *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Jerome Bruner's *The Process of Education* and *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, and John Biggs and Catherine Tang's *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, and Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*.

Newlane Learning Module Structure: Degrees - Courses - Lessons - Objectives

Newlane has 4 types of learning modules, hierarchically related: Degrees are made up of Courses. Courses are made up of Lessons, and Lessons are made up of Objectives. Objectives are the basic unit of the Newlane learning platform. If objectives and assessments hold, the whole platform holds. If they don't hold, the platform falls.

Every objective includes relevant instructional resources that are accessible by simply clicking on the objective. Each objective also includes assessments specific to that objective. This means that we can document to the objective level what a student has mastered. While the relevant instructional resources play an important role in helping students master the objective, and the Newlane platform is designed to locate and promote the best instructional media, the media are secondary to the actual objective and assessment(s). This is because the Newlane platform doesn't care how one learns--students may have a better resource than the media provided. But if the objective is not a good objective, for example if it is not clear, or it is not important for gaining mastery over the discipline, etc. or if the assessment(s) aren't good, for example, if they don't align to the objective, or they are too simple so that even someone unfamiliar with the field would have as good a chance as someone who was a master, or they are confusing, even to those who have otherwise mastered the discipline, etc. then the structure and integrity of the platform are compromised.

**Assessment types: Self-assessment, computer-scored, expert-verified**

Newlane University takes a competency-based education (CBE) approach to assessment that emphasizes clear learning objectives and verifying student mastery (as opposed to time in class, or graded assignments). The University incorporates increasingly objective assessment steps in verifying student mastery of clear learning objectives. The university has several checks to first monitor, then verify student mastery of clear learning objectives:

Self-Assessment: Students self check their mastery of each learning objective in each course. Students complete this formative self-assessment after reviewing and reading the instructional materials for the learning objective. The total number of self-assessments required per course is the number of objectives in the course. If a course has 50 learning objectives, a student must do 50 self-assessments for that course.

Course Exam: Once students self-assess mastery of each learning objective the course exam unlocks and students can complete it. The course exam is a computer-scored exam that includes at least one question for each learning objective. Students take the course exam as many times as they need until they have correctly answered at least one question for each course learning objective.

Each course includes at least one course project, which serves as a faculty-reviewed, rubric-scored assessment. Projects may take the form of a written paper, a narrated slide presentation, or a video, allowing students to synthesize and demonstrate their understanding in different formats. A course professor reviews each project against a rubric specific to the assignment, providing feedback and identifying areas where the student may need to revisit course material. Students can revise and resubmit their projects as many times as necessary, making the project both a learning opportunity and an assessment. In this way, faculty involvement occurs during the learning process, guiding students toward mastery rather than functioning only as an end-point evaluation.

Course Hearing: The Course Hearing is a faculty-reviewed oral assessment that typically comes after the exam and project stages but does not need to be a single, final step. In a 30–40 minute live video conference, a student meets with a course professor who asks open-ended and follow-up questions to verify mastery of the course goals and objectives. If the professor identifies gaps or misconceptions, the student is directed to review relevant material and return for another hearing. Students may participate in multiple hearings, each time receiving personalized feedback from faculty to strengthen their understanding. In this way, the Course Hearing functions not just as a summative evaluation but also as an interactive checkpoint where misconceptions can be addressed and corrected before final approval.

Prior to joining the Course Hearing, the course professor affirms the following statement:

I understand that I am entering a Course Hearing. I understand that my role in a Course Hearing is to use the provided rubric and my subject matter expertise to verify the student's mastery of the course goals and learning objectives as they are currently stated, and not to depart from the course goals and learning objectives in my assessment. I also understand that I'm not permitted to instruct or tutor students during the assessment portion of the Course Hearing. To the best of my ability, I promise to conduct this Course Hearing objectively and fairly.



And the student affirms the following statements:

- I understand that I am entering a Course Hearing, and that the purpose of a Course Hearing is to verify my current mastery of the course goals and learning objectives.
- I understand that by entering this Course Hearing, I am giving my consent to Newlane University to record, review, and to store any recordings of this session for training and/or mastery verification purposes.
- I verify that I am who I am presenting myself to be.
- I verify that I have not received, nor will I receive any unauthorized assistance for this Course Hearing.

The course professor reviews and references the course goals and learning objectives, and the student's performance on past assessments.

The course professor explicitly asks students to demonstrate mastery of each course goal and learning objective, and asks open-ended and follow-up questions to prompt students to demonstrate mastery of objectives from the course, this must include any learning objective students missed during a recent assessment, until the course professor determines that they have mastered all the learning objectives. At the end of the Course Hearing, the course professor provides their conclusion for the assessment and explains their reasoning to students. If the course professor determines that students have mastered all the course goals and learning objectives, students pass the course.

Degree Hearing: Each course in a degree program follows the same assessment structure. Once students complete all the required coursework for their degree program, they participate in a Degree Hearing. The Degree Hearing is similar in structure to the Course Hearing, except that it involves more than one faculty member, the hosting faculty members explicitly check off the degree aims (program outcomes) rather than course goals, and the Degree Hearing lasts around 60 minutes, and provides students an opportunity to demonstrate that they mastered all the degree aims prior to graduation. The Degree Hearing is the final assessment step of a degree program.

Focus on Objectives and Assessments

The bulk of the time for curriculum developers is spent working on objectives. Objectives include assessments and relevant media. In principle, objectives can work without relevant media, but the integrity of the platform depends on the alignment of objectives to the assessments. This means that for any given objective, the assessment should directly and straightforwardly align to the objective. To clarify this, consider some good and bad examples:

Sample Objective: Describe the process of photosynthesis.

Ideal Assessment: Describe the process of photosynthesis. [essay format, or video presentation, or oral exam, etc.] This is the ideal, it is a straightforward demonstration (even repeat) of the objective. We anticipate that we will move toward these types of assessments in the computer-scored phase or other phases prior to faculty-verified, especially as we can reliably and accurately score such assessments with technology assistance. And this is the type



of assessment that course projects would have, and that experts would ask in a course hearing. In the meantime, for our current abilities with computer-scored assessments, we must rely on the types of tests that can be computer-scored currently (recognizing that our options will continually increase as technological horizons, and platform capabilities expand on this). Currently, this means multiple choice questions.

First Tier: The first types of assessments that are critical are Multiple choice questions that are straightforwardly aligned to the objective. In these questions, we want to make sure that the assessment is directly, unambiguously tied to the specific objective. The reason this is vital is that we need to be able to have a good case that the student has demonstrated mastery of the objective, and this is the gauge. Here are some good examples for the same objective above: Describe the process of photosynthesis.

- Which of the following best describes the process of photosynthesis? A, B, C, D. [And one of these options is an accurate description of the process of photosynthesis. And in order to differentiate between the correct response and incorrect responses should involve reflection and deliberation on the part of the student.]
- True or False: The following is an accurate description of the process of photosynthesis: X.
- The process of photosynthesis can be described as which of the following? A, B, C, D.
- Put the following steps in the order they occur in the process of photosynthesis: A, B, C, D. [1. BCDA 2. CABD 3. ACBD 4. DABC]

So the first criterion or aim is that *the assessment directly and unambiguously addresses the objective*. The second criterion or aim is that the question is *clear and straightforward* so that someone who has mastered the material will have a much better chance of success than someone who has not.

