

STRATEGIES TO KEEP THE MS 1 AND MS 2 SUBJECTS RELEVANT AND LEARNER-CENTERED WITH SELECTED COURSES IN BICOL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

CHED Memorandum Order 59 series of 1996 mandates the teaching of Philippine History and Rizal to students in the tertiary level as part of the General Education Curriculum. Bicol University lodges upon the General Education Department (GenEd) the teaching of the MS subjects. The GenEd, therefore, faces the challenge of fostering the values of nationalism and cultural heritage and at the same time, keeping up with the demands of time for global competitiveness, relevance of the subject to economic and social developments, and keeping up with the learner-centered curriculum. Five courses with different interests and specializations (Computer Science, Education, Biology, Philosophy, Physical Education) were subjected to observation, rubrics and evaluation which resulted to varied teaching strategies, activities and required output for every course which catered to their distinct interests, skills, and aligned with the required skills of their fields of specialization.

Keywords: Philippine History, Rizal subject, learner-centered, diverse disciplines

Introduction

Pursuant to Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 59, series of 1996, Philippine History and Rizal's Life, Work and Writings are now mandated subjects offered in all tertiary education institutions in the Philippines. The CHED order was founded on the intent to strengthen the values of nationalism, patriotism and sense of cultural heritage among the Filipino youth as they prepare to embark in the future world of their chosen professions. Especially in the case of Filipinos whose expertise is already recognized and demanded throughout the world, Filipinos have been transformed into global citizens. The strong adaptive capabilities of Filipinos enable them to easily adjust to different cultural environment. While integration of new cultural orientation has positive outcomes, the danger of losing a sense of one's heritage is also a possibility. Thus, offering the History and Rizal subjects anticipates such possibilities and hopes to further strengthen the nationalistic, patriotic and strong appreciation of cultural heritage among Filipinos.

The History and Rizal subjects are offered as Mandated Subject 1 (MS1) and Mandated Subject 2 (MS2) respectively in Bicol University, an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accredited state university in Legazpi City. Bicol University has nearly 22,000 students enrolled in various campuses: Main Campus (College of Education (BUCE), College of Arts and Letters (BUCAL), College of Nursing (BUCN) and College of Science (BUCS)); East Campus (College of Engineering (BUCENG) and College of Industrial

Technology (BUCIT)); and Daraga Campus (College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Management (BUCBEM) and College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (BUCSSP)). Bicol University also has 3 additional campuses in Tabaco City, Polangui City and Gubat, Sorsogon where agricultural and fisheries courses are offered in addition to the courses offered in the 3 campuses in Legazpi City. Bicol University therefore thrusts to develop the fullest potentials of its diverse students along excellence in their fields of discipline and values of a true Filipino.

The teaching of MS 1 and MS2 subjects in Bicol University is lodged in the General Education Department (GenEd) of BUCSSP where it serves as a service department to the diverse courses offered in the Main, East, and Daraga Campuses. MS 1 is designed “to comprehensively examine the unfolding events from the pre-historic period until the contemporary times and analyze the impact of various changes on the country’s socio-political, economic and cultural conditions. The course aims to establish the usefulness of the past in understanding the present and also anticipating the future.”¹ MS 2 on the other hand was “organized to explore the laudable life lived by Dr. Jose Rizal. The course likewise examines the impact of Rizal’s influences on the life lived by the Filipinos during the time and as well as its continuous effects among the lives of the Filipinos at present.”² The GenEd Department is mandated to deliver the objectives of the course and weave it together with the vision of excellence and relevance for the diverse disciplines offered by Bicol University, be it in education, the sciences, the liberal arts, business and economics, or technological courses.

