

# Syllabus

## A: myth of content mastery of the top ten percent

Instructor: Dr. Joseph Ross

Lecture Time and Place: Symposium on University Teaching

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### Required materials

Your course syllabus

An exam (preferably cumulative final) from your course

### Suggested materials

Internet-accessible mobile device (laptop, tablet, smartphone)

Pen and paper

### Course description

Graduation Initiative 2025 renewed the discussion of how to support academic rigor while helping students succeed in class. This session addresses the importance of how we assess student learning. Given the impact on student success of how we create assessments and establish point values and letter grade thresholds, it is surprising that we don't often evaluate our arbitrary approaches to setting these critical parameters. This presentation explores the question, "Does our assessment and grading strategy allow us to distinguish the top ten percent of students as those who have mastered the course content and earned an A grade?" We will discuss a framework for the backward design of course assessments and grading. Data on student attitudes and course grades suggest benefits to using this paradigm. The core philosophy is built on two tenets: 1) assessments should allow students to demonstrate mastery at all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning (from Remembering through Creating), and 2) students should be aware of how they will be assessed so that they can study and prepare effectively. Please bring a syllabus and a final examination from one class. We will start to tune your course to improve student success and maintain rigorous standards. This process involves using student knowledge surveys to inform them about learning outcomes; then aligning outcomes, exam questions, point values, and letter grade thresholds with Bloom. We will explore having students prepare for exams by mindful reflection on your course and their writing mock exam questions and answer keys. Advice on improving student mindset with a letter-grading tweak, and tips for how to onboard students to this novel system, will also be shared. Ultimately, conscious alignment of our expectations, outcomes, assessments, and grading scheme, and actively involving students in exam preparation, makes a positive classroom impact on student learning and success.

## Course goal

Prepare you to edit your syllabus through a backward design process, including aligning Bloom's taxonomy with assessment items developed from a student knowledge survey

## Learning Outcomes

Create: one student knowledge survey item related to an existing assessment item

Analyze: distinguish which existing assessment items do not fully support course outcomes

Apply: align your existing assessment items with Bloom's

Understand: explain costs and benefits of using a student knowledge survey and backward course design

Remember: the most dangerous phrase in the language

## Grading

Letter grades correspond to the following percentages of points earned:

<b><u>Letter Grade</u></b>	<b><u>Point %</u></b>	<b><u>Bloom's level activities you successfully accomplish</u></b>
A(ccomplished)	>= 80%	Evaluate + create: criticize, defend, interpret, justify, recommend, construct, invent, modify, design
B(urgeoning)	>= 60%	Analyze: compare/contrast, rank, generalize, relate
C(ompetent)	>= 40%	Apply: choose, use, solve, predict, calculate
D(eveloping)	>= 20%	Understand: explain, summarize, describe, diagram
F(oundational)	< 20%	Remember: define, label, identify, locate, select