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# EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN ACTION

## Best Practices in Syllabus Writing Contents of a Learner-Centered Syllabus

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This article presents an overview of syllabus structure for faculty members and administrators who would like to develop and evaluate their syllabi. A brief overview about syllabus contents and a checklist is provided. (The Journal of Chiropractic Education 20(2): 139-144, 2006)

**Key Indexing Terms:** chiropractic; education

*The syllabus functions as a major communication device that provides details of how student learning will be assessed and about the roles of both student and instructors in the learning and assessment process.—*  
Habaneck<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The syllabus is a description and plan for a course and, if well written, may be a tool that improves student learning, facilitates faculty teaching, improves communications between faculty members about their courses, and assists with monitoring program quality.<sup>1-6</sup> Altman and Cashin state that, "The primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate to one's students what the course is about, why the course is taught, where it is going, and what will be required of the students for them to complete the course with a passing grade."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Parkes, Fix, and Harris suggest that the syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and the learner.<sup>8</sup> Typically focused on the learner, well-written syllabi communicate to students what is expected to succeed in a course and what competencies must be mastered.<sup>2,3</sup> Thus, syllabi assist faculty

members with communicating with their learners and help learners understand what is expected of them.<sup>1,5</sup>

The lead instructor for the course and, depending on the college, other recognized bodies (eg, departments, supervisors, administrative bodies, program review committees, etc) are responsible for developing and maintaining course syllabi. Typically the lead instructor is responsible for the distribution of the most updated syllabus to all other course instructors and to the students in either printed and/or electronic formats.<sup>2</sup>

As a general rule when writing or reviewing a syllabus, the syllabus contents should be so clear that they are easily understood by others who are not familiar with the course (ie, those who have not taken the course). The syllabus should provide enough detail for students to understand what is expected of them and how the course proceeds. Optimally, the course syllabus should generate interest and motivate students to take responsibility to learn the contents of the course.<sup>1,2,5</sup> The syllabus contents should be in compliance with the college's other documents, such as course catalog and policy documents, in order to ensure that there is consistency and a relationship with the educational program.

This review provides a structure by which faculty members and administrators may evaluate and deve-

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lop current syllabi and consider methods for improving syllabi through methods such as peer review from other faculty and feedback from student evaluation of instructional methods. A checklist (Appendix A) is provided so that one may download and modify this form from *The Journal of Chiropractic Education* website ([www.journalchiroed.com](http://www.journalchiroed.com)) to best suit his or her needs. The checklist may also assist an instructor who is developing a new syllabus or may be used to review existing syllabi through peer review or a review committee in preparation for curricular improvements, external review by credentialing bodies, or in the development of new programs. This review is not intended to cover course or curriculum development. Instead, it is assumed that the course has been developed and integrated appropriately within the educational program.

## SYLLABUS CONTENTS

Presented here are the typical components of a syllabus. The order of presentation matches that of the checklist in Appendix A.

### General Course Information

This section orients the reader to the basic components of the course.<sup>2-7</sup>

1. *Name of course and course identifying information:* The course name should match the most recent college catalog. Include the course number and level of study, as found in the most recent catalog.
2. *Term/quarter/semester:* State when the course is being offered, unique to the delivery of the course (eg, season and year), such as "Fall 2008."
3. *Location:* List where the course will be held (e.g, classroom, clinic, etc). Website or other electronic locations for the course (eg, Blackboard) may be listed here.
4. *Units/time dedicated per week:* For lectures and laboratories, state how often the course meets for each. List any other time required to satisfy the course, such as independent study, clinical contact, supervised patient care, and distance learning.
5. *Prerequisites/corequisites:* List the prerequisites (a prerequisite is a course that must be successfully completed prior to enrolling in the course) and/or corequisites (a corequisite is another course that must be taken at the same time). This

section should include course names and numbers in order to easily identify them.

### Instructor Information

Information about the faculty members involved with the course will help students know how to reach the instructors for answers to questions regarding course materials and lessons.<sup>2-7</sup>

1. *Instructors' names:* Clearly list the instructors' names and their function in relation to the course, such as lead instructor, laboratory instructor, and so forth. Degrees and credentials may also be included.
2. *Office hours and contact information:* Include information about how students should communicate with faculty. Include items such as office hours, where the meeting place is located, how students make appointments (eg, drop in, phone, sign up). Contact information typically includes both phone number and e-mail address.<sup>6</sup>
3. *Additional instructor information:* Some faculty members prefer to include additional personal items, such as their teaching philosophy and additional information about their professional backgrounds.<sup>6</sup>

### Purpose of the Course

This section establishes what the learner will be able to know or do upon successful completion of the course.<sup>2-7</sup> A course purpose, goals, and objectives are established in different manners, depending on campus culture and policies. Some campuses allow faculty members to modify course descriptions or goals as they see fit, whereas other campuses require faculty peer review and integration of the course into the program before changes in a course purpose may be approved.

