



## **Value Neutral Instruction and the Curriculum**

### **General Guidelines for Course Titles, Descriptions, Learning Outcomes, and Justifications**

The purpose of these general guidelines is to establish consistent standards for developing clear, cohesive course documentation across academic programs at Texas State University. They ensure transparency for students, facilitate effective communication among faculty, support accreditation compliance, and promote intentional course design that aligns with broader program goals. By providing a structured framework, these guidelines enhance educational quality based on value-neutral instruction while streamlining the course approval process. For questions, contact the Office of Curriculum and Academic Programs at [curriculum@txstate.edu](mailto:curriculum@txstate.edu)



### Course Titles

The course title should clearly and concisely reflect the course's subject matter and disciplinary focus without implying a moral, political, or ideological stance. A strong title uses neutral, descriptive language that helps students and reviewers immediately understand what the course covers. Avoid action verbs or advocacy terms that signal a prescribed point of view (e.g., Dismantling, Challenging, Decolonizing). Instead, use concise, topic-oriented phrasing drawn from recognized terminology in the field.

| Element    | Guideline                                                                                                                                                     | Rationale                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Word Count | 100 characters limit. (suggested words no more than 8)                                                                                                        | Titles should be concise, descriptive, and discipline-anchored. Overly long titles often indicate advocacy or editorial framing rather than academic scope. |
| Tone       | Use discipline-based and neutral phrasing; avoid verbs implying activism or moral stance (e.g., <i>Challenging</i> , <i>Dismantling</i> , <i>Resisting</i> ). | Ensures focus on inquiry rather than outcomes or ideological positions.                                                                                     |
| Structure  | Noun-based, topic-oriented phrasing (e.g., <i>Race and Public Health in America</i> , not <i>Combating Racism in Healthcare</i> ).                            | Maintains academic professionalism and consistency in catalog listings.                                                                                     |



## Course Descriptions

The course description provides a brief, objective overview of the course's content, methods, and analytical focus. It should describe what students will study and how the material will be explored using inquiry-based verbs such as examine, analyze, evaluate, or compare. Descriptions should remain factual and balanced, highlighting the academic scope and methodological approach rather than moral or political aims. The recommended length is 75–125 words (max 150), maintaining a professional, scholarly tone that reflects the principles of value-neutral instruction.

| Element             | Guideline                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Rationale                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Word Count          | Recommended 75–125 words (maximum 150 words)                                                                                                                                                                     | Long descriptions lose clarity and can become prescriptive. A concise paragraph communicates scope, methodology, and key themes effectively. |
| Content Structure   | 1–2 sentences on scope, 1 sentence on methodology, 1 on expected analytical outcomes. All course descriptions must start with "This course..."                                                                   | Promotes uniformity across catalog entries.                                                                                                  |
| Tone                | Use neutral verbs (e.g., <i>examine</i> , <i>analyze</i> , <i>evaluate</i> , <i>explore</i> , <i>study</i> ). Avoid prescriptive verbs ( <i>commit</i> , <i>embrace</i> , <i>challenge</i> , <i>dismantle</i> ). | Keeps focus on analytical skills, not affective outcomes.                                                                                    |
| Perspective Balance | Indicate coverage of multiple viewpoints when appropriate.                                                                                                                                                       | Reflects academic pluralism and inquiry.                                                                                                     |



## Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes define the specific, measurable skills and knowledge students should gain upon completing the course. They should be written using cognitive, action-oriented verbs (e.g., analyze, evaluate, apply, compare, create) drawn from Bloom's Taxonomy and focus on what students can demonstrably do, not what they should believe or feel. Outcomes must remain discipline-based, objective, and observable, avoiding affective or prescriptive verbs such as commit, value, appreciate, or embrace. The recommended range is 4–6 outcomes per course (up to 8 only when justified by accreditation or multi-domain integration). This approach ensures clarity, measurability, and alignment with assessment standards while maintaining academic neutrality.