The Challenge: MS 1 and MS2 Offered to Diverse Disciplines

The GenEd faculty faces the challenge of presenting the History and Rizal subjects in an interesting, learner centered and relevant manner to students whose personalities are as diverse as their varied interests and enrolled disciplines. “It is important to attend to the diversity among students and the awareness and use of such diversity to enrich the learning process and produce results within the context of the school and the disciplines’ curriculum.”³ Furthermore, one has to consider the fact that majority of students find the subject boring either due to the subject matter of the past where events are disconnected to their interests and current experiences or due to their intimidation to the bulk of facts they have to memorize in order to pass the subject as experienced during their elementary and high school.³ Another challenge that faculty members has to consider is how to present the subject in a new and interesting perspective other than the past discussions the students had during their elementary and high school lessons.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned challenges, the GenEd faculty commits to impart learning that is supposed to result into positive mental and emotional outlook and productivity on the learners which they shall carry with them beyond the semester. Study of the MS subjects shall be seen as vital and not merely for compliance purposes; neither is it merely concerned with rote memorization of facts such as dates, people, events and concepts which students find difficulty to relate with. Such facts therefore need to be made meaningful within the context of their own times and experiences; universality of lessons learned need to be appreciated and making new knowledge meaningful to past knowledge need to be developed.

Specifically, the author faces the challenge of making the MS 1 and MS 2 subjects interesting and aligned with the required skills of the students assigned to her in the past 2 years which came from diverse disciplines of **Basic Education** (Elementary and Secondary), **AB Philosophy**, **BS Computer Science**, **BS Biology** and **Bachelor in Physical Education**. A close study of the curriculum of the specified disciplines revealed the diverse skills and orientation required by such courses. The Basic Education curriculum concentrated on the foundations and principles of education, methodologies and assessment of learning where interpersonal skills, social and moral values are highly integrated in the curriculum. **AB Philosophy** deals much on the development of critical analysis of students through the study of varied philosophical ideas as applied to the demands of contemporary disciplines and the time. The course is very novel in the sense that it deviates from the theological or traditional school by offering elective courses from existing disciplines thereby enabling the graduates to acquire not just one but 2 specialization: that of Philosophy and the elective course. **BS Computer Science** and **BS Biology** both come from the College of Science where a very strict retention policy on their major subjects is being observed. A very high quota system is also set which is geared towards a sound inculcation of the technical requirements of their discipline. On the other hand, the **Bachelor in Physical Education** curriculum is centered on kinesthetic and active development of the students through various sports and competition management courses. Majority of its graduates take the Certificate in College Teaching course in order to enable them to take the licensure examination for teachers and generally become Physical Education teachers in the elementary and secondary level, trainers and coaches on dance and sports activities. The diverse interests, and skills requirements of the students pose a challenge to the author in order to keep the subject relevant and aligned to the goals of the GenEd curriculum and that of the respective disciplines of the students handled.

The Learner Centered Principles

There are 14 psychological principles which have been developed to deal holistically with learners in the context of real-world learning situations. The principles are divided into those referring to cognitive and metacognitive, motivational and affective, developmental and social, and individual difference factors influencing learners and learning. The principles are based on the premises that learners are distinct and unique which must be taken into account if all learners are to be provided with the necessary challenges and opportunities for learning and self-development. Learning is a constructive process that occurs best when what is being learned is relevant and meaningful to the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in creating his or her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is being learned with prior knowledge and experience. Learning is a fundamentally natural process which occurs best in a positive environment. The principles cannot be isolated from the rest and apply to all learners -- from children, to teachers, to administrators, to parents, and to community members involved in our educational system.

“Learner-centered education places the student at the center of education. It begins with understanding the educational contexts from which a student comes. It continues with the instructor evaluating the student's progress towards learning objectives. By helping the student acquire the basic skills to learn, it ultimately provides a basis for learning throughout life. It

therefore places the responsibility for learning on the student, while the instructor assumes responsibility for facilitating the student's education. This approach strives to be individualistic, flexible, competency-based, varied in methodology and not always constrained by time or place."⁴ The necessity of keeping the MS subjects relevant to the discipline or specialization of the students concerned and keeping the strategies relevant to their interests and skills is very much in line with the learner-centered principles of learning. It avoids making the students passive receivers of information; rather, it encourages the students to be active, goal-oriented and responsible for their own learning.