2nd Tier: After ensuring that we have at least one question that clearly falls in the First Tier, we can consider questions that may be considered part of the 2nd Tier. Note: it is also fine, and preferred if possible, for all questions to be in Tier 1. If this is not possible, or not advisable for some reason, Tier 2 would include questions that are still clearly aligned to the objective, but maybe just a part of the objective such as the following:

- The process of photosynthesis requires all of the following events EXCEPT: A, B, C, D
- Which of the following are required for photosynthesis to occur? A, B, C, D

Notice these are still aligned to the objective, but just addressing a portion of the objective. In general, preference should be given to Tier 1 questions. Reasons to include questions from Tier 2 rather than Tier 1 include the following: It may be difficult or time-consuming to come up with more than 1 Tier 1 question; We have created numerous Tier 1 questions, and we want to add some variety to the assessments, (but making sure that the large proportion are Tier 1), etc.



Inappropriate questions: Questions that don't belong in Tier 1 or Tier 2 would be considered inappropriate questions. The criterion is that the question is not directly aligned to the objective. Here are some examples of inappropriate questions for the same photosynthesis objective:

- Photosynthesis occurs in which of the following organisms? A, B, C, D [The problem is that this doesn't touch on the process of photosynthesis. This could be an appropriate assessment for an objective like: "Recognize that photosynthesis occurs in plants, not animals." etc.]
- Which of the following is the correct phonetic representation of how to pronounce 'photosynthesis'? A, B, C, D

If the assessment is not aligned to the objective, we have several options:

1. Revise the objective.
2. Revise the assessment.
3. Revise the media.

We anticipate that our objectives will evolve in response to community feedback (both objective and subjective), findings in the field, and other reasons. We anticipate that Newlane can play a role in developing pathways for learning, and these pathways are simply the series of objectives that must be mastered, and they only hold insofar as they are good pathways, and our assessments are aligned to them.

As mentioned above, the media is not as critical to the platform integrity as the objectives and assessments, but the media should include our best effort at addressing the objective. We believe that there are good resources for learning content online, but we know that what is available online was not made with our objectives in mind, so it may not be the best possible media, but as far as we can, we want to locate and promote the best available media--and we anticipate that the media will evolve and improve in instructional effectiveness and efficiency, and in alignment to objectives as the community gets engaged. As a curriculum developer, your work is to create or curate the best instructional resources for students to master a given objective. It may be a youtube video, it may be a relevant website that an expert made that covers the objective, it may be a portion of a MOOC, it may be a link to an e-book section, it may be a reference to an article in an academic journal, etc. As an expert, you should feel confident that the instructional resources associated with each objective are clear, current, and sufficient for students to master the objective. You should also feel free to recommend updates to the media resources to reflect the best media available to address a given objective (and to make updates during a course or degree update).

As a subject matter expert, you should feel free to recommend additions, or revisions to any objective or assessment. For example, if a differently worded objective gets at the heart of some important topic that the current objective doesn't, you should recommend to re-word or add a new objective accordingly.



You should also feel free to criticize any particular objective—and its accompanying assessments—for alignment to each other, and whether they are important enough to warrant a place in a pathway for mastery in that course or degree. You should also freely criticize a series of objectives and their assessments, and feel free to make alternate recommendations. We know that these pathways will change and evolve over time, so we start with our best effort, recognizing that these are strong, but ultimately provisional until we know better.

Newlane University Evaluating Instructional Resources Protocols

Instructional resources at Newlane are gathered from a variety of sources. Students can use whichever or however many of the resources offered within an objective. Most objectives have more than one option for the instructional media. Moreover, as much as possible, we aim to offer different types of resources (e.g., one might be a video, another might be a graphic slide presentation, another might be an audio podcast, another might be a written document). This allows students to use the resources that are the best fit for them.

Objectives provide the structure and orientation of instructional resources. When we understand what the objective is aiming for, creating or curating appropriate resources becomes straightforward. Subject matter experts who build courses work to ensure that the instructional resources provided by Newlane are appropriately aligned with the course goals and objectives, and that they are reliable resources. In evaluating instructional resources for Newlane courses, experts reference the following:

Is the resource directly related to the objective? To the degree possible, we work to create or curate resources that are directly related to the objective. For example, if the objective is “Explain the process of photosynthesis,” We would prefer a resource that explained the process of photosynthesis over one that only summarized which organisms conduct photosynthesis, or only indicated in which plant cells photosynthesis takes place, etc. Note: this does not mean that the resource is uniquely and exclusively related to the objective, but rather that the relevant instructional aspect of the resource is directly related to the objective. In cases where only part of a resource is relevant to the objective, experts should note this and provide suitable guidance to help students make best use of the resource (e.g., “especially pages 5-7 under the section “the process of photosynthesis”; or “especially from around 6:20 - 8:20”, etc.)

Is the resource current and accurate? The Newlane community must be able to trust that the resources we create or curate for course goals and objectives are current and accurate. Before publishing a resource for an objective, a Subject Matter Expert should review to ensure that the resource is current and accurate. The only type of extreme event where a resource that is not current or accurate would be permissible would be if the target information in the resource was current and accurate, but other parts of the resource, unrelated to the target information, was not current or accurate, and in these cases, the Subject Matter Expert should specify this.



Is the resource appropriate to the level and scope of the program? In selecting or creating an instructional resource, Subject Matter Experts should work to ensure that the resource is appropriate to the level and scope of the program in which it is found. A resource intended for advanced graduate studies may not be appropriate for an introductory level course. A resource intended for elementary school may not be appropriate for an advanced undergraduate course. With every resource, the individual suggesting its inclusion should be able to answer in the positive: “This resource is appropriate for a [select corresponding level depending on course-level] introductory (100) /intermediate (200) /advanced (300)] college-level course.”

Is the resource accessible? We have a bias for accessibility. All else being equal, a video resource (for example) that includes a written transcript, or subtitles, would be preferred to a video resource that didn't. Likewise, again, all else being equal, a resource that worked with a screen reader would be preferred to a resource that didn't.

Is the resource from a reputable and reliable source? We work to provide resources that are reputable and reliable, and the link and information is likely to be stable long-term. All else being equal, a governmental, or active national organization website would be preferred to a website of a single individual. Relatedly, all else being equal, a resource from a respected scholar in the field would be preferred to an anonymous author. We try to avoid unreliable resources (such as Wikipedia) and when the benefit of referencing Wikipedia outweighs the risk, we include a [disclaimer](#).

Process for Selecting, Acquiring, Organizing, and Maintaining Instructional Resources

Selecting or creating appropriate instructional resources

Newlane curriculum developers select appropriate instructional resources by following the above protocols. If we can't find an appropriate resource, or for other reasons we decide that it would be better to create a resource, we follow the same protocols and review measures.

Acquiring appropriate instructional resources

Newlane curates instructional resources that are free and publicly available (or the resource is available through our online library subscription). In the event that a resource is not publically available, or not available for free, we may request that the student purchase the resource, or we may purchase the resource, or a license to share the resource on our platform. To arrive at that point would require first that the resource meets all the resource evaluation protocols, and second that the resource is an improvement by a sufficient degree of any other available resource.

