GUIDELINES FOR CURRICULUM WRITING

Compiled by the Curriculum Committee

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### DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM

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V814 WRITING COURSE DESCRIPTIONS AND CURRICULUM

PURPOSE AND SCOPE
The Icelandic Academy of the Arts (IAA) produces a curriculum for the academic year ahead which is advertised on the academy's website. The curriculum is available electronically and includes course descriptions for all the courses taught each year.

RESPONSIBILITY
Deans of Departments and Programme Directors.

WHEN
The course descriptions for the spring semester are ready in the week after the November organisations days. The curriculum for the academic year ahead is ready in April.

DESCRIPTION
- Each course description should detail the title, number, type, level, and semester of the course. Furthermore, information about the number of ECTS, language, prerequisites, learning outcomes, and assessment methods, should be included along with a short description. (Instructions for writing course descriptions, IAA Rules and Regulations)
- The Dean of Department is responsible for the overview of the status of the course descriptions and the curriculum content.
- The Deans of Departments / Programme Directors request new course descriptions before organization days.
- Course descriptions are read over by the Deans of Departments / Programme Directors / Permanent Lecturers.
- The Deans of Departments / Programme Directors assess whether course descriptions need proofreading. If needed, this is implemented, then the descriptions are translated.
- The Dean of Department / Programme Director is responsible for publishing correct course descriptions on the academy's intranet. The course descriptions are sent to the Deans of Departments / Project Manager who places them on the intranet, both in Icelandic and English.
- The Dean of Department, the Director of Academic Affairs and the Director of Computer and Web Services are responsible for the correctness of the curriculum on the IAA's website.

REFERENCES
IAA Rules and Regulations
Instructions for Writing Course Descriptions and Learning Outcomes (available on the joint server).
FORMAT OF COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

COURSE INFORMATION

(Departmental coordinators add the following information to MySchool)

Course unit title:
Course unit code:
Type of course unit:
Level of course unit:
Semester:
Number of ECTS:
Language of instruction:
Prerequisites:
Learning outcomes:
Course content:
Assessment methods:
Name of lecturer:
Teachers:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

(Teachers add the following information to MySchool)

Teaching methods:
Assessment methods and criteria:
Reading material:
Planned learning activities
INSTRUCTIONS FOR FORMATTING COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

When finalising course descriptions, the formatting needs precision. This document includes instructions for formatting, followed by examples.

FORMAT:
Arial, 12p font, 1.5 line spacing without space before and after
All items in bold, but not the text after the colon. Example: Course unit title: Designers' Responsibility within Society
No full stops at the end of each item. Example: Type of course unit: Mandatory
The following items should be detailed:
Course unit title:
Course unit code:
Type of course unit: Put mandatory (or elective) and then department or programme in lower-case.
Level of course unit: Put BA 1.2 (or MA 2.1 or the appropriate level).
Semester: Put 5th or 6th semester (or the appropriate semester).
Number of ECTS: Number of ECTS (without writing ECTS).
Language of instruction: The language in which the teaching takes place.
Prerequisites: The number of ECTS students need to have finished, or the courses they need to have finished.
Learning outcomes: Here, the enumeration after the colon should start in lower-case and a comma should be put at the end of a sentence, apart from after the last item in the enumeration, where a full stop should be put. Example:
Learning outcomes: By the end of course unit students should be able to:
  • form a conscious opinion about particular issues regarding the role and responsibility of designers in society and rationalise their opinion,
  • use independent work methods, utilising information technology and being able to write within their speciality.
Course content should be one paragraph.
Assessment methods: Keywords, which provide a clear picture of the assessment methods employed during the course.
Name of lecturer:
Teachers (or teacher):
Course unit title: Designers' Responsibility within Society
Course unit code: HFR302-02H
Type of course unit: Mandatory in the 3rd year at the department of design and architecture
Level of course unit: BA 1.2
Semester: 5th or 6th semester
Number of ECTS: 2
Language of instruction: Icelandic
Prerequisites: To have finished 60 ECTS at the department of design and architecture
Learning outcomes: By the end of course unit students should be able to:
  • account for the main protocols of the professional classes,
  • cover in written and spoken language the roles, responsibilities and positions of designers' within society in a critical and professional manner,
  • cover the different value criteria from an academic viewpoint,
  • form a conscious opinion about particular issues regarding the role and responsibility of designers in society and rationalise their opinion,
  • use independent work methods, utilising information technology and being able to write within their speciality.
Course content: The course covers the societal responsibility of designers, the interaction and relationship of designers with consumers, project buyers, other designers, and official institutions. We examine the designer's role in a critical manner and his/her position in society from different viewpoints. The focus is on examining the responsibility of designers in relation to environmental issues and human rights. The students get to grips with various theories from the fields of philosophy and ethics and receive training in actual dispute issues in the light of these theories.
Assessment methods: Essay and group assignment
Name of lecturer: Gunnar Hersveinn Sigursteinsson
Teacher: Sóley Stefánsdóttir
COMMENTS OF PROOFREADER, HELGI K. GRÍMSSON, ON WORD USAGE WHEN WRITING COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