Strategies for Learner-Centered Teaching of the MS 1 and MS 2 Subjects

To begin with, a closer look into the syllabus for the MS 1 and MS 2 subjects is needed in order to determine the appropriate strategies the faculty member needs to utilize. The BU GenEd had by 2008 already utilized a uniform syllabus for all its fulltime and part-time faculty members. The course content and specific objectives were already set in accordance with the standards set by various higher education accrediting bodies. Especially now that the university is ISO accredited, a controlled copy is required for every faculty member and compliance with the content and duration of discussion for every topic is necessary in keeping up with the requirements for continued accreditation. Thus, uniform and appropriate compliance with the syllabus is required. Thus, the initial concern as to how the course may be presented to students coming from diverse disciplines such as education, engineering, sciences, liberal arts, business and even technological courses without sacrificing the standards set forth by the university. Multi-tasking and motivation among students to achieve the learning objectives is therefore very important. The need for students to own the learning process and make it relevant among themselves and their fields of interest is very important; which is also the goal of the 14 learner-centered principles.

In the earlier study⁵ of another faculty member of the GenEd Department, it revealed that the curriculum considered the interests of the learners, individual differences as well as the holistic development of the learners. The existing general education curriculum provides opportunities to build an experience-based learning for both the students and the teachers. The syllabus itself opens opportunities for the faculty and the students to choose learning activities and teaching strategies that would help achieve the course objectives and their specific interests; thus making the students feel their participation and develop ownership for their learning without sacrificing the standards of excellence and quality education.

At the start of the semester, a copy of the syllabus is presented to the students whatever discipline they come from and the content and objectives are thoroughly explained. Specified course requirements and strategies which are mandated by the University are clarified such as the grading system and the mandatory requirement of mid-term and final examinations. Essential readings are also emphasized as a basic requirement for all students. In this manner, the goals at the end of the semester is clearly set for the students and a clear time table for compliance of all requirements is made *vis-a-vis* the anticipation of regular and unanticipated interruptions in the actual contact hours. The students are, however, given the opportunity to suggest teaching strategies, activities and evaluation techniques other than those specified in the syllabus which

they believe could make the learning process more relevant and interesting to their disciplines. The suggestions are discussed and upon thorough consideration and indication of commitment from the students themselves, their suggestions are included in the modified syllabus for the class. Thus, the main content and objectives of the subject are maintained while learning the learning experience is widened and made more personalized for the class. In this manner, the class feels that the whole learning process is something they own rather than being imposed to them. Achieving the breadth and depth of the course syllabus becomes the concern not only of the faculty assigned but the class as well. Sometimes, additional activities are even undertaken by the students without feeling harassed because they find personal fulfillment and relevance in such undertaking.

A look into the suggestions and preferences of the students coming from the diverse disciplines of Basic Education (BEED and BSEd), AB Philosophy, BS Computer Science, BS Biology and Bachelor in Physical Education (BPE) would show the diversity of interests and skills of these students:

Table 1
Simplified Course Content of MS 1 and the Additional Activities/Teaching Strategies
Preferred by Students Coming from Diverse Disciplines

Content	Duration/ No. of Hrs.	Teaching Strategies/ Methodologies	Additional Activities/ Teaching Strategies Preferred by Disciplines				
			Basic Education (BEED & BSEd)	AB Philosophy	BS Computer Science	BS Biology	Bachelor in Physical Educ. (BPE)
VMGO	1.5	Socialized Discussion	Same	Same	same	same	Same
Introduction - philo of history -meaning, periods, imp. Of history -appreciation of the discipline	1.5	-Participatory discussion -buzz session	Time line	Readings (philosophical views of different philosophers)	Power point presentation	Power point presentation	same
Methods of Historiography	1.5	-participatory discussion -Social Science Inquiry -Model/ Problem Solving Technique	Web search Compilation of visual aids and charts Readings:(Otley Beyer)	Web search Readings: Otley Beyer	Web search Power point presentation including Beyer	Web search Power point presentation including Beyer	Web search Power point presentation including Beyer
Pre-Historic Period	3	-participatory discussion -picture parade -SSIM/PST approach -documentary analysis	Power point presentations Report on archeological sites in Bicol region	Power point presentation Report on archeological sites in Bicol region	Power point presentation Report on archeological sites in Bicol region	Power point presentation Report on archeological sites in Bicol region	Power point presentation Report on archeological sites in Bicol region
Spanish Period	6	-participatory					