Here is the process for acquiring an instructional resource:

Newlane seeks to provide a quality educational experience at a low cost. We can usually select quality instructional resources that are publically available for free, or create our own

instructional resource at a low cost. Occasionally, we may consider acquiring instructional resources from a third party (e.g., an individual or education publisher). In such situations, the expert making the recommendation follow this review process:

- Does the resource meet all the resource evaluation protocols? Yes/No Explain.
- Is the resource an improvement by a sufficient degree over any other available resource, including creating our own? Explain.
- Is it reasonable to request that students purchase this resource? Explain.
- If recommend that Newlane acquire the resource, or a license to share the resource on the Newlane platform, next steps are:
- I recommend acquiring the resource, or a license to share the resource on the Newlane platform. Explain rationale. Indicate estimated cost/recurring cost, if applicable
- Submit to Education Director for budget and platform integration (if applicable) review and approval.
- If the purchase or subscription is approved, the Education Director oversees the purchase, and the resource is added.

Organizing Instructional Resources

Instructional resources are organized according to the relevant learning objective. Within each objective, instructional resources include the expected time (in minutes) for students to consume the resource, and a brief description of the resource, including type of resource (e.g., video, text, audio, etc.) We ask Subject Matter Experts to verify that each instructional resource is sufficiently **Accurate** (the resource presents current and accurate information directly related to the objective), **Authoritative** (the author of the resource is a sufficient authority in the field to be trusted to present the information), and **Stable*** (the resource, and the source of the resource is stable, and likely to be available through the same link or means for the foreseeable future). For example, if a resource is a google document, this is liable to change or disappear. So if the content of a google document meets the other criteria, you should download the document as a PDF (or other stable file, like jpeg, gif, etc.) and upload that file for the media. Subject Matter Experts currently verify this through the Course Checklist form.

*Note: We have articulated these three areas (Accurate, Authoritative, Stable) as checkpoints in evaluating instructional resources. While we strive to provide resources that meet the highest standards for all of these, in practice, such resources aren't always available. Our current practice is to ask Subject Matter Experts to vouch that resources are current, accurate, and sufficient to instruct to the course goals and objectives. They do this through the Course Checklist Form.

Maintaining Instructional Resources

Newlane maintains accurate, authoritative, and stable instructional resources through a review of each course every three years by a Subject Matter Expert, and a review every six years by a



course development committee consisting of a subject matter expert, and an instructional designer. During each review, the reviewers update the course to ensure it is current and accurate, all links to instructional resources are still live and point to the appropriate resource, etc.

We also maintain our instructional resources through feedback from the Newlane Community. Experts and students and other community members can easily send and label feedback indicating if a link is broken, or there are other issues with an instructional resource. If our review indicates that we need to update our materials, we typically update curriculum from feedback within one week.

Writing Degree Aims, Course Goals, Lesson Objectives that are Appropriate to the Type/Level of Credential Awarded, and Measurable and Attainable in an Online, Distance Learning Environment

Degree aims, course goals, and lesson objectives are written in the same sentence structure, and are hierarchically related. Degree aims, course goals, and lesson objectives should be appropriate to the type/level of credential awarded. For an Associate degree, outcomes should be at the introductory, college-level. The degree aims, course goals and lesson objectives should reflect this. If the aims reflected advanced college-level outcomes, or outcomes more appropriate for high school, or outcomes that didn't reflect content appropriate to the degree, the course developer would need to revise them.

Similarly, a Bachelor's degree's aims should reflect appropriate aims and outcomes for a Bachelor's-level program. This means that the aims and coursework are appropriate to, and reflect a degree program with introductory, intermediate, and advanced college level outcomes and coursework in the discipline. To ensure that this is the case for each degree, degree developers consult comparable degree programs to verify that our program offers comparable aims and outcomes. Moreover, our degree checklist form calls this out as well. We include the following in our degree checklist form:

Are Degree Aims appropriate to the level and type of degree described/awarded? (E.g., an Associate's degree should have aims that are appropriate for introductory college-level courses. A Bachelor's degree should have aims that are appropriate for a degree program with introductory, intermediate, and advanced college-level outcomes in the degree field)

Degree aims, course goals, and lesson objectives should be measurable, and attainable in an online, distance learning environment. This means that aims, goals, and objectives on Newlane should not be dependent on the resources of a physical university, and they should be objective in the sense that verifying mastery would not be contingent on the subjective judgment of the



aim/goal/objective author. In our course and degree checklist form, we include the following review check to clarify the meaning of 'measurable' and 'attainable':

From Course Checklist form:

*General: Are intended learning outcomes (i.e., course goals and lesson objectives) measurable and attainable through a distance education approach?

Measurability Check 1: Can an expert discern whether each course learning outcome has been mastered by a student or not?

Measurability Check 2: Is each course learning outcome specific enough such that a student would not be able to master it with only a vague understanding?

Measurability Check 3: Are the course learning outcomes significant enough such that a student who had not completed a learning module comparable to that provided in the course would not be able to master the learning outcome?

Attainability Check 1: Can a novice master the intended learning outcomes through the resources provided in the course on the Newlane platform?

Attainability Check 2: In order to master the course learning outcomes, is the student required to substantively engage resources outside of those provided in the course on the Newlane platform?

From Degree Checklist form:

General: Are Degree Aims measurable and attainable through a distance education approach?

Measurability Check 1: Can an expert discern whether each degree aim has been mastered by a student or not?

Measurability Check 2: Is each degree aim specific enough such that a student would not be able to master it with only a vague understanding?

Measurability Check 3: Are the degree aims significant enough such that a student who had not completed a curriculum comparable to this degree program would not be able to master the degree aims?

Attainability Check 1: Can a novice master the intended learning outcomes through the resources provided in the program on the Newlane platform?



Attainability Check 2: In order to master the degree aims, is the student required to substantively engage resources outside of those provided in the program on the Newlane platform?

Objectives are the basic unit of instruction on the Newlane learning platform. They should explicitly state what the student should know, do or feel. At Newlane, Objectives are typically one sentence, and take the form: Imperative Verb (adjective) Noun ([preposition] [noun]). For example: “Place (Imperative Verb) prominent educational (adjectives) thinkers (Noun) on (preposition) a timeline (noun)”, “Compare (Imperative Verb) frameworks (Noun) of (preposition) different moralists (noun)”, and “Summarize (Imperative Verb) *Hamlet* (Noun)”. Course goals and degree aims follow the same sentence structure.

Our process for ensuring that program outcomes are measurable and attainable through distance education is considered throughout the development process and begins by defining and checking the meaning of ‘measurable’ and ‘attainable’, as noted above.

This means that in articulating aims, goals, and objectives, it is important to use verbs that are measurable and that our assessments are aligned to these measurable verbs and that our course goals and objectives are aligned with our degree aims (or program outcomes). It is also important that these aims, goals, and objectives are attainable through distance education. Here are more details on these:

Here is an example of an outcome that is measurable and an example of an outcome that would not be measurable:

Measurable: Compare basic philosophical trends and key ideas across history.

Not Measurable: Gain an appreciation for philosophy.

While Degree Aims are typically more general than Course Goals, they should still be measurable, or in other words, an expert should be able to discern whether the learning outcome has been mastered or not yet. ‘More general does not mean ‘vague’. ‘Measurable’ also suggests that different experts would reach the same conclusion, or have the same, or similar references or measures.

Here is an example of an outcome that is attainable in an online environment as well as an example of an outcome that is not:

Attainable through distance education: Explain important ideas and works of prominent philosophers.

