

Scaffolding Research Skills across the Curriculum, from the First Year to Capstone Courses

Jenn Manak and Jenny Shanahan, Bridgewater State University, MA

A research-skills scaffold is a means of structuring a curriculum to help students gradually and intentionally build content-knowledge and skills. We use the assessment terms *introduce*, *develop*, and *master* to indicate three general levels of progress for undergraduate students. We recommend beginning at the end, employing Wiggins and McTighe’s (1998) Backward Design educational theory. Backward Design encourages educators to think in terms of what they want their students ultimately to achieve and to develop curricula by working backward from those goals.

Goals for Students in Your Program

What are your main goals for students in your program? What do you want students to be able to do, particularly in terms of scholarly work, by the time they graduate from your program?

-
-
-

Determining the end goals of a program/major can aid faculty in designing curricula that build scholarly skills. The basic curricular outline is to *introduce* inquiry-based learning in 100- to 200-level courses, then to help students *develop* those skills in 200- and 300-level courses. That scaffolding—guiding students’ skill development with appropriate supports—helps prepare students for *mastery* of the skills, typically in 400-level courses. How does the curriculum—from the first semester to graduation—constitute a meaningful initiation into a culture of inquiry in the discipline? If a capstone project represents students’ final stage of undergraduate learning, what are the stages that prepare students for it?

Mini Curriculum-Map of Research Skills in your Program

		Introduce	Develop	Master
Program/Department:	Existing (Research-Related) Learning Goal:			
	“Next Steps” Learning Goal:			