		Discussion -Documentary Analysis -art gallery -film viewing	Organization of teaching materials used during the socialized discussion Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Mock debate(effects of colonialism) Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Additional report/ power point presentation on Bicol region during the period	Web search Additional report/ power point presentation on Bicol region during the period	Additional report/ power point presentation on Bicol region during the period
The American Rule	8	-panel discussion -debate -brainstorming	Web search Timeline Film/video viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Film/video viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Film/video viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Film/video viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Film/video viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period
The Japanese Era	4	-Participatory discussion -reflective teaching method	Web search Video clips viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Video clips viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Video clips viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Video clips viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period	Web search Video clips viewing Additional report on Bicol region during the period

The Philippine Republic	23	- Participative discussion	-reporting with the application	Reporting with the use of			
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role play -problem solving method -buzz session -film viewing -assigned readings 	<p>of learned principles and methods of teaching</p> <p>-compilation of lesson plan and teaching materials for the assigned topics</p>	<p>power point presentation</p> <p>Reaction paper for the assigned administration</p>	<p>power point presentation</p> <p>Web search</p>	<p>power point presentation</p> <p>Web search</p>	<p>power point presentation</p> <p>Web search</p>
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Note: Field Trip is also included in the syllabus but not mandatory to students. A big majority of the students willingly participate in the activity though.

A module is also introduced lately which is not yet included in this paper.

From Table 1, it is very evident that the students have varying preferences for teaching strategies/ methodologies and activities employed by the teacher in order to present the course content of MS 1. It should be noted that the teacher used the same content and strategies indicated in the syllabus. Through guided initiative at the start of classes, the students came up with additional activities or learning strategies that will help them acquire better understanding of the given topics. The strategies they preferred were done willingly by the students because in the first place, they were the ones who chose it and the activities were within their line of interest. For example, the students from the **BEED** and **BSEd** enjoyed and did not mind doing an additional work of making **time lines** because they knew for a fact that the time line will help them memorize and see the sequences of events which happened in Philippine history in preparation for their taking of the licensure examination for teachers and future teaching. They likewise did not mind making visual aids, gathering pictures and other teaching materials because they understand and appreciate the importance of such materials in the learning process and also a preparation for their future use. They also took pride in applying what they were learning in their education subjects and they already attempted to report on a chosen topic simulating the actual teaching in a classroom setting. Some students were able to come up with a detailed lesson plan and the class enjoyed playing students. The reporters were also evaluated based on specified rubrics. Maximum student participation and responsibility was achieved in the classroom based on the number of students participating in the various activities and the submission of the requirements on determined deadlines.

The AB Philosophy students on the other hand did not mind having additional readings other than what was specified on the syllabus. The initiative even came from them based on their orientation to read long and varied philosophical writings. Like the education students, the AB Philosophy students were able to claim responsibility to their learning and link the new knowledge learned in history and philosophy, or vice versa, meaningful to their old or prior learnings. They were able to relate their philosophical readings on the importance of history and effects on colonialism as reflected by their inclination to present a mock debate on the topic. They also came up with an analysis/reaction of the political policies of the different administrations in the Philippine Republic using a particular philosophical view. What is overwhelming is that the questions and opinions raised by the students show the existence of linking various concepts into a new and holistic view on the events in Philippine history.