Not Attainable through distance education: Attend in-person philosophy lectures.



This example that is not attainable highlights two factors that we're looking for in our degree aims: 1. That students can master the degree aims through distance education (vs. needing to be present in person for one or more of the degree aims) and 2. That the student can master the degree aims through the resources provided in the Newlane program (vs. relying on resources or instruction outside of the provided resources). This does not mean that students **MUST** use the resources provided through Newlane **EXCLUSIVELY** to master the degree aims, but that they **CAN** master them using **ONLY** the resources Newlane provides.

These definitions and examples frame the whole curriculum development process at Newlane, and they are also part of the final check before publishing a course or degree (through the Degree Checklist Form).

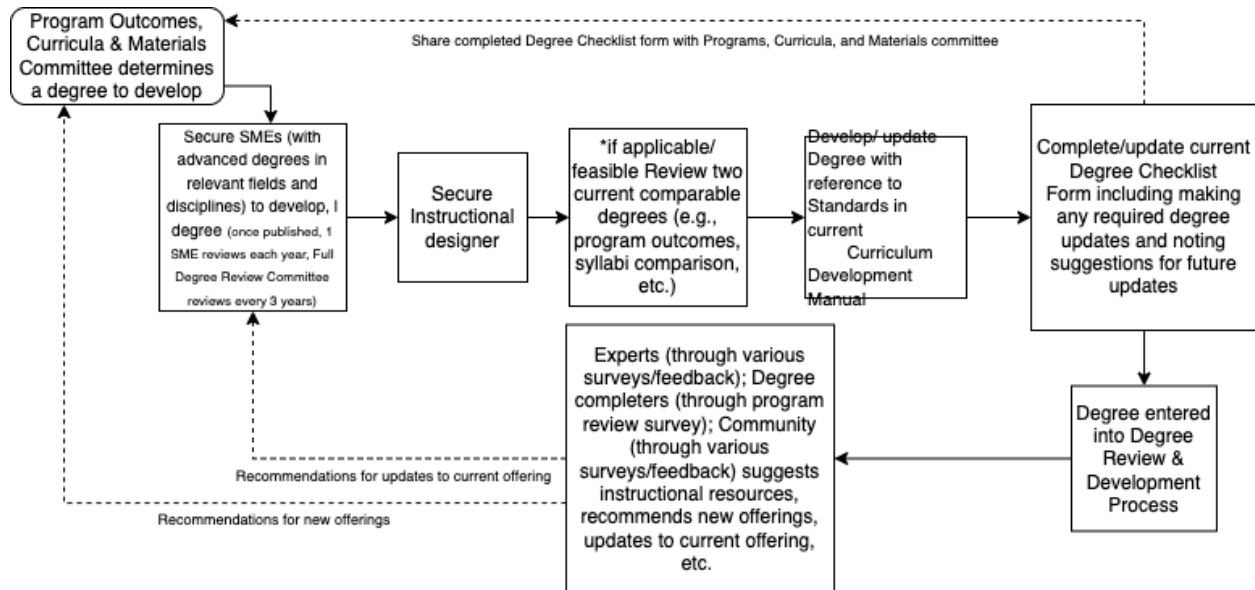
With our objectives, we strive to follow the approach of Biggs and Tang, Teaching for Quality Learning at University. Fourth Edition (2011) when they write:

With an [objective] we need to make a statement about what students' learning would look like after they have learned [whatever content/skill/etc.] to the acceptable standard. Defining that standard of the outcome of learning is important. Verbs like 'understand', 'comprehend', 'be aware of' are unhelpful in [objectives] because they do not convey the *level* of performance we require if the [objective] is to be met. Even the quite common 'demonstrate an understanding of' leave important questions unanswered: what does the student have to do to demonstrate 'an' understanding? What level of understanding does the teacher have in mind -- simple acquaintance? Able to point to an instance of? Apply in a real-life situation? **One of the key criteria of a good [objective] is that the student, when seeing a written [objective], would know what to do and how well to do it in order to meet the [objective].** (118-9).

Newlane Curriculum Development Process

Degree Development Process

See the Newlane Degree Development and Review Sequence Flowchart:



The degree development process at Newlane consists of several different phases that take place prior to, during, and following a degree build. The phases are: alignment to standards, benchmarking to programs, and review. The process culminates in the completion of a degree checklist form that ensures each phase has been addressed.

Alignment: Newlane courses are aligned to recognized standards, guidelines, and best practices as provided by prominent associations in the disciplinary field. For example, philosophy courses are aligned to standards outlined by the American Philosophical Association.

Sequencing: The sequence of courses in a degree program should be based on the subject matter and whether students require prior foundational knowledge to be successful. The sequence of courses in a degree program should embody an effective and efficient route to master the degree aims. To determine whether a course requires a prerequisite, the Degree Development Committee follows this process:

1. In articulating the course goals, the Course Development Committee should note if any goal entails assumed knowledge or skill that is not warranted either in the requirement



that all students have completed high school or equivalent, or in the placement of the course in the sequence of a program.

2. If any course goal assumes such unwarranted knowledge or skill, the course designer notes this, and can either adapt the goal to not entail the assumption, or note that a given course or learning sequence is a prerequisite to the course, or that the course should be placed elsewhere in the sequence.
3. In sequencing lessons in a course, or courses in a program, the driver should be to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of students achieving course goals or degree aims (program outcomes).

Benchmarking: Where applicable, degrees should be benchmarked to two or more comparable degrees from well-respected, accredited comparable programs. To be benchmarked, a degree should have comparable degree objectives, comparable degree coverage, and comparable degree assessments. This can be done with a current or recent syllabus, with a review from a current professor, etc.

Review: Degrees are reviewed by a degree review committee that includes two subject matter experts, (who hold advanced degrees in relevant fields and disciplines), and an instructional designer. The subject matter experts review the degree for aims, and goals, coverage, and assessments, and signs off that the degree reflects or exceeds conventional standards and practices. Once a degree is complete, it enters into the Degree development and review process where we gather feedback from experts (from various surveys and feedback), program completers (through the Program Completion Survey and other surveys and feedback) and other community members (through various surveys and feedback). Updates incorporate this feedback. Degrees are reviewed every three years by at least one SME, and they are reviewed every six years by a full degree review committee.

The Newlane Degree Development Process culminates in the completion of a degree checklist form, displayed below:

<p>The Newlane Degree Development Process culminates in the completion of a degree checklist by the Degree Review Committee. The checklist is included below:</p>	



Degree	Degree Type: Bachelor (Associate, Bachelor, Master, Doctoral) Degree Name: [Philosophy]
Degree Aims	[LIST DEGREE AIMS]
Are Degree Aims current and relevant (by 'current', is meant that the aims reflect current understanding in applicable fields; a student would not need to unlearn what the degree aims express if they were to pursue more advanced study in the same fields/disciplines. By 'relevant' is meant that the aims are important to the degree, and to Newlane's target student population and their hypothesized intentions upon earning the degree).	Yes. [Explain] No. [Explain]



