The Syllabus as a Teaching Tool

Mapping Your Course
A syllabus shares your teaching philosophy and how your course works. A learner-centered approach can help you engage students and build a classroom community.

Begin with a description and rationale to show students how your course will contribute to their learning as a whole. A syllabus quiz or activity combined with a first-day overview can help students use your syllabus better.

Integrating Outcomes
Connect students to what they will learn through explicit, measurable student learning outcomes (SLOs). Ask students to reflect on what the SLOs mean and how their personal learning goals intersect with the course outcomes. Help them visualize how your course will contribute to their education.

Creating Learning that Lasts
Plan for lasting impact by showing how your course supports students as they fulfill program and institutional goals. These connections help students see how courses work together to build the transferable skills they need for success.

Student-Centered Revising
After you review your syllabus elements with a checklist, focus on your audience by revising with a learner-centered self-assessment rubric. Research suggests that a syllabus with a positive tone, clear rationale, and space for students’ input about policies and procedures can positively affect students’ perceptions of their instructors and improve classroom behavior.

For resources on course design or to schedule a consultation, visit the Faculty Development Center.

Syllabus Checklist

- **Course Details**: Title, classroom, and time.
- **Instructor Information**: Office, office hours, phone, email, etc.
- **Course Description and Rationale**: What is the course about? How does it connect to the rest of the curriculum? How will students benefit from this course?
- **Student Learning Outcomes**: What will students gain from this course? Begin your list of learning outcomes with “By the end of this course, students will be able to...”, and connect outcomes to...
  - Program Learning Outcomes: Build context by linking students to your program’s learning outcomes.
  - Institutional Learning Outcomes: Show how your course contributes to UMBC’s Functional Competencies.
- **Format and Procedures**: How will the course be structured? What teaching techniques will you use?
- **Course Requirements**: What readings, participation, tests, papers, projects, etc. will help students achieve the course outcomes?
- **Grading**: What will be graded and when? How are grades distributed among the assignments? What rubrics are used to assess student work? Do you offer options for revision?
- **Course Policies**:
  - Academic Integrity Statement
  - Student Support/Disability Services Statement
  - Late work rules
  - Attendance requirements
  - Technology use rules
- **Inclusive Excellence**: Consider including a diversity statement and offering students options for self-identification by inviting them to designate personal pronouns.
- **Ground Rules**: Consider leaving space to collaborate on behavior expectations; research suggests that fewer negative behaviors emerge when students contribute to rules.
- **Course Schedule**: Include class meeting dates, topics, readings, problems, assignments, test or presentation dates, final exam schedule, etc.
- **Suggestions for Success**: What learning resources should students know about to succeed in your course? What strategies have worked well for past students? What pitfalls should they avoid?
Selected Syllabus Resources


**Student Support/Disability Services Statement:**
http://sds.umbc.edu/recommendation-disability-statement-for-course-syllabi/

**Diversity Statement:**
http://fdc.umbc.edu/creating-a-welcoming-classroom/

**Pronouns:**

**Ground Rules:**
http://fdc.umbc.edu/grounderules-a-few-examples/

**Course Map:**

**Infographic:**
https://ltlatnd.wordpress.com/2016/08/26/turn-your-syllabus-into-an-infographic/

**FDC Library**
For additional resources, visit
http://fdc.umbc.edu/resources/fdc-library/

---

### Links

**Learner-Centered Approach:**

**Syllabus Quiz:**

**Syllabus Activity:**
http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/infactdev/content/docs/1st%20oday%20of%20class%20activities.pdf

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):**
http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/SLOResources.html

**UMBC’s Functional Competencies:**
http://fdc.umbc.edufiles/2015/02/General_Education_Competencies_0805.pdf

**Academic Integrity Statement:**
http://oue.umbc.edu/ai/

---

### Two Frequent Syllabus Questions

- **Is my syllabus too long?** Many instructors create lengthy syllabi to capture policies, procedures, and assignments all in one place. Is this too much for students? Research suggests that students provided with detailed, learner-centered syllabi viewed the instructor as more caring, enthusiastic, and accomplished compared to instructors who provided brief syllabi (Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010, as cited in Richmond, 2016).

- **How can I make my syllabus more engaging?** Research suggests that a learner-centered syllabus can help you engage students. You can also revise some of the text with useful graphics. For example, offer a course map or create an infographic.