How to write course aims

A guide to writing course aims for University of Sussex courses.

About course aims:

Course aims are broad statements which summarise the overarching goals and intentions of a course. They should address the purpose of the course and what it is trying to achieve, as well as the intended benefits for students. They should be:

- Addressed to/written for prospective students
- Expressed from the point of view of those delivering the course
- A value proposition
- Not too specific
- Inspiring!
- There to sell your course and encourage applications
- About the qualities and achievements you envision for your ideal graduate

Course learning outcomes then operationalise these broad aims by setting out specific and measurable (assessable) statements of what a student will know, understand or be able to do by the end of a course.

Why spend time on your course aims?

These are many advantages to establishing the main aims of the course.

From a tutor and course design perspective, doing so will:

- Set clear direction and reference points for everyone involved in the course design process
- Help you select suitable content material and activities
- Enable you to design the course in a consistent and coherent way.

From a learner perspective, doing so will:

- Provide prospective learners with key information so that they can quickly assess whether the course is relevant to their needs or interests
- Assure prospective learners that their time and money will be well spent
- Enable prospective learners to see what makes your course distinct from comparable courses elsewhere.

Before writing / reviewing your course aims:

1. Take a few minutes to jot down thoughts on the following questions. These will shape your course aims and encourage you to articulate what's great about your current course.

    - Why is this course relevant in today's world?
    - Why is Sussex a great place to study it?
    - What will students do and experience on the course?

- What kinds of opportunities or careers could this course lead to?
- What makes the course welcoming and meaningful for all students?

2. Now, imagine how you would like your course to be in the future. How do you want to improve the outcomes and experiences for your students? Ask yourself:

- What you are particularly proud of about the course?
    - What do students tell you?
    - Are your teaching and assessment strategies innovative and exciting?
    - Does your course map to the Curriculum Design Principles in the SAF? Do you have strong APP data or particular graduate outcomes you could highlight?
    - How does your course differ from competitor universities?
- What could you expand and build on to further enhance your responses to the questions above?
- What are the persistent problems that you need to fix or gaps you want, or need, to fill?
- What do you want your course to be like in 3-5 years' time?

Writing your course aims

Drawing on your responses above, now draft your course aims. Remember, your should write aims that reflect how your course will be in 2027-28.

It is recommended that you provide 3-5 concise statements expressing your course aims.

Each course aim should be able to complete the sentence: 'This course aims to…'

A well-crafted set of course aims:

- Uses verbs like: *equip*, *enable*, *develop*, *promote*, *foster*, *encourage*, *provide*, *support, cultivate.*
- Usually addresses:
    - Subject knowledge and understanding
      E.g., *Provide a thorough grounding in biological sciences.*
    - Cognitive skills
      E.g., *Develop analytical and critical thinking skills.*
    - Practical and transferable skills
      E.g., *Prepare students for professional practice or further study.*
    - Personal and professional development
      E.g., *Foster self-directed learning, ethical awareness, and teamwork.*

Example course aims

Physics (BSc Physics)

This course aims to:

1. Provide students with a comprehensive understanding of fundamental and advanced principles in classical and modern physics, including mechanics, electromagnetism, quantum theory, and thermodynamics.
2. Develop students' ability to formulate, model, and solve complex physical problems through logical reasoning and mathematical analysis.
3. Provide students with hands-on experience with experimental design, data analysis, and the use of computational tools relevant to physical research and industry.
4. Encourage independent inquiry, effective communication, and collaborative working — preparing students for careers in science, education, or technology.

Law (LLB Law)

This course aims to:

1. Provide a rigorous grounding in core areas of English and European law, alongside a critical understanding of legal institutions, principles, and procedures.
2. Cultivate students' analytical thinking and legal reasoning, encouraging them to construct persuasive arguments and evaluate legal issues from multiple perspectives.
3. Develop practical legal skills including case analysis, research, oral advocacy, and legal writing, essential for professional legal practice or further academic study.
4. Promote ethical awareness, responsibility, and a commitment to justice, fostering reflective learners ready for a diverse range of legal and public sector careers.

Media Studies (BA Media and Communication)

This course aims to:

1. Provide students with a critical understanding of media industries, technologies, and cultural contexts, both historically and in contemporary society.
2. Encourage and support the development of analytical skills for interpreting media texts and assessing the influence of media on public discourse, identity, and politics.
3. Give students practical experience in media production, digital storytelling, and multimedia content creation, using industry-standard tools and techniques.
4. Support personal development in teamwork, project management, and reflective practice, preparing students for roles in media, communications, and the creative industries.

Business (BA Business Management)

This course aims to:

- Provide a broad and integrated knowledge of core business functions including marketing, finance, operations, and strategic management, within global and ethical frameworks.
- Develop students' critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills by applying theory to real-world business challenges.
- Engage students in experiential learning activities such as simulations, group projects, and enterprise initiatives to build professional competencies and entrepreneurial acumen.

- Nurture leadership potential, intercultural awareness, and lifelong learning, equipping graduates to contribute effectively to dynamic and responsible business environments.

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