Crafting Exemplary Syllabi for F2F & Online Courses
ABHE CAO Forum, February 2021

Overview

● Syllabus Purpose and Objectives
● Syllabus Essentials
● Standard of Excellence
● Syllabus Currency and Review

Syllabus Purpose and Objectives

Who are syllabi for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal audiences</th>
<th>External audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students (F2F, online,</td>
<td>Other IHEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hybrid)</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course instructor (same)</td>
<td>State HE oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future instructors</td>
<td>Accreditation teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Syllabus Purpose and Objectives

Learner-centered vs Teacher-centered syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Anchor 1</th>
<th>Anchor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Available for prescribed number of office hours only</td>
<td>Multiple means of access and requires interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s role</td>
<td>Student is told what he/she is responsible for learning</td>
<td>Students take responsibility for bringing additional knowledge to class via ongoing class discussion or regular presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Tests only (not comprehensive)</td>
<td>Multiple means of demonstrating outcomes and both self- and peer-evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from Table 1, Richmond et al., 2016)

Syllabus Purpose and Objectives

What are syllabi for?

**Functional lenses**
1. Motivational
2. Structural
3. Evidentiary

*(Slattery & Carlson, 2005)*

**Metaphors**
1. Map
2. Legal code
3. Contract
4. Letter
5. Promise
6. Others?

Syllabus Purpose and Objectives

Alignment issues

- Course ⊆ Department ⊆ School ⊆ Institution
- Assessment, culture, values
- Branding (visual and verbal tone)

Tension: length and usability
Syllabus Essentials

A caveat

- My reluctant journey: standardization vs academic freedom
- Syllabi and academic freedom
  - Minima/maxima, document structure, branding...
  - Content, assignments/grade weights, methods...

Syllabus Essentials: Literature

Sources
- Boldt, 2014
- Garavalia et al., 2000
- Slattery & Carlson, 2005
- Stanny et al., 2015

Consensus is lacking...

Syllabus Essentials: Literature

What does a syllabus include?
- Intro to course/course description
- Faculty contact info
- Required texts/materials
- Course objectives (SLOs)
- Institutional policies, rules (w/ rationale)
- Grades & grading process
- Assignments & grade weights
- Instructor policies, procedures
- Schedule/calendar
Syllabus Essentials: Literature
What does a syllabus include?
- Non-required supplemental materials
- Assignment details
- Prereqs & how course fits into program of study
- Rationale for topic sequence & assignments
- Accommodations/special needs policy/services
- Participation expectations
- Institutional support services
- More detailed intro to professor
- Required skills
- Time commitment for students
- Class format
- Group work expectations
- Motivational messages
- Topics covered

Syllabus Essentials: My List
1. Course info
2. Faculty info
3. SLOs with assessment
4. Required materials
5. Grade weights/scale
6. Assignment overview
7. Rubrics/checklists
8. Academic misconduct statement
9. Accommodations statement
10. Calendar
11. Subject-to-change note
Syllabus Essentials: Objectives and Learning Taxonomies

- Backward design (see Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, and Richlin, 2006)
- Verb focused
- Learning/thinking taxonomies
  - Bloom's cognitive revised (Heer, n.d.)
  - Others: Krathwohl's affective, SOLO, Fink's, etc. (O’Neill & Murphy, 2010)

Standard of Excellence

Develop (or revise) a syllabus template
- Consider making it a faculty project
- Branding and usability
- Digital integration/interaction
- Contents: institution-level information, minimum required components, regulatory compliance
- Challenge: set a standard for tone (Slattery, 2020)

Standard of Excellence

Considerations
- Research (both primary and secondary sources)
- How does your template reflect...
  - Chickering and Gamson's (1987) 7 good-practice principles?
  - Barr and Tagg's (1995) learning paradigm?
  - Research into student perceptions?
Standard of Excellence

Student perceptions

-Appearances can matter
  ○ Kim & Ekachai, 2020; Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015
-Details of the right kind especially seem to matter
  ○ Garavalia et al., 2000; Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015; Saville et al., 2010
-Tone matters
  ○ Harnish & Bridges, 2011; Richmond et al., 2016; Stowell et al., 2018

Syllabus Currency and Review

Good practices

- Annual review for minimal compliance
- Incorporate into faculty review/assessment
- Syllabus fair or other workshop
- Include syllabi review in program evaluations

Leverage for excellence

- Develop a syllabus rubric
  ○ Baseline (“essentials” above, sources)
  ○ Excellence (Richmond et al., 2019; Stanny et al., 2015)
- Regularly use rubric(s) and track progress (Stanny et al., 2015; Welsh, 2000)
References
See references in a [supplemental document here](#)