



Creating a Course Syllabus

Lens on Learning Principles

A syllabus can provide incentive for involvement for both teachers and students since it makes clear where the participants will “wind up” at the end of the semester. (Duffy & Jones, 1995.)

A syllabus is an instructional tool with the following goals:

1. Provide basic information (i.e. teacher’s name, office location, e-mail address, voice mail)
2. Provide students with a course “map” or path, identifying what they will be doing, when and how they will be doing it, and when and how their performance will be evaluated.
3. Communicate a teacher’s educational philosophy and instructional methods.
4. Serve as a course contract between the teacher and the students.
5. Answer general questions students might have about the course (i.e. What can I expect to learn? Why do I need to learn it? How will I learn it? What will it take to be successful? How will I be evaluated? What are the important dates? Whom do I contact with questions or difficulties?)

A syllabus should reflect thoughtful course and instructional planning that is designed to facilitate achievement of course learning outcomes. It should be revisited each time a course is delivered.

According to Duffy and Jones (1995) a well written syllabus:

- Models clear, concise, and complete organization.
- Provides a road map for the entire course.
- Serves as a reference and review tool.
- Reflects the personality of the teacher.
- Reflects a course that addresses diverse learning needs

Reflection on Practice

1. What are other faculty, who are teaching the same course or teaching similar courses in your department, including in their syllabus?
2. How can you communicate all the information clearly and concisely in a way that engages students with different learning styles?
3. How will you distribute the syllabus (i.e. on Blackboard and/or in class), and how will you make sure students read the information in it?

Things to Include in Your Syllabus

Required Content (The list below is based on the Syllabus Checklist in the Curriculum Handbook)

- Course description that addresses what students can expect to learn in the course, how they will learn it, and why the course might be of value to them.
- Faculty information (i.e. name, office location and hours, phone number, e-mail address and how you manage e-mail communication)
- Clear, concise listings of learning goals and objectives
- List of major assignments and due dates
- Class and/or activity schedule
- Sequence of topics to be covered
- Evaluation procedures (i.e. types and number of assignments, % value for each, grading criteria)
- Pre-requisite knowledge and/or skills needed to be successful in the course
- Required instructional resources (i.e. texts, tools, software, etc.)
- Recommended instructional resources (i.e. books, article, web site, videos)

- Course policies and procedures (i.e. missed test policy; assignment deadline policies; academic policies for plagiarism, cheating, etc.; code of conduct and human rights policies, acceptable use policy) http://www.georgianc.on.ca/calendar/policies/results.php?num_1=1
- Expectations for successful participation in the class (i.e. style of learning activities, assignment formats)

Additional Items to Consider Including

- Descriptions of each topic, including the learning outcomes that will be addressed and how assignments and learning activities will help students achieve the learning outcomes.
- The teacher's educational philosophy and instructional methods used in the course (i.e. How much of the course will consist of lectures? cooperative learning? problem-solving activities? individual or group assignments? online tasks? labs? tutorials? etc.)
- Support services that are available and how to access them (i.e. OLC Blackboard assistance, LRC, Write-On, Click-On, Math-Lab, Peer Tutoring, Student Services, etc.)
- Tips and strategies for successful learning (i.e. learning style strategies, study/reading, notetaking)
- Additional learning activities available such as field trips, guest speakers
- Comments about the classroom atmosphere and how it will be sustained
- Participation expectations (including what the students' responsibilities are when they miss a class – i.e. buddy system, notes on BB)
- Grade information (i.e. recording sheet, how and when they will be posted, how to calculate)
- Calendar that includes important course, program, department, and college dates

Incorporating the Syllabus as Instructional Content

According to Patricia Cross (2003), a syllabus creates an opportunity for a lively and involved discussion about a course. She suggests passing out the syllabus and asking students to work in groups to generate questions about it. Use a class discussion of goals to identify, clarify, and perhaps modify course road map. If student goals differ from course goals consider how students can realize personal goals (i.e. through term papers or special projects).

Other Ideas for Getting Students to Interact with the Syllabus

- Mini-quiz about the content of the syllabus (in class or on Blackboard)
- A scavenger hunt type activity that gets students working in teams to find certain information presented in or relevant to the syllabus
- Present the syllabus as a first draft, and then involve students in writing or determining certain aspects of the syllabus (i.e. writing a particular policy, designing a grading scheme for one aspect of the course)
- Present the syllabus as a working document, and ask students to e-mail you within a certain time frame with any questions or concerns that they would like considered before the final draft (i.e. conflicting dates, problematic areas, weighting, additional options for assignments)
- Attach a sign-off sheet to the syllabus that students sign and hand in saying they have read it

More Information on Writing a Syllabus

Cross K. Patricia. (2003). *Techniques for promoting active learning*. , Phoenix, AZ: League for Innovation in the Community College.

Duffy D. & J. Jones. (1995). *Teaching within the rhythms of the semester*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Georgian College. (2001). *Curriculum handbook: Programs and courses (Section X: pp. 2-3)*. Retrieved March 4, 2003, <http://info.georgianc.on.ca/curriculum/pdf/sectionX.pdf>

Haugen, L. (1998). Learning-centred syllabi workshop. Retrieved April 9, 2003, from <http://www.cte.iastate.edu/tips/syllabi.html>

University of Minnesota. (n.d.) Syllabus tutorial. Retrieved April 9, 2003, from <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/syllabus/index.html>