FORMATTING:

• Italicize the course unit title in the text and when mentioned in prerequisites.
• Write BA programme when mentioned, not just BA.
• When the course unit is mandatory/elective for a particular group, it is best to say mandatory for... in. Example: Type of course unit: Mandatory for students in the 2nd and 3rd year of fashion design. Or: Type of course unit: Mandatory in graphic design/Mandatory in the 3rd year of graphic design.
• When a course unit is taught concurrently during several semesters (e.g. taught both in the 2nd and 3rd year) it shall be thus written: Semester: 4th and 6th semester. However, if the course is taught during many semesters, it shall be thus written: Semester: 3rd to 6th semester (then it means that the course is taught both during the autumn and spring semester in the 2nd and 3rd year).
• In the case of prerequisites, it should be written in the following manner: Prerequisites: To have finished (then the names of the course units and the number of ECTS).

LANGUAGE:

• Agreement to use course unit, i.e. without the definite article, in the sentence, By end of course unit, students should have:.
• Instead of writing being able to introduce and take part in discussion about their own work it is more correct to write being able to introduce their own work and take part in discussion. I.e. without linking two different actions, it is better to distinguish between the verbs.
• The main rule is to say: In the course rather than On the course.
• The main rule is to say: In the course there is instead of: In the course there will be, where the descriptions should refer to what will happen but not that which must happen.
• Words such as meaning, analysis, introduction and attendance, should be in the singular.
• Instead of the word approach, the words stance and methods should be used when appropriate. The word approach should be used sparingly, and then particularly in the context different approaches.
• Instead of the word styles, the concept types of styles is preferable. It is not correct to write various styles. The usage of various in this context is incorrect. It would be better to say different types of styles.
• Years and centuries should be written numerically, e.g. 20th century.
• Course descriptions should be coordinated so that the names of lecturers are always written in the same manner under the courses that they teach.
ABOUT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Based on a summary by Dr. Guðrún Geirsdóttir and Anna Guðmundsdóttir of learning outcomes, available on the website of the Teaching Institute of the University of Iceland and in outcomes from the Ministry of Culture and Education.

A part of the coordinated quality control and the coordinated university system in Europe was adopting learning outcomes. Up until now, teachers have defined their course units and their aims based on their subject matter. Furthermore, there is a reference to what the teacher plans to cover and implement with his/her students. The learning outcomes, on the other hand, refer to what a student should be able to do – what he/she should be capable of at the end of the course or his/her studies. The learning outcomes are construed and defined on the basis of knowledge, ability and proficiency.

KNOWLEDGE:

A student possesses knowledge within a field of study or profession.

This implies that the student:

- has acquired a general understanding and insight of the main theories and concepts,
- has gained state of the art knowledge in a chosen field,
- knows the basics in search technique and information technology.

SKILLS:

The student can use the methods and procedures of the profession or field of study.