1. *Course purpose:* Include the catalog description as it appears in the most recent course catalog or whatever the official source of course information is for the given college. The purpose should clearly describe the course contents and what the learner may expect.<sup>5,7</sup>
2. *Course goals:* Course goals are broad, general statements that are directly related to programmatic goals. Course goals describe a practical purpose for a course. Typically goals relate to core competencies (eg, CCE competencies). Each course goal should represent a solution to a

well-defined training need. Course goals establish the direction of the course. Goal statements describe a general learning outcome and are typically not measurable. The successful implementation of program goals is accomplished through clear, well-defined course goals stating the overall purpose of the course. Therefore, course goals should be clearly linked to program goals.

3. *Course objectives*: Course objectives are more specific than goals and address achievable, measurable skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students will need to acquire.<sup>5</sup> Course objectives are specific statements that describe, in precise and measurable terms, what the student should be able to do or know once completing the course. These are specific items written for the learner (not the educator) and typically are written with action verbs (eg, using terms as found in Bloom's or other taxonomies). Course objectives translate the goal into specific outcomes for the learner. Objectives help students understand the clear expectations that they will need to meet in order to pass the course and master the competencies that the course training provides. A course objective should be measurable, understandable, and attainable within a given amount of time. An objective should advance the student toward a corresponding course goal. Ideally, objectives should aim at what the student should be able to know or do as a result of the learning experience, as opposed to what the teacher will do or provide. Writing the objectives from the students' point of view helps learners better understand what is expected of them. Course objective may then be broken down into lesson, module, or unit objectives, which are more detailed and aimed at specific learning activities and lesson plans.<sup>5</sup>
4. *Additional course information*: Some faculty members include additional material describing the importance of the course and how the material fits into the larger educational program. This helps the student understand where they are on their path toward their ultimate goal of graduating with a degree.

### **The Learning Environment**

This section defines the environment in which learning will take place.<sup>2-5</sup> This helps students know what to expect in preparation for the course.

1. *Facilities and teaching methods*: Describe the different types of formats that will be used to

facilitate student learning in the course. In what manner will the student be learning and in what particular environment (eg, open lab small group sessions, video review in the library, Roentgen film review in radiology lab, online listserv discussions, taking notes in a lecture hall, etc.)?

2. *Required texts*: List the required text(s) title, author(s), publisher(s), and edition (e.g, 2nd edition). If textbooks are not required, clearly state so.
3. *Required materials and attire*: What materials must the student obtain for this course (eg, diagnostic kit, speeder board, skin-marking pencil, etc)? Provide information that will assist the student in obtaining materials for the course. List materials that the student is required to access, such as any other required reading (eg, journal articles, etc). List other items, such as videos, slides, or images that they are required to view. List required attire, if needed, such as the need to wear clinic attire or a patient gown.
4. *Provided materials*: What materials will the faculty member provide? Common materials include microscopes, dissection kits, and patient gowns. Be sure to obtain copyright permission for any materials that will be duplicated for the course.<sup>2</sup>
5. *Recommended texts/resources*: Resources that the student will find helpful in learning, but are not required, may be listed here.

### **Time Schedule/Course Plan**

This establishes what the student may expect at a particular point in time during the course.<sup>2-7</sup> This section helps students prepare in advance for the learning environment<sup>7</sup> and balance their study schedule with the many other courses that they are taking concurrently. The schedule should be as clear as possible and relate to the course competencies, goals, and objectives.

1. *Schedule/course plan*: Provide the course calendar, including what materials are covered and when. Course schedules are typically organized by week and by topic; however, they may be arranged as modules, depending on the course and program.
2. *Lecture and/or lab topics*: For each week or section, describe the topic or theme of the lectures/labs. Topics may be subcategorized by lecture hour or by week. The topic should be descriptive enough that students clearly understand what is

being taught so that they may best prepare for in-class time.

3. *Landmark events, assessments, and due dates:* Include in the schedule all assessments for lecture/lab, due dates for projects, special projects, and presentations. Include reading assignments, including pages/text that students are expected to read prior to class. List any special or additional equipment that students are required to bring to a particular class. Include dates that are holidays or days in which classes are not being held.

