Creating Transparent and Engaging Syllabi

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Center for Teaching and Learning

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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
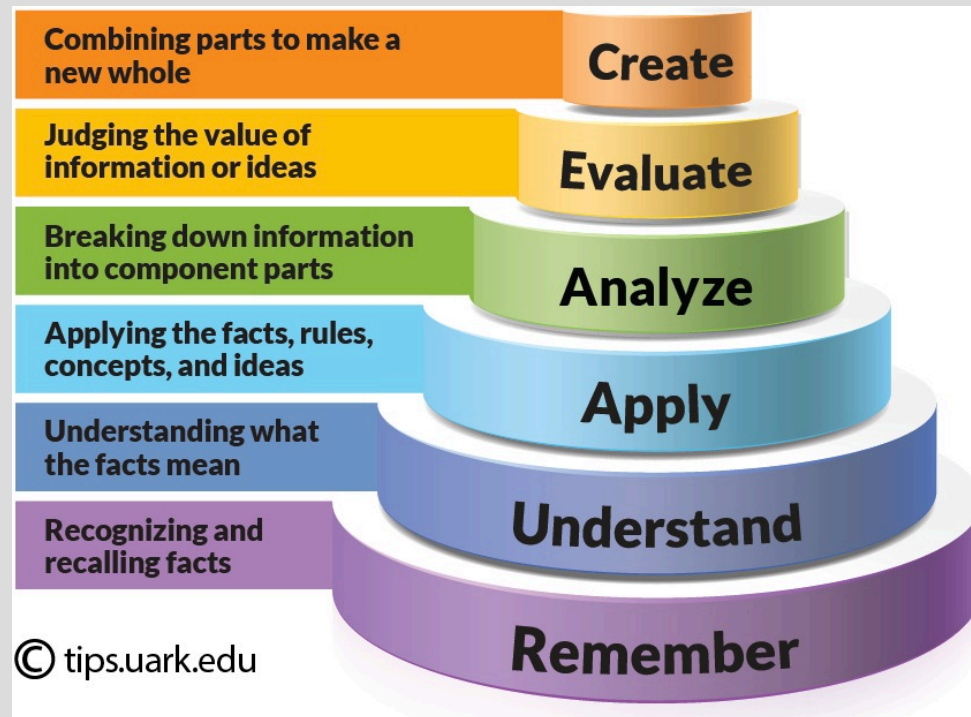
- **Course Objectives**
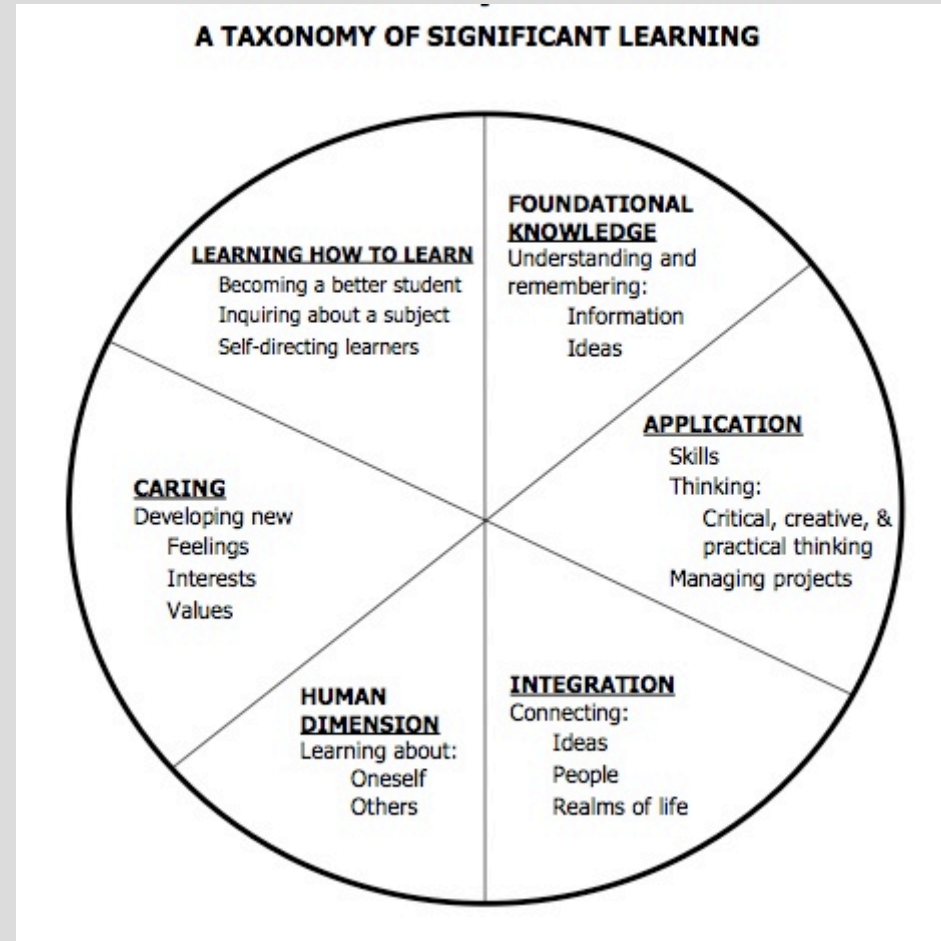 - Purpose of the course; intentions of professor; often numerous and detailed
- **Student Learning Outcomes**
  - "Product"-focused; statements that describe measurable knowledge/skills
  - Effective outcome-statements specify and action by the students that is
    - Observable.
    - Measurable.
    - Done by the students (rather than the faculty member).
    - Start by writing, "The student will....."

Using Bloom's Taxonomy to design course objectives

Using Fink's Taxonomy to design course objectives

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
Understanding and remembering:
Information
Ideas

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

INTEGRATION
Connecting:
Ideas
People
Realms of life

HUMAN DIMENSION
Learning about:
Oneself
Others

CARING
Developing new
Feelings
Interests
Values

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

Your Turn!