This implies that the student:

- is able to use appropriate equipment, technology and softwares,
- is capable of critical methodology when analysing subject matters,
- is able to argue for decisions on a professional basis,
- is able to judge independently the methods deployed,
- discerns when information is needed and has the ability to find it, assess its reliability and utilise appropriately,
- is able to utilise acknowledged databases and information sources in the relevant field of study,
- has adopted thought processes characterised by broadmindedness and originality.

COMPETENCE:

A student can utilise his/her knowledge and proficiency for work and/or for further studies.

This implies that the student:

- has developed the ability and the independent work methods necessary for further studies within the field,
- can work independently and methodically, set goals, devise work/project schedules and follow them through,
- can actively participate in collaborations and lead working groups,
- is capable of interpreting and introducing theoretical topics and research results.

When a teacher works out the learning outcomes for particular courses, he/she needs to begin by examining the learning outcomes for the relevant department. There he/she will find the
outcomes which best fit his/her aims and the course unit and realise how best to word them for his/her own course unit.

**A FEW PRACTICAL ISSUES:**

Learning outcomes need to be measurable (so they are relevant to assessment criteria).

5-8 learning outcomes is usually the appropriate number per course.

Avoid unclear or flexible concepts.

**Verbs that describe learning outcomes**

It can be tricky to find the right verbs to describe the learning outcomes for course units, especially since they need to tie in with the overall learning outcomes of the programmes of study/departments. Below are a few examples of verbs which only are meant to facilitate the writing of learning outcomes.

- Explain, describe, know, categorise, organise, write, put in context, coordinate.
- Interpret, estimate, discern, clarify, widen, universalise, deduce, reword, rewrite, summarise, discuss, implement, express, compare.
- Utilise, solve, build, show, change, discover, manage, circumscribe, prepare, produce.
- Connect, assess, practise, head, confirm.
- Define, separate, draft/describe in broad terms, choose, dissociate, point out oppositions, rationalise, test, criticise, doubt, analyse, group.
- Compose, create, invent, design, plan, rearrange, recount, represent, inform, change, reason, regulate, elect, focus, conclude, build up, form, assemble, widen out/increase, develop.
- Determine, differentiate, condense, explain how, form opinions for or against, grade, establish, question.
- Perform, place, gather, curvature, configure, combine, bring together, simulate, find, demonstrate, discern, disassemble, dissect, improve, measure, repair, imitate, mix, introduce, document, outline, react, use.
- Untangle, decide, recognise, facilitate, communicate.

In addition: Creativity, artistic vision, generate theories/ideas, adjust, produce, open (for possibilities).
ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT METHODS

Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted, counts. (Albert Einstein)

Assessment is a way to gather information about results and progress during studies. It can be an assessment that takes place at the same time as the studies/work, an **authentic assessment**, where students are assessed in actual circumstances with or without their knowledge, and **formative assessment**, where the goal is to monitor and evaluate the student's position with the aim of helping him progress. **Summative assessment** (Assessment of learning) on the other hand is used to assess at the end of formal teaching or milestone to “be sure” that something has been achieved (or not). E.g. an exam, exhibition, produce and portfolio.

When evaluating education, the components to be assessed are divided in two. On the one hand, the **teaching evaluation**, which provides insight into the studies and the learning environment of students, and on the other hand **learning assessment**, to ascertain studies:

**TEACHING EVALUATIONS COVERS:**
- Teaching
- Teaching materials
- Learning environment
- Curriculum

**LEARNING ASSESSMENT IS UTILISED FOR:**
- Assessment of learning
- Assessment for learning
- Assessment as learning

During the adoption of assessment systems, both teaching evaluation and learning assessment have been met with considerable resistance by arts subject teachers at all levels of education. Arts subject teachers have used a few mutual reasons to argue their point.

1. Firstly, because individual assessment of learning comes across as a statement about the quality of students' work. Such criticism and judgement is often referred to as a *hindrance for the creativity and development* of the individual.
   - Counter-argument: Ef aims are set for a particular course or training, it must be possible to pronounce through an assessment what has been achieved during the studies. The assessment of the work can be a guidance to whether the student has succeeded at his/her intentions – it does not need to include a judgement of the work's beauty or lack of it! If the assessment is a guidance, it could expedite the maturity and development of talents and facilitate creative flow.