### **How Learning Will Be Assessed**

This section describes the methods of how the learner will be assessed (eg, oral examination, essay examination, OSCE format, etc).<sup>2-6</sup> Students should be made aware of both formative and summative assessments. Evaluation should reflect the listed competencies and course objectives. Ideally the assessment tools will be the most appropriate for the type of assessment and each objective will typically have one or more assessment methods.

1. *Grading procedure:* List and describe all assessments in the course.<sup>5</sup> These may include self-assessments, peer assessments, out-of-class assignments, multiple-choice exams, portfolios, essays, oral reports, group projects, and so forth. Include any atypical evaluations, such as if “pop quizzes” may be expected and what value they may be worth. This section should include all points or values that the course has to offer, as well as how points will either be gained or deducted.
2. *Grading scale and method:* Grades should normally be in compliance with the college policy or catalog (eg, A, B, C, D, F, etc.). State how grades are calculated, such as by norm-referenced or criterion-referenced methods. List any other information relevant to grading, such as if extra credit will or will not be offered.
3. *Missed assessments:* Items may include consequences for missing or being late to an assessment or not participating in or turning in an assessment. Will the score be dropped or will the missed assessment need to be retaken? If students are allowed to make up missed exams/assessments, explain within what time frame students are allowed to make up an exam. What notification will they need to give to the instructor? Is the student responsible for follow-up? Include the

results to the course grade if the student does not follow the instructions in the syllabus.

4. *Grade posting:* Include how often feedback and assessments scores will be given to the student and how this information can be accessed. Will the grades/information be posted on a bulletin board or a website, or will the student need to set up an appointment with the instructor to review the assessment and receive feedback? How often will this information be updated throughout the course?
5. *Results of a failing grade:* Some syllabi include information to advise students how to access student support services or tutoring services. Specific instructions may be included for the student who is not doing well during the course or who fails the course.
6. *Additional student support information:* This section may include other helpful materials relating to assessment, such as assessment measurements and grading rubrics that the student may reference while preparing for examinations.<sup>6,7</sup>

### **Technical, Classroom, and College Policy Information**

This section clarifies expectations within the learning environment, helps address unforeseen events, and provides information about what is expected from the student.<sup>4,7</sup>

1. *Syllabus amendments:* What if the instructor needs to alter the plan after the syllabus has already been distributed? Some colleges allow amendments to occur by following a certain protocol. It is helpful to have this statement included in the syllabus to inform students that they need to be aware of any changes and how they will be informed of these changes.<sup>4</sup> A general statement may be included, such as, “The information in this syllabus is subject to change in extenuating circumstances. Changes to the course syllabus will be provided to the student in writing within 1 week prior to the event.”
2. *Special needs:* Information specific to the course that relates to students with special learning needs or disabilities, physical handicaps, or religious obligations may be included (eg, students with hearing deficits may need special listening equipment; Muslim women do not expose themselves in public for activities such as physical exam skills courses, etc.). The syllabus may require that students contact the lead instructor within the first

week of the course in order to accommodate any special needs as early as possible.

3. *Last course revision date:* Including the date of last revision of the course or syllabus helps the lead faculty member and other constituents track how often the course is updated and make sure the students have the most up-to-date version of the syllabus.
4. *Student conduct and class/college policies:* List specific policies for the class (eg, cell phone and laptop use in class). Be sure that these policies are supported by the most recent college policy. The instructor may choose to include specific classroom policies in regard to academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating), attendance, tardiness, class participation, and how attendance affects grades. Statements such as "Students must arrive within the first 15 minutes of class to be counted as present" or "No make-ups will be given for lab periods" make attendance policies clear. Other details relating to health and safety issues may also be included. The syllabus may state that the course follows the college policy. Verify that your classroom policies and regulations are in compliance with your college's policy manual.

#### **Additional Information**

Depending on the course, one may wish to include additional information, such as charts, study suggestions, information on how to access the course website, advice for preparing for assessments/exams, appendices, and so forth.<sup>4,5</sup> Most faculty members agree that syllabi that are too long are not read by most students. However, syllabi that are too brief may not include important and relevant information. Some authors suggest that more details are better than fewer and result in better learning.<sup>4,5</sup> Each course instructor should consider if additional information is best to include in the syllabus or as a separate handout later on in the course.

## CONCLUSION

Providing a well-written syllabus will help the students in the learning environment and will assist faculty members as they teach. This review provides a guide to the variety of sections that may be included in a syllabus. This is not an exhaustive list and some syllabi will typically contain only portions of all the items listed here.

