

The Role of Current Events and Flexible Course Syllabi: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper describes a collaboration of Architecture and Engineering faculty to innovatively exploit current events for teaching opportunities in the context of a flexible syllabus. In developing course syllabi for our design studio classes the incorporation of current events to allow students to learn from and practice on real-world examples was very refreshing and educational. The currency and sometimes urgency of real world events with respect to innovative solutions require a flexible course syllabus complete with learning outcomes. To achieve this, the faculty must keep abreast of current events that may be incorporated into the course syllabus. With this view, current events may be scanned for relevance and used as a real world teaching opportunity. For example, the recent 2010 earthquake in Haiti presented such opportunities to immediately identify a problem, define the parameters and incorporate it into the studio class syllabus. The situation requires architectural and engineering response, in real time, to provide shelter. The basic components of these current events provide opportunity. The design problem is to provide earthquake victims with immediate shelter that can be built using available resources and simple labor. The questions posed to the students are; can innovative design solutions be found to account for earthquake and hurricane design? How do those solutions address technical, social and economic needs? The syllabus then must have the flexibility to incorporate the event into its learning objectives. In conclusion we postulate that there are teaching opportunities inherent in blending current events into a flexible course syllabus.