<p>Are Degree Aims appropriate to the level and type of degree described/awarded? (E.g., an Associate's degree should have aims that reflect introductory college-level understanding and skill. A Bachelor's degree should have aims that reflect advanced college-level understanding and skill in the degree field).</p>	<p>Yes. [Explain] No. [Explain]</p>
<p>Sequence Check 1: Based on the subject matter, does the sequence of core to major courses address whether students require prior foundational knowledge to be successful?</p> <p>Sequence Check 2: Is the sequence of courses an effective and efficient route to master the degree aims?</p>	<p>Sequence Check 1 Yes/No Explain</p> <p>Sequence Check 2 Yes/No Explain</p>
<p>List any courses that should have prerequisites, list appropriate prerequisites, and rationale for sequence including prerequisites (e.g. fundamental concepts are taught in one course that are assumed in another; background information assumed in one course are taught in another; a certain level of writing</p>	



ability is assumed in one course that is taught in another, etc.)	
Does this program align with Newlane University's Mission?	Yes/No Explain
Are Formative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient?	Yes/No Explain
Are Summative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient?	Yes/No Explain
Content Validity: Do the Degree Aims and Course Goals appropriately represent what should be addressed in a similarly-titled degree at an accredited university?	Yes/No Explain
Reliability: Are the Degree Aims and Course Goals reliable expressions of intended learning outcomes? Would assessing mastery of the degree aims and course goals be appropriate as the basis of explicit criteria and standards for earning the degree?	Yes/No Explain
Fairness: To the best of your knowledge, are the degree aims and course goals free of bias for or against certain	Yes/No Explain



populations of students?	
Courses	[LIST COURSES]
Course Goals	[LIST SAMPLE COURSE GOALS FROM A RANGE OF COURSES]
[FOR UPDATE] Lessons	Average Lessons per course: [] Range: []
[FOR UPDATE] Objectives	Average objectives per lesson: [] Range: []
[FOR UPDATE] Computer-scored assessments per objective	Average assessments per objective: [] Range: [] Sample Questions: Course: Lesson: Objective:
Projects	Average projects per course: [] Sample from [X] Course: From [Advanced Topics: Epistemology]: [COURSE PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND STANDARDS]
Is the capstone project consistent with academic and professional standards based on commonly accepted higher education practices?	Yes/No Explain
Degree Intro video complete	[link to video]
Course intro videos complete	Yes. [Links] No
Short description for each course	Yes. Sample from [X] Course:
Long description for each course	Yes. Sample from [X] Course:
Any required materials?	Link and cost



<p>Are Course Goals and Lesson Objectives properly mapped to Degree Aims and is the coverage of each degree aim through course goals and lesson objectives appropriate and sufficient?</p>	<p>Yes/No Explain</p>
<p>[FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER ONLY] *Is degree program aligned to AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning; Quality Framework for CBE standards, Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education, and/or other relevant respected standards, benchmarks, or *best practices for effective online teaching and learning?</p> <p>AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning: http://members.aect.org/publications/designstandards/DL_Design_Standards.pdf</p> <p>Higher Learning Commission Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education: https://download.hlcommission.org/EvalofDistanceEducation_STA_2021.pdf</p>	<p>General: YES/NO Explain:</p> <p>Measurability Check 1: YES/NO Explain:</p> <p>Measurability Check 2: YES/NO Explain:</p> <p>Measurability Check 3: YES/NO Explain:</p> <p>Attainability Check 1: YES/NO Explain:</p> <p>Attainability Check 2: YES/NO Explain:</p>



<p>Are degree aims clear? Can we reasonably expect that a student can understand what level of mastery is expected?</p>	<p>Yes/No Explain</p>
<p>Are the curricula and instructional materials appropriate, and sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated degree aims?</p>	<p>Yes/No Explain</p>
<p>[FOR ONLINE LEARNING EXPERT ONLY] *Is degree program aligned to AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning; Quality Framework for CBE standards, Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education, and/or other relevant respected standards, benchmarks, or *best practices for effective online teaching and learning?</p> <p>AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning: http://members.aect.org/publications/designstandards/DL_Design_Standards.pdf</p> <p>Higher Learning Commission Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education: https://download.hlcommission.org/EvalofDistanceEducation_STA_2021.pdf</p>	<p>Yes/No Explain</p>



f	
Reviewers Signed off	Expert 1: [NAME] [RELEVANT CREDENTIAL]
	Expert 2: [NAME] [RELEVANT CREDENTIAL]
Benchmarked degrees: Degrees should be comparable degrees from accredited institutions and should demonstrate similar program requirements and outcomes.	School 1: Coursework: School: [X]; URL:
	School 1: Syllabi: School: _____; URL: _____
	School 2: Coursework: School: [X]; URL:
	School 2: Syllabi: School: _____; URL: _____
	Any additional schools? [URL:]
Comparable credit hours?	School 1: Yes School: [X]; URL:
	School 2: Yes School: [X]; URL:
	Any additional schools?
Comparable Levels?	School 1: Yes School: [X] URL:
	School 2: Yes School: [X] URL:
	Any additional schools?
Meet conventional standards? Standards referenced	Yes Association [X] URL:



<p>*(at least 2 SMEs + Instructional Designer) By listing name here, the SMEs explicitly endorses the degree aims as current and relevant (by current, we mean that the aims reflect current understanding in the relevant fields; a student would not need to unlearn what the degree aims express if they were to pursue more advanced study in the same fields/disciplines. By 'relevant' we mean that the aims are relevant to the degree, and to Newlane's target student population), and that the degree aims are appropriate to the type and level of credential being awarded (by 'appropriate' we mean that the degree aims reflect Newlane standards for the degree program).</p>	<p>Expert: _____; Credentials: _____ (must be terminal degree in field)</p>
<p>Is the learning curve sufficiently scaffolded so we can expect students to see lots of meaningful progress in a short period of time, especially with early lessons? How is this accomplished?</p>	<p>Yes/No Explain</p>
<p>What aspects set this degree apart as leveraging resources of the Newlane platform and community? (e.g. what objectives does it address that may not be</p>	<p>Explain</p>



<p>explicitly addressed in conventional programs?) (How do we make the case that this is as good as any current degree, and/or on the road to becoming the best degree on the market?) (Every degree should be on the road to becoming the best degree on the planet in the future.)</p>	
<p>Relevant Research</p>	<p>If applicable, cite at least one current, relevant publication whose findings are embodied in this degree program, and describe how so. If a current, relevant publication is not applicable, demonstrate in other ways that the program is based on reliable research and industry practice.</p>
<p>"Next landings" endorsements</p>	<p>Endorser verifies that degree is current and relevant preparation for relevant, more advanced academic study. Initial: _____ Institution: _____</p>
<p>Degree Review Committee Recommendations</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> APPROVED AS IS</p> <p>RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED AS IS</p> <p>REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS:</p> <p>RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS:</p> <p>[INITIALS]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> APPROVED AS IS</p> <p>RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED AS IS</p>