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**Appendix A: Syllabus Checklist** (This form may be downloaded at no cost from: [www.journalchiroed.com](http://www.journalchiroed.com))

Syllabus Checklist	Required or optional?	Present and complete?
<b>General course information:</b>		
1. Name of course and course identifying information		
2. Term/quarter/semester		
3. Location		
4. Units/time dedicated per week		
5. Prerequisites/corequisites		
<b>Instructor information:</b>		
1. Instructors' names		
2. Office hours and contact information		
3. Additional instructor information		
<b>Purpose of the course:</b>		
1. Course purpose		
2. Course goals		
3. Course objectives		
4. Additional course information		
<b>The learning environment:</b>		
1. Facilities and teaching methods		
2. Required texts		
3. Required materials and attire		
4. Provided materials		
5. Recommended texts		
<b>Time schedule/course plan:</b>		
1. Schedule/course plan		
2. Lecture and/or lab topics		
3. Landmark events, assessments, and due dates		
<b>How learning will be assessed:</b>		
1. Grading procedure		
2. Grading scale and method		
3. Missed assessments		
4. Grade posting		
5. Results of a failing grade		
6. Additional student support information		
<b>Technical, classroom, and college policy information:</b>		
1. Syllabus amendments		
2. Special needs		
3. Last course revision date		
4. Student conduct and class/college policies		
<b>Additional information:</b>		

Old Dominion University  
College:  
Department:  
Syllabus Title:  
Call Number:

## **1. Meet the Professor**

### 1.1. Instructor Contact Information:

Title  
Name  
Office Location  
Office Hours  
E-mail Address(es)  
Telephone Number(s)  
Fax Number  
Other

### 1.2. Contact Policy

### 1.3. About the Professor

Teaching and Education Background  
Research Interests  
Selected Papers and Publications  
Personal Website

### 1.4. Teaching philosophy

### 1.5. Teaching Assistant/Secretary Contact Information:

Title  
Name  
Office Location  
Office hours  
E-mail address(es)  
Telephone number(s)

## **2. Student Help Resources**

2.1. Online Student Orientation: [<http://www.clt.odu.edu/oso>]

2.2. Blackboard Support Website: [<http://www.clt.odu.edu/bb>]

2.3. Technical Support Center: [<http://occs.odu.edu/occs-help@odu.edu>, 757-683-3192]

2.4. Study Guides Strategies: [<http://www.studygs.net/>]

### **3. Course Readings**

- 3.1. Required Materials
- 3.2. Optional Materials

### **4. Course Description**

- 4.1. ODU Catalog description
  - Course Number
  - Section Number
  - Pre- or Co-requisites
  - Lecture Hours
  - Location
  - Credits
  - Official Description
- 4.2. Instructor Course Description
- 4.3. Entry-level Requirements
- 4.4. Recommendations for Success

### **5. Course Objectives and Expectations**

- 5.1. Course Objectives
- 5.2. Course Expectations

### **6. Teaching and Learning Methods**

- 6.1. Delivery Method
- 6.2. Instructional Approach
- 6.3. Course Interaction
  - Faculty-Student Communication System (FSCS)
  - Listserv (Mailman)
  - Discussion Board (Blackboard)
  - Chat (Blackboard Virtual Classroom)
- 6.4. Feedback
  - Class Evaluation Form
  - Mid-semester Evaluation Form
  - Course Final Evaluation

### **7. Course Schedule**

- 7.1. Table/Chart showing week, class meeting days, date, topics, assignments and due dates.



**Learner-Centered Syllabus Checklist – Expanded**  
**Center for Learning Technologies**

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**Course Schedule Example**

This schedule is tentative and might change during the semester according to how the course evolves. The content is subject to change as well, depending on students' interests and progress.

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<b>Week</b>	<b>Class Meetings Days</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
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## 8. Grading Criteria

There are 100 points possible for this course. The grade you earn for this course depends on the total number of points you earn throughout the semester. The final grade will be based on the following percentage scale:

98-100 =	<b>A+</b>	94-97 =	<b>A</b>	90-93 =	<b>A-</b>
88-89 =	<b>B+</b>	84-87 =	<b>B</b>	80-83 =	<b>B-</b>
78-79 =	<b>C+</b>	74-78 =	<b>C</b>	70-73 =	<b>C-</b>
68-69 =	<b>D+</b>	64-68 =	<b>D</b>	<59 =	<b>F</b>

**Note:** A grade of "I" indicates assigned work yet to be completed in a given course or absence from the final examination. It is assigned only upon instructor approval of a student request. The "I" grade can be given only in exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control, such as illness. In these cases, the student is responsible for notifying the faculty member. The "I" grade becomes an "F" if not removed by the last day of classes of the following term (excluding the exam period) according to the following schedule: "I" grades from the fall semester become "F", if not removed by the last day of classes of the spring semester; "I" grades from the spring and summer sessions become "F" if not removed by the last day of classes of the fall semester. An "I" grade may not be changed to a "W" under any circumstances.