2. Learning assessment includes a *measurability* of students' performance. Such measuring methods are in the opinion of many people unacceptable and do not conform with the value of the arts, where the size and quantity of the experience cannot be measured.
   - Counter-argument: The measurability can refer to whether the student has gained something, i.e. individual and not general. It is also possible to create a unit of measure appropriate for the goals and learning outcomes of particular courses. The experience remains individual.

3. Thirdly, the assessment methods often depend on the final results of students' work. Many teachers maintain that students' activity is no less important than the final result.
• Counter-argument: The work and activity of students can be assessed. The final result can be good even when the activity has not been great and vice versa. It is up to the teacher what he/she would like to assess, on the other hand, he/she must explain to the student when each component is assessed.

4. Fourthly, the learning assessment is often linked to testing in the field, i.e. standardized testing, where the students' standing and ability is tested. Many arts subjects teachers believe that there is no room for standardized testing in the arts, where the aim is not to follow some preconceived qualitative classification.

• Counter-argument: In some fields, it can be convenient to use such testing, both in the arts and in other subjects.

(Based e.g. on the book *The Arts and Creation of Mind* by Elliot Eisner).
ABOUT STUDENTS' WORKLOAD – ACTUAL STUDIES AND ECTS

Based on a report from the University of Oulu in Finland. The report was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education as an input for the discussion between universities due to the adoption of the Bologna Process. Also used: Notes from the lecture of Baldur Sigurðsson, Head of the School of Education Writing Centre at the University of Iceland, lecture given during the IAA organisations days on 2 November 2011.

Real studying can only take place through a cognitive conduct and consideration – the conduct and the thought required is in the sole hands of the student.

When organising the teaching, it is the job of the teacher to create optimum conditions for learning. When writing work schedules and choosing assignments for particular courses, the correlation between workload, study materials, the time spent on studying and the time which it takes “an average student” to learn the subject matter needs to be considered. The precondition for efficient studying is a well organised course, where there is a balance between the workload and the number of ECTS, assignments are clear, reading materials and other homework is appropriate.

Research in this field has e.g. has shown that;

1. When the workload is too great, the students have a tendency to only learn that which is necessary to pass exams – the studying becomes superficial,
2. too much material influences the students' ability to distinguish the main points from the side issues – the student skims through the material and – the studying becomes superficial,
3. where there is no actual requirement for testing the ability and talent of the students – the studying becomes superficial.

Whether a student experiences that a course is well organised or overloaded is evidently related to his/her own interest and ability, potential anxiety, stress levels, former knowledge, methods of work, etc. It is therefore clear that teachers can only control the part of the studies which are governed by the outer organisation of courses and programmes. It should be kept in mind that a large proportion of the outer organisation is:

- how the teaching is (good – bad teaching)
- interaction with students
- moderate workload
- format and organisation of courses
- the teacher's ability to communicate etc.
ECTS AND WORKLOAD

Studying at university is a full-time job. According to the standardised ECTS – the mathematical model which has been adopted in most European universities – 60 ECTS units correspond to 1500-1800 working hours during the academic year for students. According to this, there are approximately 25-30 working hours behind one ECTS unit per week. It is assumed that a student will accomplish on average two units per week.

WHAT DOES ECTS MEASURE?

ECTS units measure the time that students spend to reach particular study goals. This time is comprised of:

**Contact-time per student:**
- how many contact-hours does each student receive,
- how many students are there – are there any private lessons,
- how are the hours divided between lectures, guided lessons, student seminars etc.

**Students' independent work:**
- how much independent work is expected of the students,
- reading and preparation for classes and/or other work related to lessons,
- bigger assignments – final projects – revision for exams.

When calculating the workload for a course, universities have adopted a particular criterium for the number of ECTS which is calculated in accordance with the 1500-1800 hours per year. At the same time, it needs to be considered how difficult the material is, or how much time needs to be spent to internalise the material. The instructions from the University of Oulu in Finland suggest that appropriate preparation at university level for one lecture can be three hours of reading, work, consideration or review. Practical work or demonstration often takes up longer hours of contact, but the preparation is possibly shorter (two hours). For our studies, the general reference of 2-3 hours can be used, going up to five hours (problem based learning) based on the nature of the work.