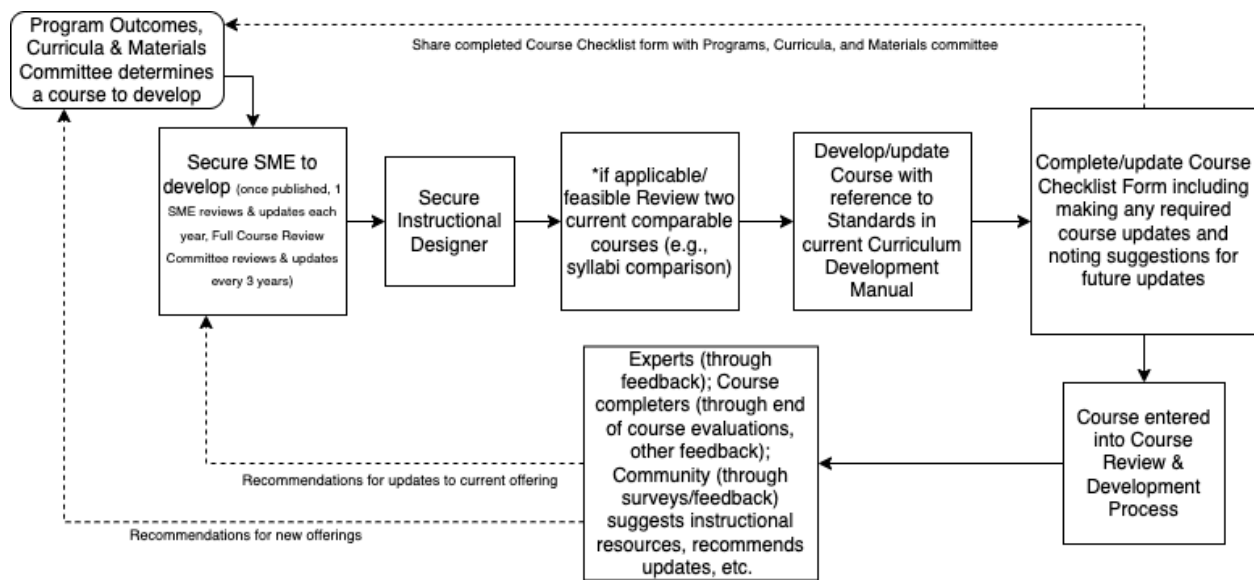


	REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS: RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS: [INITIALS]
Degree Review Committee Signed off. By so doing, the degree review committee confirms that this degree reflects current knowledge and practice, including practices for online instructional delivery, and is comparable in rigor, breadth, and depth to other similar programs in accredited institutions.	Expert 1: _____; Credentials: _____ (must be terminal degree in field) Expert 2: _____; Credentials: _____ (must be advanced degree in field) Expert 3: _____; Credentials: _____ (instructional designer) Other (optional): _____; Credentials: _____
Updates -- reviewed by at least one faculty member every 3 years, and by a complete Degree Review Committee at least once every 6 years. Note date(s) of review, and explain updates (if any)	Date / Reason + Explanation of update



Course Development Process

See the Newlane Course Development and Review Sequence Flowchart:



The course development process at Newlane is composed of several phases that take place prior to, during, and following a course build. These phases include alignment to standards, sequencing, benchmarking, and review. The process culminates in the completion of a Course Checklist Form, which confirms that each phase has been appropriately addressed and that the course meets Newlane’s academic and instructional expectations.

Alignment

Newlane courses are aligned to recognized standards, guidelines, and best practices as provided by prominent associations in the relevant disciplinary field. For example, philosophy courses are aligned with standards outlined by the American Philosophical Association. Alignment ensures that course goals, objectives, and assessments reflect accepted disciplinary norms and academic rigor.

As part of alignment, courses are also expected to adhere to Newlane’s internal structural standards. Courses should include between five and eight course goals and between 32 to 42 learning objectives, ensuring sufficient depth and coverage while maintaining consistency and



parity across courses. These parameters were refined through prior course reviews and are intended to support clarity, coherence, and manageable scope for students.

Sequencing

The sequence of lessons in a course should represent a sensible, effective, and efficient route for students to achieve the course goals. In determining sequencing and potential prerequisites, course designers follow this process:

- When articulating course goals, designers consider whether any goal assumes prior knowledge or skills not reasonably warranted by a high school education or by the course's placement within a program.
- If a course goal entails such assumptions, the designer may revise the goal, identify appropriate prerequisites, or recommend that the course be placed elsewhere in the program sequence.
- Lesson and course sequencing decisions are guided by the principle of maximizing student success in achieving course goals and degree aims (program outcomes).

Benchmarking

Where applicable, courses are benchmarked against two or more comparable courses from well-respected programs. For example, an introductory psychology course may be benchmarked against Psychology 101 courses offered by established online or traditional universities. Benchmarking evaluates comparability in course objectives, scope of coverage, and assessment practices. This may be accomplished through review of current syllabi, consultation with subject matter experts, or adoption of open educational resources (OERs) used by accredited institutions. Where possible, alignment with multiple institutions is preferred.

Review

Courses are reviewed by a Course Review Committee that includes at least one subject matter expert and an instructional designer. The subject matter expert evaluates the course for appropriateness of goals and objectives, adequacy of coverage, and rigor of assessments, and confirms that the course reflects or exceeds conventional academic standards.

Following initial approval, courses enter an ongoing review cycle. Feedback is gathered from subject matter experts, course completers (through End of Course Evaluation forms), and other community members through surveys and qualitative feedback mechanisms. Courses are reviewed annually by at least one expert and undergo a comprehensive review by a full review committee every three years. Findings from prior reviews inform updates to standards, checklists, and guidance used in subsequent course development and review cycles.



The Newlane Course Development Process culminates in the completion of a course checklist form, displayed below:

Updated 9/2025	See Curriculum Development Manual
The Newlane Course Development Process culminates in the completion of a course checklist included below:	*Required fields
*Course Name:	Course Name: Foundations of Social Science
Course Level	Course Level: <u> [100] </u> - perhaps should be 200? <u> </u>
Appropriate Degree Level	Select Degree Level: Bachelor
Course References Information	Course includes reference to any material sourced (including licenses, etc.) Possibly Notes about Newlane SMEs who worked on it. Not part of default details of course so it's easier to find and doesn't get mixed up with the course description.
Semester Credit hours	3
Course number	
*Course Goals Should be between 6 and 8 total course goals--or provide rationale otherwise	
Are Course Goals clear? Can we reasonably expect that a student can understand what level of mastery is expected?	Yes
*Lessons	
*Objectives [Objectives should be objective, not subjective or personalized. Objectives should not read e.g., "Identify how X helps me personally." (See section in Curriculum Development Manual for guidance on appropriately worded objectives.)	



Should be between 32 and 42 objectives--or provide rationale otherwise.	
Are Objectives clear and appropriate to the course and course level? Can we reasonably expect that a student can understand what level of mastery is expected?	Yes
80%+ of objectives have at least 2 instructional resources that are different types of resources.	Yes
Course Data All lessons include at least one objective, at least one media resource, at least one assessment.	Yes
Exercises At least 1/3 of lessons should have exercises. Exercises should have a range: study questions, mini-project prompts, etc.	Yes
*Projects	THERE ARE NO PROJECTS LISTED
Project goals	[LIST PROJECT GOALS]
Sample project topics	[List possible project topics] (optional)
Sample projects	[Include one or more sample completed project] (optional)
Glossary/Vocabulary/etc.	[15-20? words that would help student better digest course]--for future dev
Course intro videos produced by Newlane, up to date and complete	Yes __x_ (provide link) (e.g., does not reference 'Teachur'; does not show an outdated platform, etc.)
Short description for each lesson and course: Short and long description are different text. Short description should be 1-2 sentences overview (like what would be in a course list). Long description should be 2-3 paragraphs discussing the contents of the course (in a more narrative form) or lesson and skills students' will acquire.) Think of it this way; if a new student stopped by your office to ask if this course was for them, how would you describe the course. Or if	Yes __x_ (provide link)