## 9. Student Responsibilities

- 9.1. Time Management
- 9.2. Understanding the Syllabus requirements
- 9.3. Utilizing Online Components

## 10. Course Policies

### 10.1. Attendance

As per university policy, students are expected to attend Classes. Students missing more than 15% of class meetings may be failed. Therefore, students who miss more than two class meetings are subject to automatic failure.

### 10.2. Tests and Make-ups

### 10.3. Course Disclaimer

Every attempt is made to provide a complete syllabus that provides an accurate overview of the courses. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. This may depend, in part, on the progress, needs and experiences of the students.

## 11. University Policies

### 11.1. College Classroom Conduct

The following standards are intended to define acceptable classroom behavior that preserves academic integrity and ensures that students have optimum environmental conditions for effective learning.

1. Students must turn off cell phones and pagers during class or have them set to vibrate mode.
2. Classes are expected to begin on time, and students will respect the time boundaries established by the professor. If classroom doors are locked, students may not knock or seek entrance in other ways.
3. Students should notify instructors in advance when a class will be missed. In the event of an emergency that causes a class to be missed, instructors must be notified as soon as possible.
4. Instructors may require that cell phones and other electronic devices be left on their desks during tests or examinations.
5. Students must not engage in extraneous conversations during classes. Such acts are considered to be violations of the Code of Student Conduct.
6. Students will activate their Old Dominion e-mail accounts and check them before each class. If the student chooses to have his/her messages forwarded to another account, it is the student's responsibility to take the necessary steps to have them forwarded.
7. Consumption of food and drink during class is prohibited, except when the professor has specifically approved it.
8. Offensive language, gestures and the like are disrespectful and disruptive to the teaching-learning process.  
[[http://studentservices.odu.edu/osja/ccp\\_pamphlet.pdf](http://studentservices.odu.edu/osja/ccp_pamphlet.pdf)]

### 11.2. Cultural Diversity

### 11.3. Honor Pledge

*"I pledge to support the honor system of Old Dominion University. I will refrain from any form of academic dishonesty or deception, such as cheating or plagiarism. I am aware that as a member of the academic community, it is my responsibility to turn in all suspected violators of the honor system. I will report to Honor Council hearings if summoned."* By attending Old Dominion University you have accepted the responsibility to abide by this code. This is an institutional policy approved by the Board of Visitors. Refer to Student Honor Council.  
[<http://studentservices.odu.edu/hc/>]

### 11.4. Special Needs

In compliance with PL94-142 and more recent federal legislation affirming the rights of disabled individuals, provisions will be made for students with special needs on an individual basis. The student must be identified, as "special needs" by the university and provide a letter from the Disability

Services Office, located at 1525 Webb Center. Any accommodations will be based upon written guidelines from the Disability Services Office. All students are expected to fulfill all course requirements.

11.5. University Email Policy

The Old Dominion University e-mail system is the official electronic mail system for distributing course-related communications, policies, announcements and other information. A University e-mail user ID and password are necessary for authentication and access to numerous electronic resources (Blackboard, faculty websites, etc.) NOTE: Effective August 23, 2004, all student accounts will utilize MIDAS passwords.  
[<https://midas.odu.edu>]

[<http://occs.odu.edu/accounts/studemail/index.shtml>]

11.6. Withdrawal

A syllabus constitutes a contract between the student and the course instructor. Participation in this course indicates your acceptance of its content, requirements and policies. Please review the syllabus and the course requirements as soon as possible. If you believe that the nature of this course does not meet your interests, needs or expectations (amount of work involved, class meetings, assignment deadlines, course policies, etc.), you should drop the class by the drop/add deadline, given in the ODU Schedule of Classes.

[<http://www.odu.edu/ao/registrar/calendars/academic>]

11.7. Student Acknowledgement

"I, \_\_\_\_\_, have completely read this syllabus and understand and agree to the course requirements".

### Mindful and Learner-Centered Syllabus Checklist

**Checklist Directions:** Please use this checklist to determine whether your course syllabus includes these components of a learner-centered syllabus.

#### Course Information

- Course Abbreviation and Number
- Course Title
- Semester and Year (Start Date to End Date)
- Number of Credit Hours

#### Instructor Information

- Name
- Office Address
- Office Hours and Other Contact Information
- Telephone Number
- Email Address

*If the instructor has a teaching assistant, include contact information.*

#### Departmental Information

- Name of Department
- Location of Departmental Office
- Preferred Contact Information for the Department

#### Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

- Discuss how the course fits into the overall curriculum. Answer the question "Why is this course useful?"
- List 4-5 broad-based learning outcomes that reflect what the students will learn and skills they will develop by successfully completing the course.
- Orient students to the discipline if this is an introductory course.

