Using Constructive Alignment for Teaching Efficiency and to Achieve Concrete Learning Gains

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Background
Constructive alignment is a proven course development approach. It involves mapping specific learning objectives, to assessment/evaluation strategies, and ultimately to specialized teaching approach(es). This approach results in a cohesive course where students will have suitable opportunities to demonstrate subject mastery.

Learning Objectives
1. Demonstrate skills associated with creating landscape designs.
2. Accurately measure a landscape site and document field information.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in computer-aided design.
4. Practice and refine written and oral communication of design concepts.

My Take on the Changes
• Assignments more focused, and relate to each other better
• Fewer assignments to grade; I can provide more substantive and valuable feedback to students
• Clear scaffold of assignments across the semester
• There has been a more incremental and obvious improvement of student work over the course of the semester

What the Students are Saying
• “Assignments had real-world application”
• “I liked working with real clients”
• “Writing about different landscapes helped me think about my designs differently”
• “I didn’t like the Design Star stand ups at first but know why you made us do them”
• “I’ve tried new graphic techniques (w/ varying levels of success) which is what I wanted to do. Even though I didn’t love the way each design worked out, I think I learned something from each one of them.”

HORT 481: Advanced Garden Composition
Capstone design course
Evaluation and assessment includes:
• 5 design projects
• Written assignments
  • Reflective writing after each design
  • 3 Design critiques (written)
  • Design Portfolio (written)
• Oral assignments
  • Client Presentation
  • 3 Camera Challenges (oral)
  • Design Point of View (written and oral).

Sample of student's final design project (Eric Golay)