a new student asked what the lesson was about, how would you describe it?	
Long description for each lesson and course: Short and long description are different text. Short description should be 1-2 sentences overview (like what would be in a course list). Long description should be 2-3 paragraphs discussing the contents of the course (in a more narrative form) or lesson and skills students' will acquire.) Think of it this way; if a new student stopped by your office to ask if this course was for them, how would you describe the course. Or if a new student asked what the lesson was about, how would you describe it?	Yes __x__ (provide link)
Books	[LIST ANY (if any) REQUIRED BOOKS AND COST--aim for free online books if possible] [List recommended books and cost, maybe 3+ that would be good texts to recommend to students] (optional)
Other materials required?	List _____ Cost: _____
Benchmarked courses from accredited schools:	
	[School 1]: [Syllabus]: Yes __x__ (Similar course goals, objectives, and lessons) No ____ (provide explanation)
	[School 2]: [Syllabus]: Yes __x__ (Similar course goals, objectives, and lessons) No ____ (provide explanation)
	Any additional schools?
Comparable credit hours?	[School 1]: Yes __x__ (Comparable Credit Hours) No ____ (provide explanation)
	[School 2]: Yes __x__ (Comparable Credit Hours) No ____ (provide explanation)
	Any additional schools?
Comparable Levels?	[School 1]: Yes __x__ (Comparable Levels -- beginning, intermediate, advanced, etc.) No ____ (provide explanation)



	[School 2]: Yes ___x___ (Comparable Levels -- beginning, intermediate, advanced, etc.) No _____ (provide explanation)
	Any additional schools?
<p>*Are the curricula and instructional materials appropriate (to the course/degree level and objectives), and sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated course goals?</p> <p>Appropriate Check: Are the learning outcomes articulated in a way that conveys reasonable outcomes for the degree level?</p> <p>Comprehensive Check: Is it reasonable to expect that a student can achieve the learning outcomes only using the resources provided through the Newlane learning platform?</p> <p>Sequence Check 1: Based on the subject matter, does the sequence of lessons address prior knowledge required for any lesson?</p> <p>Sequence Check 2: Is the sequence of lessons an effective and efficient route to master the course goals?</p>	<p>General Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p> <p>Appropriate Check: Yes/No Explain</p> <p>Comprehensive Check: Yes/No Explain</p> <p>Sequence Check 1: Yes/No Explain</p> <p>Sequence Check 2: Yes/No Explain</p>



<p>Are instructional resources sufficiently Accurate (the resource presents current and accurate information directly related to the objective), Authoritative (the author of the resource is a sufficient authority in the field to be trusted to present the information), and Stable* (the resource, and the source of the resource is stable, and likely to be available through the same link or means for the foreseeable future) Note: As much as possible, should not be a google doc, or other editable resource. Prefer pdf vs editable doc.</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___ Explain:</p>
<p>*General: Are intended learning outcomes (i.e., course goals and lesson objectives) measurable and attainable through a distance education approach?</p> <p>Measurability Check 1: Can an expert discern whether each course learning outcome has been mastered by a student or not?</p> <p>Measurability Check 2: Is each course learning outcome specific enough such that a student would not be able to master it with only a vague understanding?</p> <p>Measurability Check 3: Are the course learning outcomes significant enough such that a student who had not completed a learning module</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___ Explain:</p>



<p>comparable to that provided in the course would not be able to master the learning outcome?</p> <p>Attainability Check 1: Can a novice master the intended learning outcomes through the resources provided in the course on the Newlane platform?</p> <p>Attainability Check 2: In order to master the course learning outcomes, is the student required to substantively engage resources outside of those provided in the course on the Newlane platform?</p>	
<p>[INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER ONLY] *Is course aligned to AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning; Quality Framework for CBE standards, Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education, and/or other relevant respected standards, benchmarks, or *best practices for effective online teaching and learning?</p> <p>AECT Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning: http://members.aect.org/publications/designstandards/DL_Design_Standards.pdf</p> <p>Higher Learning Commission Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education: https://download.hlcommission.org/EvalofDistanceEducation_STA_2021.pdf</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>Meet conventional standards? Standards referenced (if applicable)</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___ (provide explanation)</p>
<p>Are there any apparent copyright</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p>



<p>issues with any of the materials for the course? (That is, are resources used that appear to violate copyright regulations, e.g., a website with photocopies of a book, or clips from a film that aren't in the public domain, and the website author is not likely to have the rights?)</p>	<p>Explain:</p>
<p>**"Next landings" endorsements</p>	<p>Academic endorsement (Endorser verifies that course is current and relevant and appropriate preparation for more advanced academic study)</p> <p>Initial: ____ Position _____ (must be relevant to possible academic "next landing" for students who complete degree this course is in)</p>
<p>Does this course align with Newlane University's Mission?</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>Are Formative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient for the course goals and objectives? (e.g., Mid-Course Hearing)</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>Are Summative Assessment Opportunities appropriate and sufficient for the course goals and objectives? (e.g., Course Hearing, Course Exam)</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>Content Validity: Do the course goals and objectives and assessments appropriately represent what should be addressed in a similarly-titled course at an accredited university?</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>Reliability: Are the course goals and objectives and assessments reliable expressions of intended learning outcomes? Would assessing mastery of the course goals and objectives be appropriate as the basis of explicit</p>	<p>Yes ___ No ___</p> <p>Explain:</p>



criteria and standards for passing the course?	
Fairness: To the best of your knowledge, are the course goals and objectives and assessments free of bias for or against certain populations of students?	Yes ___ No ___ Explain:
Hearing Prompts	Include at least 3 hearing prompts that would be appropriate in a course hearing for the course. (as applicable) Include sample prominent texts to draw from in the hearing. (Optional)
*Course Review Committee Recommendations	SME 1 ___ APPROVED AS IS RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS: _ NOT APPROVED AS IS REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS: RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS: [INITIALS] INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER _ APPROVED AS IS RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS: _ NOT APPROVED AS IS REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS: RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS:



	[INITIALS]
<p>*(at least 1 SME + instructional designer) By providing name here, member of course review committee verifies that the content for the course is current, relevant, and is (or would be) comparable in rigor, breadth, and depth to other similar courses in accredited institutions, and the course goals and intended learning outcomes are measurable, and attainable in a distance learning environment.</p>	<p>SME NAME: DEGREE: NOTES:</p> <p>INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER NAME: DEGREE/EXPERIENCE: NOTES:</p>



<p>Updates -- reviewed by at least one SME every three years, and by a complete Course Review Committee at least once every 6 years. Note date(s) of review, and explain updates (if any)</p>	<p>Date / Reason + Explanation of update</p>
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Curriculum Effectiveness

On a regular basis, Newlane representatives talk with graduate school admissions board members, and potential employers--both for how useful they find our current records, and any recommendations they may have for improving curriculum objectives or presentation of records, or concerns, advantages/disadvantages of our educational model. The aims of these conversations are to ensure that our curriculum and records deliver what the graduate school and employment market is seeking. As we talk with admissions and employers, we keep an up to date record of feedback we get, including significant gaps for usefulness/helpfulness. We also discuss proposals to improve effectiveness of curriculum and records on a regular basis. We anticipate that we will integrate improved assessments.