In the case of the BS Computer Science and BS Biology classes, there is a similarity in their preferences of teaching strategies and activities to make the learning process more interesting and relevant to their field of interest. Expectedly, they preferred to use technology above other strategies in order to procure additional learning experiences. They were more inclined towards the use of power point presentations, web search for new sites bearing new information regarding a particular topic, and to download pictures, films and video clips related to the lesson. The use of technology which is their major field is utilized by the students to make history relevant and interesting for them. Using their technological skills, they are able to discover articles, documents and pictures that catch their interest and curiosity of varied historical events which they share to the class. It only proves that learning is not confined to the classroom but through various avenues and that information need not come solely from the

teacher; rather, the teacher serves as a facilitator and that the learning experience is not a one-way process.

In the case of the Bachelor in Physical Education class, they were more of the kinesthetic learners given their field of specialization. Thus, long classroom discussions offend them. From the table, it is clear that they preferred summarized lectures/ participatory discussions, group activities and also the use of technology in their learning experience. They also preferred power point presentations over making their own paper and pencil visual aids. There was also the preference among these students for film/ video clip viewings rather than lengthy discussions of particular events in history.

What is evident among these diverse 5 disciplines that have been observed is that, in spite of their varied preferences for additional learning strategies/ activities, the use of technology and the incorporation of discussions of Bicol region during a particular period in Philippine history.

First, the use of technology was a common preference by students in spite of their varied fields of specialization given that computers and related gadgets had already become a necessity, almost a new way of life for humanity. The proliferation of cellular phones with camera and internet connectivity, ownership by majority of students of laptops, digital cameras and video recorders, and the existence of cheap internet cafes make technology accessible to many students and offer them a wide variety of information and learning potentials. Incorporating these technologies in the learning strategies of students not only make the availability of information faster and wider for students but also unconsciously make them aware that even the most boring subject is compatible with their new lifestyle and it can be utilized to have a new and interesting learning experience. According to the 3rd principle, the learner should be able to link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways, lest the inadequacy would result to isolation. The creation of meaningful link between the study of history and the use of technology in the learning process changes the attitude of students toward the subject. According to Margaret Riel, "Technology can be exploited to enhance the integration of the Learner-Centered Principles by supporting the learner's needs and capabilities while promoting creative and critical thinking. Teachers must advance in their method of instruction and knowledge of technology to support the individual learner in a Learner-Centered Framework. When utilizing technology with the "Learner-Centered" principles the goal is to have the students create **original products** based on the knowledge they have acquired. They will have to integrate the information into their schema of previous knowledge. Then the learner must develop an understanding of how to integrate all the different sources of information into a single original product. The entire process can be exciting, frustrating, challenging, difficult, intriguing, motivating, but most of all never boring. The ultimate goal is to increase learning with longer retention, and even increased performance on standardized tests."⁶

It is also note worthy that the materials created by the students coming from the other classes is appreciated and utilized by the students from the other courses or disciplines. Their output are shown to other classes but never compared with their output; the goal was to maximize the utilization of different materials and strategies. Video clips coming from the BS

Computer Science students are shared with other courses and the activities designed by the Education students are also shown to other courses. In this manner, they realize that a wide variety of learning strategies can be utilized based on their interests and field of specialization. The AB Philosophy students also came up with a term paper researching the history of specific topics (such as diseases, clothing/ fashion, dwellings, recreation and more) and their relevance to the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions for a specific period in Philippine history. The BS Computer Science also came up with a research on animation, movies, soap operas and other media in the Philippines. Students were able to come up with well researched output for their level given the technology at their disposal and were able to submit them on time because of the inner motivation that driving them.

The incorporation of events in Bicol region in the different national periods in Philippine history is also a welcome discussion for the students from the different disciplines. Students volunteered to give summarized reports on a particular event or locality especially those who come from or near the locality to be discussed. Being a state university which caters for the whole Bicol region, BU caters students who come from 6 provinces of the region. Students take pride of the place they come from which is also one of the values nurtured by the MS subjects. The said approach is geared towards presenting a holistic picture of Philippine history where national and local events all contribute in building a coherent and dynamic heritage for Filipinos and making these events significant for Bicolanos. In relation to the learner-centered principles, learning is most effective when differences in learner’s linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account.

