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
  - Rules for late work rules, attendance, technology use, etc.
- ☐ *Inclusive Excellence:* Visit The Diverse Classroom and use the Inclusion By Design worksheet to ensure your syllabus contributes to a healthy classroom climate. 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 & Links

Selected Syllabus Resources

Brien, J., Millis, B., & Cohen, M. (2008). *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Diamond, R. (2008). *Designing and assessing courses and curricula: A practical guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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

Filene, P. (2005). *The joy of teaching: A practical guide for new college instructors*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Fink, L. D. (2005). Self-directed guide to designing significant courses http://www.deefinkandassociates.com/GuidetoCourseDesignAug05.pdf

Fink, L.D.(2013). *Creating significant learning experiences an integrated approach to designing college courses*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hansen, E. (2011). *Idea-based learning: A course design process to promote conceptual understanding*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Nilson, L. (2007). *The graphic syllabus and the outcomes map: Communicating your course*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Richmond, A.S. (2016). Constructing a learner-centered syllabus: One professor's journey. IDEA Paper #60. Manhattan, KS: IDEA.org.

Saroyan, A., & Amundsen, C. (2004). *Rethinking teaching in higher education: From a course design workshop to a faculty development framework*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Links from Reverse Side:

Learner-Centered Approach:
http://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/IDEA%20Papers/IDEA%20Papers/PaperIDEA_60.pdf.

Syllabus Quiz:
http://blogs.agu.org/geoedtrek/2014/08/27/syllabus-quiz/

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

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

UMBC's Functional Competencies:
http://fdc.umbc.edu/files/2015/02/General_Education_Competencies_0805.pdf

Academic Integrity:
http://aetp.umbc.edu/ai/

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

The Diverse Classroom:
https://fdc.umbc.edu/the-diverse-classroom/

Inclusion By Design worksheet:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Boulz5eHbyjYdmYoeF9ablRRcHM/view

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

Pronouns:
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/designating-personal-pronouns-and-moving-toward-gender-inclusive-classrooms

Ground Rules:
http://fdc.umbc.edu/ground-rules-a-few-examples/

Course Map:
http://fdc.umbc.edu/files/2017/07/UMBC-Course-Map-Template-6.12.17-8.xlsx

Infographic:
https://ltlatnd.wordpress.com/2014/08/26/turn-your-syllabus-into-an-infographic/

For additional resources, visit the FDC Library in Engineering 101 and here: http://fdc.umbc.edu/resources/fdc-library/.

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.