Planning your Skill Lab

REVISED: September 11, 2014

This document describes essential ingredients and distinctive pedagogy for the Brown School's 1-credit hour Skill Labs. It is divided into three sections: (1) Goals and Pedagogical Approach; (2) Guiding Principles; and (3) Course Logistics and Administration. Please follow these when developing a Skill Lab.

1. Goals and Pedagogical Approach

Goals

Skill Labs will increase learners' comfort, confidence and competence using a particular skill or set of skills in real world practice, policy and/or research situations. Evaluation of instructor and student performance will focus on achievement of these goals.

Accordingly, the syllabus for each Skill Lab must identify the specific skills to be acquired, and link each of these skills to at least one competency in the MPH and/or MSW programs.

Pedagogical Approach

Skill Labs are fundamentally different from many traditional courses, not just shortened versions of them. Skill Labs will use hands-on active learning methods to help students acquire and perform a particular skill or set of skills that are in demand by employers.

Teaching a skill involves three main steps: *explanation*, *demonstration*, and *practice*. While the amount of time spent on each may vary somewhat by course, we generally expect that more than half of all time spent in class (i.e., contact hours) will be devoted to practice.

Explanation includes a clear articulation of the skills to be gained, why each is important, essential vocabulary for those using the skills, and tools or resources needed to execute the skill. It also includes the critical role of context-setting, explaining how the skills are used in the field, by whom, to accomplish what goals.

Demonstration involves showing students how to perform the skill. Ideally, this includes breaking a skill into its component parts and showing in hands-on fashion how to carry out each step. Each skill can be demonstrated or modeled directly by the instructor, using examples from a range of media, through interactive exercises, or any combination of these and other approaches.

Practice is at the heart of learning a new skill. Instructors will create opportunities for students to rehearse and repeat a skill, while providing guidance, coaching and feedback in every instance. These practice opportunities will simulate challenges

that require using the skill and should allow students to make mistakes without penalty. Skill Lab assignments to be completed outside of class time should also be designed as practice opportunities (with performance evaluated for grading).

2. Guiding principles

Skills will be transferable.

Skill Labs will teach skills that can be applied across a range of settings and problems. Because these courses will serve students from Social Work, Public Health and other academic units across campus, they should be designed and taught in ways that are agnostic to discipline, including examples and assignments that are from different fields and/or ones flexible enough to allow students to select their own areas of application.

Skill supporting resources will be accessible.

For Skill Labs that involve teaching students to use a specific tool (e.g., software for data analysis or project management), instructors should select tools that are well-established and supported, widely available and used, and with exceptions for widely used tools (e.g., SAS, GIS), available for free or low cost to the user. It is important that we make every effort to assure that students and the organizations that hire them use or are able to obtain the tools we have taught them to use.

3. Course Logistics and Administration

Course format

Formats for Skill Lab courses should be selected to optimize student learning. We encourage use of different formats and will evaluate the extent to which course format enhances or hinders student learning. Although we will consider any format that assures 15 contact hours in class with students, for scheduling purposes we ask that instructors start by considering which of the following formats best suit their Skill Lab:

- OPTION A: Meet 1 time per week for 1 hour across 15 weeks.
- OPTION B: Meet 1 time per week for 1.5 hours across 10 weeks.
- OPTION C: Meet 1 time per week for 3 hours across 5 weeks.
- OPTION D: Meet 2-3 days total for 5-8 hours each day. (Given student schedules and classroom availability, this option is only available on weekends.)

In addition to determining the number and duration of class sessions, instructors teaching in any format except OPTION A above must also determine *when* during the academic semester they would like to teach their course. While the set of Skill Labs for any given semester must be spread out across the entire semester, we ask that instructors consider and choose from the following periods for their course.

- OPTION E: Inter-session (the week immediately prior to Spring semester).
- OPTION F: Spring break.
- OPTION G: Weeks 1-5 of the semester.
- OPTION H: Weeks 6-10 of the semester.
- OPTION I: Weeks 11-15 of the semester.
- OPTION J: Weeks 1-10 of the semester.
- OPTION K: Weeks 6-16 of the semester.
- OPTION L: Any weekend(s) during the semester.

Appendix A links these Options to preferred days and time. Please use this Appendix when making scheduling decisions about your course. Note that for pedagogical reasons, certain Skill Labs may need to meet in particular time slots. For example, Skill Labs focused on data analysis tools may be scheduled during the intercession or early in a semester so that the skills can be applied immediately in students' advanced analytic courses. Please send your preferred course format, days and times to Sue Imhoff *(sdimhoff@wustl.edu)* by September 19, 2014.

Classroom needs

Skill Lab instructors whose course requires special space needs like a computer lab should notify the Associate Deans for Social Work and Public Health as soon as possible to assure these spaces are available.

Prerequisites and other requirements

In general, we assume that any graduate student in good standing at the Brown School (or elsewhere in the University) can register for any Skill Lab. However, some Skill Labs may require students to have completed prior coursework (e.g., taking Introduction to Biostatistics before a Skill Lab on SAS) or to bring a particular project to the Skill Lab (e.g., having a manuscript idea or manuscript in progress to work on in the Skill Lab on Manuscript Development). Correspondingly, certain courses may require students to complete certain Skill Labs prior to enrollment.

Course description and syllabus

The MSW and MPH program offices are excited to work with you to develop a brief course description (roughly 100 words) and syllabus. A sample course description is provided in Appendix B. We ask that you submit your draft course description to Matt Kreuter *(mkreuter@wustl.edu)* by September 19, 2014, and a draft syllabus by October 31, 2014. As we received syllabi and course descriptions, we will share them as models.

Questions?

Questions about Skill Lab development can be directed to:

Amanda Moore McBride, Associate Dean for Social Work, *ammcbride@wustl.edu*
Matthew Kreuter, Associate Dean for Public Health, *mkreuter@wustl.edu*

Appendix A. Skill Lab available dates for Spring Semester, 2015

Course format	Available dates and times
OPTION A	M-F 12:30-1:30 or M-Th 4:15-5:15
OPTION B	M-F 8:45-10:15 or M-F 10:30-12:00
OPTION C	M-F 9:00-12:00 or M-Th 1:00-4:00 or M-Th 2:00-5:00 or M-Th 5:30-8:30
OPTION D	Friday afternoons, Saturdays, Sundays
OPTION E	January 5-11, 2015
OPTION F	March 8-14, 2015
OPTION G	January 12 – February 13
OPTION H	February 16 - March 27
OPTION I	March 30 – April 30
OPTION J	January 12 – March 27
OPTION K	February 16 – April 30
OPTION L	January 23-25, January 30 – February 1, February 6-8, 13-15, 20-22, February 27 – March 1, March 6-8, 20-22, 27-29, April 3-5, 10-12, 17-19, 24-26

Appendix B. Model course description of a Skill Lab

Manuscript Development

This course will help students learn to write scholarly manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Students will learn and apply a prescriptive formula for writing each section of a manuscript and responding to reviewer critiques. The course is designed for those who are new to writing for publication as a lead author, and emphasizes reporting findings from empirical studies. Students must enter the course with a manuscript project to work on. They will develop the manuscript through the course and submit it for peer review as the final course requirement.