Creating Transparent and Engaging Syllabi

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Why is this important?
Goals and functions of a syllabus

- Contract between you and students (expectations for each)
- Communication device (tone & clarity)
- A learning tool (learning tips and strategies)
What to include

• Basic course information
• Basic instructor information
• Texts, readings, and other materials
• Course schedule or outline
• Expected learning outcomes
• Assessment methods
• Criteria for grade determination
• Course/instructor policies (attendance/tardiness; missed or late assignments or exams; academic dishonesty; classroom incivility; class participation; ADA compliance; religious holiday observances)
• Optional: General study tips; list of available resources
Required Information

• E.g., Title IX; "Campus Carry"; ADA statement; p. 53 of the Faculty Handbook
Syllabus Design

Templates are available online

Sample template (WUSTL)

So are checklists

Sample syllabus checklist (WUSTL)
Syllabus Tone: Encouraging vs. Punishing

• **Encouraging**
  • Warm, inviting, personal tone
  • Conveys helpful, clear information
  • Sample

• **Punishing**
  • Commanding, impersonal tone
  • USE OF ALL CAPS!
  • Sample

• Research has shown that students are more likely to approach a professor in a course that uses a syllabus with an encouraging tone; effect is largest on underclassmen and first-generation college students (Ishiyama & Hartlaub, 2002)
Aligning the course syllabus: Course Objectives, goals/outcomes, and assignments

• **Course Objectives**
  • Purpose of the course; intentions of professor; often numerous and detailed

• **Student Learning Outcomes**
  • "Product"-focused; statements that describe measurable knowledge/skills
  • Effective outcome-statements specify and action by the students that is
    • Observable.
    • Measurable.
    • Done by the students (rather than the faculty member).
    • Start by writing, "The student will....."
Using Bloom’s Taxonomy to design course objectives

- Remember
- Understand
- Apply
- Analyze
- Evaluate
- Create

- Recognizing and recalling facts
- Understanding what the facts mean
- Applying the facts, rules, concepts, and ideas
- Breaking down information into component parts
- Judging the value of information or ideas
- Combining parts to make a new whole

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Using Fink’s Taxonomy to design course objectives

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN
- Becoming a better student
- Inquiring about a subject
- Self-directing learners

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
- Understanding and remembering:
  - Information
  - Ideas

APPLICATION
- Skills
- Thinking:
  - Critical, creative, & practical thinking
- Managing projects

CARING
- Developing new feelings
- Interests
- Values

HUMAN DIMENSION
- Learning about:
  - Nse & Others

INTEGRATION
- Connecting:
  - Ideas
  - People
  - Realms of life
Your Turn!