#### Learner Objectives

- List three to five major learning objectives. For example: What will students know or be able to do after completing the course? Or what skills or competencies do you want them to develop? If appropriate, be clear about what the course does not address.

#### Describe Course Format

- Specify textbooks and readings by author and editions. When possible, explain connections to the course goals and how the text and readings address them.
- Explain whether you expect students to have completed readings before class sessions and the degree of understanding that you expect (e.g., successfully complete pop quizzes, be able to discuss concepts, or apply reading information to problem-solving scenarios).
- Explain other requirements such as group assignments, individualized consultation, etc.
- If readings are placed on reserve in the library, discuss library policy.
- Identify additional equipment or materials needed and where students can obtain them.

#### Assignments (Papers, quizzes, exams, projects, etc.)

Be as specific as possible about:

- Types of exams, quizzes, exercises, projects, papers, etc.
- Expectations for performance

### How will Students Be Evaluated?

- Explain how students will be evaluated and grades assigned.
- Include components of final grade, weights assigned to each component, grading on a curve or scale, etc.

### Course Policies

Discuss your policies clearly regarding:

- Attendance
- Late assignments
- Make-up options
- Extra credit
- Deadline extensions
- Reporting illness
- Cheating and plagiarism
- Expected classroom behaviors
- Expectations for attendance, assignments, and examinations
- Describe students' responsibilities in the learning process
- Visit [ISU Catalog](#) website for the grading policies regarding incomplete marks

### Course Calendar

- Provide a course calendar that outlines topics to be covered, reading requirements, assignment due dates, etc. If necessary, revise it and be sure students get an updated version.
- Important Dates: List important dates such as last drop date, registration dates for the next semester, etc. Visit [ISU Academic Calendar](#) website for semester detail information.
- Dates and times of any exams scheduled outside of class time (If needed, visit [Online Testing Center](#) website for additional information)
- Date and time of final exam
- Visit [Interfaith Calendar](#) website when scheduling projects, presentations, and exams to consider any potential conflicts.

### Additional Learner-Centered Information

- Provide a glossary of terms and jargon commonly used in the subject area.
- Inform students about sensitive or potentially disturbing information or activities covered in the course.
- Estimate student workload. Give students a sense of how much preparation and work the course requires. But be realistic; they don't believe either scare tactics or soft-pedaling. (Remember that yours is not the only class that they're taking.)
- Include information on how to succeed in the course, such as:
  - Check your Iowa State email regularly
  - Log into the course website on Blackboard daily
  - Communicate with your instructor and visit during office hours
  - Create a study schedule so that you don't fall behind
  - Information about campus resources such as tutoring, study skills help, etc.
  - Resources for obtaining additional help, such as tutors, teaching assistants, supplemental instruction (if any).

### Recommended Iowa State University Syllabus Statements

#### **Statement on Academic Integrity:**

To promote integrity and deter dishonest academic work, it may be useful to consider including a statement of expectations and consequences related to academic misconduct in your course syllabus. Visit [Office of Student Conduct Academic Misconduct](#) webpage for statement examples.

#### **Statement on Disability Accommodation:**

Iowa State University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Sect 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you have a disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact (**instructor name**) to set up a meeting within the first two weeks of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your need. Before meeting with (**instructor name**), you will need to obtain a Student Academic Accommodation Request (SAAR) form with recommendations for accommodations from the Student Disability Resources Office, 1076 Student Services Building (main floor). Their telephone number is 515-294-7220 or email [disabilityresources@iastate.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@iastate.edu). Retroactive requests for accommodations will not be honored.

**Statement on Dead Week:**

This class follows the Iowa State University Dead Week policy as noted the ISU Policy Library; as well as section 10.6.4 of the Faculty Handbook. Visit [ISU Policy Library](#) website for policy wording.

**Harassment and Discrimination:**

Iowa State University strives to maintain our campus as a place of work and study for faculty, staff, and students that is free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and harassment based upon race, ethnicity, sex (including sexual assault), pregnancy, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, or status as a U.S. veteran. Any student who has concerns about such behavior should contact his/her instructor, [Student Assistance](#) at 515-294-1020 or email [dso-sas@iastate.edu](mailto:dso-sas@iastate.edu), or the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance](#) at 515-294-7612.