Newlane Assessment for Curriculum Developers

Assessments: Newlane incorporates three types of assessment: Self-assessment, computer-scored assessment, and Faculty-verified assessment (including formative and summative assessments). Since self-assessment only involves the student in question, we'll focus on computer-scored assessments and expert-verified assessments.

Computer-scored assessments: Computer-scored assessments are directly aligned to a specific objective. Our format for computer-scored assessments currently includes multiple choice questions, which also captures True/False or Yes/No questions.

Each objective should include at least one computer-scored assessment before we publish a course. The next benchmark once we have at least one computer-scored assessment question per objective is to have at least three questions. Provided our questions are well-designed (see below) having three questions makes a stronger case that statistics are on our side; chances are that a student who correctly answers three questions that are directly aligned to the objective did not just have lucky guesses. Since there are not high stakes for the computer-scored exam at this stage, we can begin with one question per objective.

Multiple-Choice Questions

For reference on building good Multiple Choice Questions, see [this document](#) from the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching. (Brame, C., (2013) Writing good multiple choice test questions. Retrieved 10 Sept., 2020 from [https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/writing-good-multiple-choice-test-questions/.](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/writing-good-multiple-choice-test-questions/))

In terms of specific types of questions, please follow these protocols:

True or False: True or False questions should be written with the phrase 'True or False:' at the beginning, and should not include a question mark at the end. Like this:
True or False: Plato was a student of Aristotle.

NOT: Plato was a student of Aristotle, True or False?

Yes or No: Yes or No questions should be written with the phrase 'Yes or No:' at the beginning, and should not include a question mark at the end. Like this:
Yes or No: I have made a personal stress management plan.

NOT: I have made a personal stress management plan, Yes or No?

Questions with only two options (like True/False and Yes/No questions) should not make up more than 10% of questions in an objective, lesson, or course. It is fine if there are no True/False or Yes/No questions in an objective, lesson, or course.



EXCEPT: Questions that state ‘All of the following...EXCEPT’ should be written as a statement with ‘EXCEPT:’ at the end in all caps and a colon. Like this:

All of the following are found on a head EXCEPT:

NOT: All of the following except which are found on a head?

Projects

Overview:

Each course has at least one project. The course project challenges students to synthesize what they have learned in the course in some sort of media format (like a paper, video, presentation, etc.).

Developing Projects:

Projects include a rubric that gives guidance to students and evaluators on the standards for the project. Projects and their rubric standards should align with projects and rubric standards in comparable courses at accredited universities. In terms of word count on projects, project developers can use the following as a rough estimate (though number of words may not always be applicable, and addressing the rubric standards is more important than the number of words):

Intro Level (100): 1000 - 2500

Intermediate (200): 1500 - 2500

Advanced (300+): 2500 - 5000

Projects that don't have a word count (e.g., videos, slide presentations, etc.) should likewise align with projects of comparable courses, or the substance of the rubric standards.

Sample Projects:

Here is a sample project from an introductory level course (Introduction to Philosophy):

In around 1000 words, make a philosophical argument about a topic in either epistemology, ethics, or metaphysics. For example, using the allegory of the cave, or Descartes' Meditations and Discourse on Method, make an argument for one of the following (or similar) topics:

Why might people today mistake their perception, or an illusion as reality? What does the allegory of the cave have to say about the process of education? Is Descartes' project to discover "indubitable knowledge" important today? Why or why not? To what extent does Descartes' project to discover indubitable



knowledge challenge how people should trust their senses as a source of knowledge?

Incorporate, as appropriate, passages from one or more significant philosophers in history to support your argument. Your argument should anticipate and respond to objections and be free of logical errors or fallacies.

Here is a sample project from an intermediate level course (History of Ancient Philosophy):

In around 1500 words, or a 5-10 minute video presentation, trace a key idea (e.g. ultimate reality, what constitutes moral behavior, etc.) across at least three western philosophers from the ancient era. The presentation should include at least two primary sources.

Here is a sample project from an advanced level course (Kant):

In around 2500 words, interpret and respond to one or more idea or passage from a course reading.

Here is a sample of rubric standards from an advanced level course (Philosophical Writing):

- Articulate a philosophical thesis that is clear, interesting, plausible, and novel.
- Write a focused and unified philosophical essay with effective word-choice and transitions between points.
- Anticipate reader's need for information, explanation, and context in philosophical writing.
- Effectively interpret and integrate quoted material (when applicable) into paragraphs in useful and illuminating ways to support key points.
- Correctly cite sources in written work.
- Make arguments that are clear, reasonable, and sound in philosophical writing.
- Offer clear and compelling reasons in support of key claims in philosophical writing.
- Anticipate and successfully grapple with counter-arguments in philosophical writing.
- Write with correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

We approach our rubrics as standards to meet rather than a spectrum upon which to place students. For more information about Rubrics at Newlane see our [Philosophy Project Rubric Document](#).



Updated Newlane Curriculum Standards 07/2025

Standards to be met by all published courses by 12/2026

Minimum update:

- Course has Name
- Course has Number
- Course has Introductory Video
- Course has Description
- Course has goals
- Project has goals
- Each objective has instructional resources
- Each objective has at least one MCQ
- Each MCQ has exactly 1 correct answer
- All resources for each objective are live
- Course Checklist Form complete

Course-level updates:

- All courses have a Newlane-produced intro video
- Course description is helpful and meaningful
- Make clear how many credits for a course (so anyone can see and know right away)
- Make clear any prerequisites
- Has a way to reach course professor

Updates on Projects:

- Include rubrics for different media (written; video; slides; etc.)
- Each project has goals that are clearly written
- Each project includes appropriate prompts; and either or both: sample project topics; sample completed topics

Updates on Hearings:

- Include at least 3 hearing prompts that would be appropriate in a course hearing for the course.
- (as applicable) Include sample prominent texts to draw from in the hearing.

Lesson-level updates:

- Every Lesson description is helpful and meaningful (carry some burden of explaining objectives further)

Updates on Exercises:



- Target specific passage, idea, or argument
- Exercises have a range: Study questions, mini-project prompts; etc.

Objectives-level updates:

- Include core/primary sources in objectives (not just in exercises—e.g., core texts)
- Move more primary sources to instructional resources for objectives (but also narrow the range of primary text for which students are responsible in a given course).
- Review to make sure language for objectives makes clear what a student should know or be able to do—evolving toward Bloom’s taxonomy (and not too generic)
- 80%+ of objectives have at least 2 instructional resources that are different types of resources (e.g., a video, and a written text)

Course Exam Updates

- Ensure each MCQ has 1 and only 1 correct response
- Most MCQs should have 4-5 possible answers
- T/F or YES/No questions should make up no more than 10% of questions

Conclusion

At Newlane, we are mission-driven to make quality higher education accessible to everyone. A critical piece to this is that we build and maintain quality curriculum and rigorously verify student mastery. In order to sustainably develop quality curriculum and maintain rigorous verification processes, it is crucial that Newlane faculty, experts, and counselors understand the process of developing curriculum, and that this work is as straightforward as possible. Together with a Newlane faculty member’s expertise, this Curriculum Development Manual provides you the background understanding, tools and references to develop curriculum with Newlane.

Part of providing quality education is regular updates, informed by developments in education, specifically online education, and developing best practices for educating in different disciplines. If you have any suggestions for improving Newlane curriculum, or for improving anything about the Newlane curriculum development process, please contact Ben Blair: ben@newlane.edu