| Element                  | Guideline                                                                                                                                       | Rationale                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total Number of Outcomes | Recommended 4–6 total (maximum six; *exception of eight in some cases*)                                                                         | Clarity and measurability could decrease when outcomes exceed six per course. Focused outcomes improve alignment with assessment and learning objectives. |
| Length per Outcome       | 1 sentence (12–18 words)                                                                                                                        | Each outcome should be a single, measurable statement using an action verb from Bloom's taxonomy.                                                         |
| Domain Focus             | Primarily cognitive domain (analyze, evaluate, create, apply). Avoid affective verbs (e.g., <i>value</i> , <i>appreciate</i> , <i>commit</i> ). | Reinforces academic neutrality and measurable learning objectives.                                                                                        |
| Structure Formula        | <b>TXST CIM Form</b><br>At the end of the course, students should be able to...<br>[Action Verb] + [Content/Skill] + [Context/Condition]        | Provides clarity and consistency across syllabi and program reviews.                                                                                      |

\* An exception of up to 8 learning outcomes may be permitted based on the following categories: complex or multi-domain courses, accreditation-driven requirements, core curriculum/general education courses, multi-skill laboratory or performance courses, sequential or scaffolded learning objectives, and program-level assessment integration. When a course exceeds six learning outcomes, the following must be provided: a written justification in the CIM course proposal; demonstration of direct alignment between outcomes and either accredited body required standards, institutional or general education competencies, or a documented assessment map; assurance that outcomes remain concise and measurable; and avoidance of redundancy. \*

## Justification

The justification section in a course proposal explains why the new course or revision is needed, not what values it promotes. Under the principle of value-neutral instruction, justifications should focus on academic, professional, and evidentiary rationale rather than ideological or advocacy-based reasoning.

| Element                             | Description / What to Include                                                                                                                                          | Purpose                                                                                      | Examples (Neutral)                                                                                                                    | Example of Non-Neutral (Needs Revision)                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Academic Rationale                  | Identify the disciplinary, scholarly, or methodological reason for the course or program. Reference recent developments, emerging theories, or gaps in the curriculum. | Establishes academic legitimacy and disciplinary grounding.                                  | "This course responds to the growing field of data-driven behavioral research and expands the department's methodological offerings." | "This course empowers students to challenge biased systems and dismantle inequities."      |
| Institutional Alignment             | Explain how the course supports the university's mission, academic plan, or strategic pillars (e.g., <i>Elevate Student Success</i> , <i>Run to R1</i> ).              | Demonstrates connection to institutional goals rather than political or ideological agendas. | "The course supports TXST's <i>Run to R1</i> initiative by enhancing applied research competencies."                                  | "The course promotes social justice activism as part of TXST's mission to advance equity." |
| Workforce or Professional Relevance | Provide data or examples showing labor-market demand, employer expectations, or professional standards.                                                                | Ensures proposals are evidence-based and career-relevant.                                    | "Data show a 25% increase in employer demand for UX research skills, which this course directly addresses."                           | "This course prepares students to advocate for change in oppressive systems."              |



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## Academic Innovation

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pedagogical Contribution                              | Describe how the course complements existing offerings, fills a curricular gap, or improves sequencing.                                      | Shows contribution to curricular coherence and student progression.                 | "The course bridges introductory design theory with advanced studio practice, supporting smooth progression in the major." | "This course corrects historical biases in the field and recenters marginalized voices."          |
| Accreditation or Assessment Connection (if necessary) | Identify specific standards (e.g., ABET, CAEP, AACSB) or student learning outcomes supported.                                                | Aligns the justification with external quality assurance and assessment frameworks. | "This course meets ABET student outcome 3: 'an ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences.'"             | "The course ensures students commit to ethical advocacy consistent with our departmental values." |
| Data or Evidence Reference (Optional)                 | Include enrollment trends, student demand, advisory board feedback, or comparative program data.                                             | Grounds justification in verifiable evidence rather than opinion.                   | "Student surveys and peer program reviews indicate a need for expanded training in applied GIS methods."                   | "Students have expressed interest in activism-based courses that promote awareness."              |
| Tone and Language                                     | Maintain professional, objective, and third-person tone. Use inquiry verbs ( <i>examine</i> , <i>evaluate</i> , <i>analyze</i> ) rather than | Reinforces value-neutrality and academic professionalism.                           | "The course examines theories of change across cultural contexts."                                                         | "The course commits students to antiracist practice in all contexts."                             |