**Religious Accommodations:**

If an academic or work requirement conflicts with your religious practices and/or observances, you may request reasonable accommodations. Your request must be in writing, and your instructor or supervisor will review the request. You or your instructor may also seek assistance from the [Dean of Students Office](#) or the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#).

**Consider Including these Examples of Inclusive, Professionalism and Mutual Respect Statements:**

Relevant to the ISU Inclusive Language policy stating, "All university publications and communication, whether oral or written, shall use inclusive language and illustrations. Inclusive language refers to language that makes every attempt to include comprehensively all groups in the community. Whenever possible, selection of academic materials will also reflect efforts to uphold this university policy." Visit [Inclusive Language Policy - Policy Library](#) website.

Regarding name, gender identity and/or gender expression, "Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records."

In reference to mutual respect and professionalism, "You are expected to treat your instructor and all other participants in the course with courtesy and respect. Your comments to others should be factual, constructive, and free from harassing statements. You are encouraged to disagree with other students, but such disagreements need to be based upon facts and documentation (rather than prejudices and personalities). It is the instructor's goal to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. Please contact the instructor if you have suggestions for improving the classroom environment. It is preferable if students discuss issues directly with the instructor, however, students may also leave a note in the instructor's mailbox.

Related to University policies, "Students in this course are responsible for being familiar with the University's student rules and policies. Visit [ISU Policy Library](#) website."







# The Learner-Centered Syllabus

Prepared by

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## OVERVIEW

Syllabi serve several functions. First and foremost, they communicate individual faculty member decisions about teaching and learning to students. Syllabi also reflect disciplinary, departmental, and college/school norms regarding pedagogy, style, and the way faculty work together to develop curricula. In fulfilling the University's responsibilities to external accreditors, state agencies, parents, and other stakeholders, syllabi also play an important role in reflecting a vision of shared governance among faculty, students, and academic administrators across the University.

The following requirements apply to all syllabi for courses taught at the University. Programs, departments, colleges, and schools may have additional requirements for faculty teaching in those units. In addition, writing-intensive courses may require additional information be listed on the syllabus, and recent state legislation may require additional information on all syllabi for online courses. The Drexel Center for Academic Excellence (DCAE) will communicate any additional requirements as they are determined and developed. Additional resources for constructing and evaluating syllabi can be found on the DCAE site (<http://www.drexel.edu/provost/dcae/teaching/Syllabi.html>).

The goal has been to keep the list of institution-wide requirements to what minimally constitutes a foundation for a learning-centered syllabus while supporting our faculty members' ability to develop syllabi that work best for them within their disciplinary and instructional contexts. The requirements also support Drexel University compliance to specific legal and Middle States accreditation standards. Additional information about this effort can be found on the Academic Channel within the Drexel One Portal.

Please forward any questions or comments to:

Craig Bach, Chair, University Committee on  
Learning Assessment  
Associate Vice Provost, Curriculum and Assessment  
Teaching Professor, Goodwin College  
[bachcn@drexel.edu](mailto:bachcn@drexel.edu) | 215.895.2200

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Drexel Center for Academic Excellence  
Associate Professor, Culture & Communication  
Tel: 215-895-4904 | [hornumbg@drexel.edu](mailto:hornumbg@drexel.edu)

