That's it.
That's the course.

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THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

Large intro courses tempt us to **do too much**. All those students, some of whom will choose different majors… This is the best chance to teach them our subjects, so we want to **cram it all in**.

Yield not to temptation!

In SCM 101, a course redesign emphasized **linearity** and **one core concept**. **Student learning improved** and **instructor happiness increased**.

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Streamlined course design makes the world a better place

BACKGROUND

- SCM 101 (Introduction to Communication and Media): a 120-seat course for first-year students.
- No prior knowledge of any kind is assumed.
- Assumption: *some* students will take Harrington courses in communication and media. That said, *many* students will not.
- Presumption: *no* students need all the details of communication theory at the 100 level
- Presumption: *all* students benefit from learning about *a* theory, applying it to analyze something, and then creating something with it.

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COURSE CHANGE

O L D
(*simplified*)

Big overview

One set of ideas

Exam

A different set of ideas

A project

A reflection that kinda-sorta integrates multiple sets of ideas

don't forget

N E W

A theory

Learn about it

Analyze with it

Create with it

That's it.

Once upon a time, SCM was a very complicated course. It did many, many things. Students were confused. The instructor was glum. It was time for a refresh. The revised course…

- is 100% linear. Thing A leads to Thing B.
- doesn't throw lots of content at students: one theory drives the entire course.
- allows the instructor to focus on linking Tuesday to Thursday and this week to next—students needn't remember something that had lain fallow for a month.
- makes clear *through structure* how a theory can become a tool for understanding and doing—not just a thing to learn for a test.
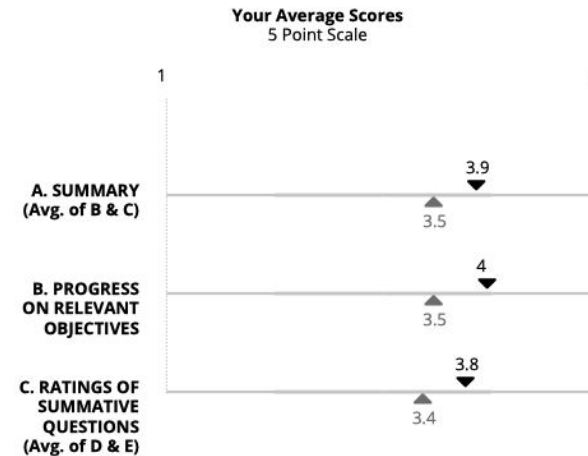
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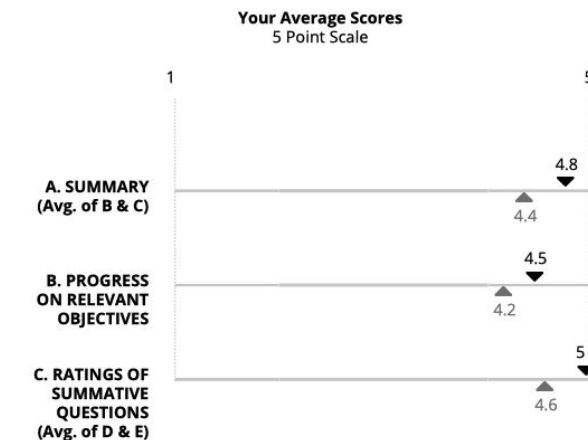Streamlined course design makes the world a better place

IMPACT

IDEA results show marked improvement, both in terms of topline numbers, which are comforting at annual review time, but also in terms of students reporting that they understand what they've learned.

- Topline scores improve noticeably, suggesting increased effectiveness
- "Teaching Essentials" results suggest students understand better how ideas fit together

Your Average Scores
5 Point Scale

A. SUMMARY (Avg. of B & C)	3.9 / 3.5
B. PROGRESS ON RELEVANT OBJECTIVES	4 / 3.5
C. RATINGS OF SUMMATIVE QUESTIONS (Avg. of D & E)	3.8 / 3.4

Teaching Essentials	Your Average
Made it clear how each topic fit into the course	3.9
Explained course material clearly and concisely	3.4
Introduced stimulating ideas about the subject	3.4
Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them	3.3

Before
and
after

Your Average Scores
5 Point Scale

A. SUMMARY (Avg. of B & C)	4.8 / 4.4
B. PROGRESS ON RELEVANT OBJECTIVES	4.5 / 4.2
C. RATINGS OF SUMMATIVE QUESTIONS (Avg. of D & E)	5 / 4.6

Teaching Essentials	Your Average
Made it clear how each topic fit into the course	4.6
Explained course material clearly and concisely	4.7
Introduced stimulating ideas about the subject	4.3
Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them	3.9

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DISCUSSION

- A 100-level large lecture course can be bogged down by a convoluted course design.
- By restructuring around a linear design with a clear trajectory from one course segment to the next, students better mastered content
- Rather than treat theory as concept, treat it as organizing principle: at 100 level, students benefit more from learning to use *a* theory than from learning lots of different theories.
- Student comments track the improvement: from "I struggled grasping how things related as we went along" to "Definitely laid out the course better than my other courses, kept it organized, consistent, and easy to follow."

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