Table 2
Simplified Course Content of MS 2 and the Additional Activities/Teaching Strategies Preferred by Students Coming from Diverse Disciplines

Content	Duration/ No. of Hrs.	Teaching Strategies/ Methodologies	Additional Activities/ Teaching Strategies Preferred by Disciplines	
			AB Philosophy	BS Computer Science
VMGO	1.5	SOCIALIZED DISCUSSION	SAME	SAME
Overview of the Course	1.5	-Lecture -Socialized Discussion	same	same
Importance of Rizal as a course	1.5	-Active socialized discussion	Volunteered mock debate	same
The Making of a Hero	1.5	-Group discussion	Additional readings	Web search
The Philippines and the World in the 19 th century	4.5	-Lecture -Panel discussion -Socialized discussion	Additional readings Additional reflections	Web search and power point presentation
Birth of Filipino	4.5	-Group	Additional readings	Web search

Consciousness		discussion -lecture	and reflections Web search Power point presentation	Power point presentation
Nationalism in the Novels	4.5	-lecture -socialized discussion -film showing	Module Web search	Module Web search
Idealism in Prose and Poetry	4.5	-Group reading -group discussion	-reporting	-reporting
Tribute to a man and Hero	3.5	-Role playing -options: field trip to Calamba, Laguna or to museums in Bicol region	Role playing/ program Term papers and philosophical papers	Role playing/ program Note: in some cases, higher years come up with their own movie/ animation on Jose Rizal's life -power point presentation about the life of Rizal

The above table had already been edited and simplified so that this paper will not exceed the maximum number of words required. What is evident from the table that again, the AB Philosophy and BS Computer Science students both prefer the incorporation of technology in their learning experience and the use and application of skills from their major field of discipline is utilized. Just like in the MS 1 subject, The AB Philosophy students have the inclination to have mock debates, group discussions, readings, and come up with philosophical papers which looked into the ideas/ philosophies contained in the writings of Rizal. The BS Computer Science students also have the preference to gather additional information from the internet and utilize computer applications to make the subject more interesting and relevant to their discipline. For freshmen and sophomore students, they usually come up with very novel power point presentations/ slide shows but senior students can already come up with more advanced media such as a movie/ animation on Jose Rizal as an application of the skills they learned in their major subjects. The output is also relevant because it is not just an application of computer skills but also involves keenness in showing the right details and interpretation of Rizal's life and legacy. They need to come up with historically correct output about Rizal which indicates an understanding of the course.

Furthermore, the willingness of students to take active participation in the class is indicated in their willingness to become a reporter/ discussant for the day. Students have a positive attitude towards reporting as long as the teacher guides, facilitates, and appreciates their efforts instead of the teacher monopolizing the discussion.

Conclusion

Negative attitude towards the MS 1 and MS2 subjects can be corrected if the teacher utilizes varied strategies in order to make the subject interesting, relevant to the specialization of the students and learner-centered. One teaching strategy may be effective and interesting for one set of students but it may be the opposite for others. Acknowledgement of the diversity of students can help solve the problem. The appropriate and guided use of technology can likewise awaken and strengthen the learning experience of students. Making a general subject such as the MS1 and MS 2 subjects relevant to diverse students can be achieved through commitment from both the teacher and the students.

Notes

¹ MS 1 Course Syllabus of BUCSSP General Education Department

² MS 2 Course Syllabus of BUCSSP General Education Department

³ Preliminary Survey to MS Enrollees SY 2008-2011

⁴ Arizona Faculties Council (AFC). Retrieved from http://www.abor.asu.edu/4_special_programs/lce/afc-defined_lce.htm

⁵ Ayo, Ruby Ann L., *“The Social Science General Education Curriculum: An Analysis”* UMOLOHOKAN Vol.2 No. 1 2010. p. 30.

⁶ <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/eet/articles/lrnercentrdprn/index.htm>