READING MATERIAL

When deciding the reading volume, it is good to keep a few issues in mind:

- is the reading material in Icelandic, English or in another language, e.g. Nordic?
- what is the nature of the text (we normally have a fairly good sense of how difficult the reading material can be for the students. What takes us one hour to read can take the student three hours since the material is new to him/her),
- does the text include many new concepts and ideas which are foreign to the student or is it an addition to a known basis,
- should the student skim through the material – know what it is about, or should he/she be able to internalise the material, explain it or work on it through a written assignment.

Time for reading (all is included, from buying the book to giving an account of the material).

**Theoretical material:**
- in a foreign language 2-3 pages per hour
- in Icelandic 4-5 pages per hour
These definitions do not affect further reading. I.e. teachers can suggest further reading and they should do that for well prepared students and/or those who would like to delve deeper into particular aspects of the course.

**AN EXAMPLE OF A THEORETICAL COURSE OF 6 ECTS UNITS**

The students should spend in total 150-180 hours (on average) on work for the course. Work division could look like this:

**Contact hours per student**
- 30 hours, lectures

**Students' independent work through an essay:**
- Preparation for each lecture which lasts 2 teaching hours is approximately 3 hours. Total 45 hours.
- Essay, 10 pages. Reading – 20 hours, writing – 30 hours, consideration and compilation, finishing touches – approx. 10 hours. Total 60 hours.
- 30 hours for other, such as assignment, short exam, short input for seminar.

Or

**Students' independent work with an exam**
- Preparation for each lecture which lasts 2 teaching hours is approximately 3 hours. Total 45 hours.
- Revision and preparation for an exam, total 45 hours.
- 45 hours for other, such as assignment, short exam, short input for seminar.

**Total 165 hours** (Normal workload considering the number of ECTS).

**EXAMPLE: 6 ECTS PRACTICAL COURSE**

**Contact hours per student**
- 10 hours. Lectures
- 60 hours. Practical lessons

**Students' independent work**
- Work on creative assignments outside of lessons, write a journal or a report about the hours of work and connect with own experience and thoughts. One hour per lesson or in total 70.
- Other preparation or homework 25 hours (can be to attend exhibitions or concerts, reading, etc.).

**Total 165 hours** (Normal workload considering the number of ECTS).

*NOTE. There is a tendency for an overload of work for many of the small courses in the studies! This is worth considering when organising the courses.*
LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE BA PROGRAMME

3 YEARS 180 ECTS  LEVEL 1.2

THE MINISTRY

A student possesses knowledge within a field of study or profession. This implies that the student:

• has acquired a general understanding and insight of the main theories and concepts
• has gained state of the art knowledge in a chosen field
• knows the basics in search technique and information technology

The student can use the methods and procedures of the profession or field of study. This implies that the student:

• is able to use appropriate equipment, technology and softwares
• is capable of critical methodology when analysing subject matters
• is able to argue for decisions on a professional basis
• is able to judge independently the methods deployed
• discerns when information is needed and has the ability to find it, assess its reliability and utilise appropriately
• is able to utilise acknowledged databases and information sources in the relevant field of study
• has adopted thought processes characterised by broadmindedness and originality

IAA

• knows the theories, concepts and methods of the art form
• knows the working environment of the art form
• has acquired insight and understanding to approach the subject matters of the art form in an individual way
• has understanding of the ethos and the methods underlining the pursuit of the art form
• knows the basics in search technique and information technology

• is able to hold a critical stance in terms of information and methods
• has acquired a critical perspective for their own art creation and that of others
• is capable of deploying critical methods when analysing the subject matters of the art form in question
• is able to argue professionally for decisions based on the art form
• has adopted the techniques and abilities to work independently and methodically on subject matters in their art form
• has adopted thought processes for creativity characterised by broadmindedness and originality
• discerns when information is needed and possesses the skill to find it, assess its reliability and utilise appropriately
• is capable of independently assessing the ideas at work
• has amassed work methods characterised by enquiry and diversity for bold solutions
• is able to utilise technology and equipment serving the art form
A student can utilise his/her knowledge and proficiency for work and/or for further studies. This implies that the student:

- has developed the ability and the independent work methods necessary for further studies within the field
- can work independently and methodically, set goals, devise work/project schedules and follow them through
- can actively participate in collaborations and lead working groups
- is capable of interpreting and introducing theoretical topics and research results
- has the independence and communication skills to actively participate in collaborations
- can work independently and methodically, set goals, choose appropriate methods, devise project/work schedules and follow them through
- is capable of interpreting and communicating his/her ideas, subject matters and results in a clear way both through writing and orally
- can communicate his/her ideas through own art creation
- has developed his/her imagination for independent creativity and can utilise that in his/her work
- has developed independent work methods for further studies and work
LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE MA PROGRAMME

1 ½ - 2 YEARS 90 - 120 ECTS  LEVEL 2.2

THE MINISTRY

A student possesses knowledge in a speciality of a field of study or profession. This implies that the student:

- knows theoretical subjects and dispute matters
- has acquired knowledge by research
- can rationalise his/her own solutions
- can put state of the art knowledge in context in the appropriate speciality
- is aware of research methods within his/her own field of study

IAA

A student possesses practical and theoretical knowledge within an art form. This implies that the student:

- knows the professional subjects of the art form and its dispute matters
- has acquired knowledge by research and art creation
- can rationalise his/her own solutions
- can put state of the art knowledge in context in the appropriate speciality
- is aware of research methods within his/her field of study
- has knowledge of the ethics of the art form, art creation and research

KNOWLEDGE

- has adopted appropriate work methods
- has the knowledge to analyse and communicate numerical information
- can understand and grapple with complicated subject matters in a professional context
- can utilise his/her knowledge and understanding in professional work
- has mastered the appropriate equipment, techniques and softwares
- can acquire, analyse and assess scientific data
- displays originality in the development and utilisation of ideas
- can utilise his/her knowledge, understanding and ability to find solutions in new and foreign circumstances or in an interdisciplinary context within the speciality of the field of study
- can develop projects and put them into context using methods based on theories of the speciality of the field of study and/or experiments
- has the ability to integrate knowledge, grapple with complicated subjects and present an opinion given the information at hand

PROFICIENCY

- has adopted appropriate work methods and modes for art creation
- can understand and grapple with complicated subject matters in the professional context of an art form
- can utilise his/her knowledge and understanding in professional work and the artistic work environment
- has mastered the appropriate methods, technology and softwares when implementing work and subject matters
- can acquire, analyse and assess data within research and artistic processes
- displays originality, insight and imagination when developing and creating work
- can utilise his/her knowledge, understanding and ability to find solutions in new and foreign circumstances and in an interdisciplinary context within the arts and related fields of study
- can develop projects using the methodology of the art form and put them into context among the theories of the professional field
- has the ability to integrate knowledge, grapple with complicated subjects and present an opinion within the creative sphere and of artistic work
• has the ability to use research methods delivering results and implement smaller research projects
• is literate in the field of research and its results
• can develop research methods and efficiently use them for smaller research projects and art creation
• is literate in the field of research and able to analyse work based on the professional premises of an art form

• has developed the teachability and independent work methods necessary for further studies
• can initiate projects, lead them and take the responsibility for individuals' and group work
• has developed the teachability and independent work methods necessary for further studies
• can initiate projects within the artistic field, lead them and take the responsibility for individuals' and group work, single-handedly or in collaboration

• can clarify complicated theoretical subject matters and/or well-founded theoretical results single-handedly or in collaboration, witnessed by experts in the field and the general public
• can clarify intricate subject matters and communicate them in a theoretical and professional context of the art form, both publicly and within a specialised context

• has the ability to present and describe theoretical issues and research methods in a foreign language
• is capable of making independent, professional decisions and rationalising them
• can independently assess when different methods of analysis and complicated theoretical issues apply
• is capable of making independent, professional decisions and rationalising them

• can independently and critically assess when different methods of analysis apply for research and art creation