## Syllabus Checklist

		Comment
<b>Header and Cover</b>		
Course Prefix and Number	<input type="checkbox"/>	List the course prefix and number (e.g., EDUC 321)
Official Course Title	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the course title as it appears in the catalog
Term	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify the term in which the course is being taught
<b>Instructor Information</b>		
Instructor Name	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the name of instructor(s) teaching the course, as well as any teaching assistants responsible for the course
Contact Information (Phone, E-Mail, Web Site)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide the contact information you would like students to use during the term
Office Hours, Location, Mailbox	<input type="checkbox"/>	List when and where you will be available for office hours and where students can drop off items to you (e.g., department mailbox)
<b>Student Learning Information</b>		
Course Description	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide a description of the course consistent with what appears in the university catalog
Course Purpose within a Program of Study	<input type="checkbox"/>	Describe the purpose of the course, expand on the course description (e.g., special topics course where the description says "Topics may vary"), and/or inform students what role the course plays in the degree program
Statement of Expected Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	List the most important learning goals (e.g., outcomes, objectives, competencies, performance criteria) you expect students to achieve in the course (n.b., in most cases, there will be between 3 and 8 statements of expected learning)
<b>Course Materials</b>		
Required and Recommended Texts, Readings and Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	List all required and recommended readings, texts, and resources that will support student performance in the course
Required and Supplemental Materials and Technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	List any additional materials or technologies (e.g., software, mp3 player) that students will need for the course
<b>Assignments, Assessments, and</b>		
Graded Assignments and Learning Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify assignments and any activities for which the students will receive a grade
Grading Matrix	<input type="checkbox"/>	Detail how a score/grade for each assignment and/or activity is used to calculate a final score/grade for the course
Grade Scale	<input type="checkbox"/>	Define point breakdowns for each possible grade assigned (e.g., 90-93 = A-)
<b>Course Schedule</b>		
Course Calendar	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide students with a calendar of course activities, readings, assignments, and/or exams. The level of detail will be determined by the faculty member or department in which the course is taught.
<b>Academic Policies</b>		
Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Cheating Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	State or link to the Drexel University policies on the syllabus - <a href="http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic_dishonesty.asp">http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic_dishonesty.asp</a>
Students with Disability Statement	<input type="checkbox"/>	- <a href="http://www.drexel.edu/studentlife/judicial/honesty.html">http://www.drexel.edu/studentlife/judicial/honesty.html</a>
Course Drop Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	- <a href="http://www.drexel.edu/ods/student_reg.html">http://www.drexel.edu/ods/student_reg.html</a>
Course Change Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	- <a href="http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course_drop.asp">http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course_drop.asp</a> Communicate the prerogative of the faculty member to change the course during the term at his, or her, discretion. Articulate how, and when, these changes will be communicated to students.

# The Power of the Syllabus: A Learner-Centered Approach

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# How Do We Want to Be Taught?

A learner-centered approach to college education asks you to consider how each and every aspect of your course can effectively support student learning. (Gunnert, 1997)

A learner-centered syllabus requires that you shift from what you, the instructor, are going to cover in your course to a concern for what information and tools you can provide for your students to promote learning and intellectual development.

R. W. Diamond, "Forward" in J. Gunnert, *The Course Syllabus* (1997)

# What Does it Mean to Be a Learner-Centered?

## The Instructor:

- perceives learning as a partnership with students
- becomes acquainted with students' current knowledge of the subject matter
- becomes acquainted with students' learning styles
- becomes acquainted with students' learning goals for the course

# What Does it Mean to Be Learner-Centered?

## The instructor:

- ✓ uses a variety of instructional approaches based upon multiple-intelligences theory and practice
  - e.g. lecture, cooperative learning, small group discussion and problem-solving, kinesthetic activity, group and individual journaling
- ✓ assumes ultimate responsibility for the learning experience
- ✓ receives and incorporates feedback from students

# What Does It Mean to Be a Learner?

## The student

perceives the learning as a partnership with the instructor and fellow students  
communicates their current knowledge of the subject matter  
reflects on and communicates their learning style  
becomes acquainted with the instructor's learning goals for the course and communicates their own

# What Does it Mean to Be Teacher-Centered?

## The student:

- ✓ is an active participant in all planned instructional approaches  
e.g. lecture, cooperative learning, small group discussion and problem-solving, lectures, labs, activity, group and individual assignments
- ✓ assumes ultimate responsibility for their own learning
- ✓ provides feedback to the instructor



the most important document instructors give to students.

The instructor's first opportunity to introduce students to a learner-centered paradigm

a valuable resource for students throughout the duration of a course.

# What is the Purpose of a Syllabus?

o A contract between the instructor and students

o A central reference and communication device for students

o An effective planning document for both the instructor and students

o A reference guide for you and for other instructors

o Adapted from <https://www.khanacademy/learn/education/syllabus>

# SYLLABUS

- o The syllabus represents an agreement between you and your students.
- o You must state your policies explicitly to be enforceable. (Consider seriously the policies you want to enforce.)
- o By remaining in the class the student consents to the requirements in the syllabus.

## A Central Reference and Communication Device

The syllabus provides the opportunity to anticipate and respond to student questions and to establish a tone for the course.

Make your plan crystal clear by avoiding misleading language.

# Learning Outcomes (focus is on the learner)

- o Focus on learner's behavior that is to be changed
- o Serve as guidelines for content, instruction, and evaluation
- o Identify specifically what should be learned
- o Convey to learners exactly what is to be accomplished
- o Should be observable, measurable, and able to be demonstrated\*

\* Adapted from *Frontal Teaching to Backfire: A Case Study of Learning Outcome Graduate Education* by Robert Neber, <http://www.eric.org>

## **In Conclusion...**

“The traditional syllabus is primarily a source of information... the learner-centered syllabus can be an important learning tool that will reinforce the intentions, roles, attitudes, and strategies that you will use to promote active, purposeful, effective learning.” (Gurnert, 1997)