



Successful Syllabi

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Introduction

Have you ever taken a moment to consider whether your course syllabus could be more than a semester-long contract between you and your students? A syllabus has the potential to be an invitation to a great months-long learning event and can hold a prominent role in student learning. While research on best practices regarding syllabi continues, it is clear that syllabi are an “exceptionally important teaching and learning tool” (Fornaciari & Lund Dean, 2013, 702). More recently, Lang (2016, 36) introduces the idea of the “retrieving syllabus” as a retrieval tool for key concepts and encourages that the syllabus is one way to encourage self-regulated learning. The different purposes and types of syllabi are identified by Ludy et al. (2016) with three types of syllabi identified as:

- 1) traditional (key information only)
- 2) contractual (includes detailed information about course content, policies and procedures)
- 3) learning-centered which emphasizes student and instructor roles, and is similar to the promising syllabus (Bain, 2004).

The learning-centered syllabus is designed to convey excitement about course content and the student's role in learning. Ludy et al (2016) further offer a new category of syllabus referred to as the engaging syllabus based on their research on visual enhancements to the syllabus and the students' initial perceptions and motivation for the course. Examples of visually creative syllabi may be found in Jones (2011). Course syllabi have great potential to set the tone for the course and to generate enthusiasm for course content (Weimer, 2011). As a closing thought, have you considered including your students' input as co-creators of the syllabus, specifically in regard to learning objectives and outcomes beyond what may be agreed upon by your department or university? Merrill (2016) encourages the use of backwards design in syllabus development while taking into consideration student input, and Fornaciari and Lund Dean (2016) make a compelling case and provide examples for developing a syllabus that builds a classroom culture of collaboration.

Implementation

- Whether you are revisiting a current syllabus or creating a syllabus for a new course, consider:
 - the tone of the syllabus
 - the language or discourse used
 - evidence of your passion for the course content
 - inclusivity of all students
- In regard to tone:



- Is the tone inviting or full of directives?
 - Is most of the content related to course or university policies and descriptive of what students should **not** do?
 - Is there a place for your teaching philosophy and reason why this is your chosen field?
 - Is there a statement encouraging students to utilize your designated office hours?
 - Is it clear that you have provided resources and thoughtfully designed assessments to accommodate all students?
- While creativity is desirable in designing your syllabus, it is important to consult your university faculty handbook and/or academic administrator to determine whether there is policy language that is required or recommended to be included in the course syllabus. Examples of this may be policies related to student accessibility, academic integrity, etc.
 - If creating a syllabus for a new course, consult colleagues as well. This may be especially helpful for faculty with lab and studio courses.
 - Revisit existing syllabi to ensure your syllabi are inclusive. For example, ask a student who has indicated that English is a second language to read over and indicate what may be unclear. Be sure to stay updated on accessibility requirements at your university – both in class and online.
 - A helpful tool below is the Inclusion by Design: Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design. This survey guides you to evaluate your current syllabus by asking questions about specific elements of most syllabi.
 - For the full survey, please refer to the University of Virginia – Survey Your Syllabus link below
<http://cte.virginia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Inclusion-by-Design-Survey-Your-Syllabus-Brantmeier-Broscheid-Moore-.pdf>
 - A rubric was developed by Palmer, Bach, & Streifer (2014) to assess the degree to which a syllabus is learning-centered. This rubric focuses on four criteria:
 - learning goals and objectives
 - assessment activities
 - schedule
 - overall learning environment
 - For the full rubric, please refer to the University of Virginia – Syllabus Rubric Guide link below
<http://cte.virginia.edu/resources/syllabus-rubric/>
 - Examples of syllabus templates and checklists:
 - Syllabus design <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tssd>
 - Course design and planning <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tscdp>
 - Example of information to include:
<http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/facultycenter/pdfs/Syllabus%20Checklist.pdf>



Kent State University – Per university faculty handbook, there is no template for course syllabi, however, faculty are encouraged to consult their academic unit administrator

<https://www.kent.edu/facultyhandbook/syllabus>

Frequently Asked Questions

- How do I encourage my students to read and use the syllabus at the beginning of the semester?
 - Make the syllabus available before first day and inform students they should come to the first class w questions about the syllabus or create an assignment where they post questions about the syllabus online during the first week of class.

- What if I want to make a change to my syllabus after the course has started?
 - You may wish to consider adding a statement about the possibility of unexpected events requiring potential changes to the syllabus and how you will quickly and effectively communicate those changes to students.

Other Resources

Carnegie Mellon University

<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/syllabus/>

University of Virginia – Survey Your Syllabus

<http://cte.virginia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Inclusion-by-Design-Survey-Your-Syllabus-Brantmeier-Broscheid-Moore-.pdf>

University of Virginia – Syllabus Rubric Guide

<http://cte.virginia.edu/resources/syllabus-rubric/>

This is the rubric referenced above and in Palmer, M. S., Bach, D. J., & Streifer, A. C. (2014)

Vanderbilt University

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/syllabus-design/>

Stanford University

<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/course-preparation-resources/creating-syllabus>

Best Practices for Teaching Online: Creating an Online Syllabus:

http://ux1.eiu.edu/~warobinson/UT_Creating%20an%20Online%20Syllabus.pdf

Online and hybrid course syllabus example:

<http://online.pasadena.edu/faculty/files/2012/02/Online-Syllabus-Example-CANVAS-New-Login.pdf>

Kent State University – please contact OCDE for a template syllabus for online courses.

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