RESOURCES FOR COURSE AND SYLLABUS DESIGN

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Contents of This Packet

Lesnick, A., & Wilson, C. (2020). Creating and Rethinking Syllabi:
https://www.brynmawr.edu/tli/syllabusdesign
Here is a sign-up link for the summer workshops connected to this resource.

Pistone, Amy. (2019). Creating Inclusive Syllabi
https://www.amypistone.com/2019-scs-workshop-centering-the-margins-creating-inclusive-syllabi/

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles for Syllabus Design
http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/planning_syllabus

Volk, S. (2015). The Dual Life of a Syllabus
http://languages.oberlin.edu/blogs/ctie/2015/08/03/the-dual-life-of-a-syllabus/

Sinor, J., & Kaplan, M. Creating Your Syllabus
Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2_1

N.B. re Gender-Neutral Language: All of these resources are drawn from published and informal texts created by scholars and students. I have not changed the pronouns in the published texts but have included bracketed gender-neutral pronouns in unpublished texts.

Bain, K. (2004). "Critical Questions to Ask About Your Course"
Questions taken from Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do.*

1. What big questions will my course help students answer, or what skills, abilities, or qualities will it help them develop, and how will I encourage my students' interest in these questions and abilities?

2. What reasoning abilities must students have or develop to answer the questions that the course raises?

3. What mental models are students likely to bring with them that I will want them to challenge? How can I help them construct that intellectual challenge?

4. What information will my students need to understand in order to answer the important questions of the course and challenge their assumptions? How will they best obtain that information?

5. How will I help my students who have difficulty understanding the questions and using evidence and reason to answer them?

6. How will I confront my students with conflicting problems (maybe even conflicting claims about truth) and encourage them to grapple (perhaps collaboratively) with the issues?

7. How will I find out what they know already and what they expect from the course, and how will I reconcile any differences between my expectations and theirs?

8. How will I help students learn to learn, to examine and assess their own learning and thinking, and to read more effectively, analytically, and actively?

9. How will I find out how students are learning before assessing them, and how will I provide feedback before—and separate from—any assessment of them?

10. How will I communicate with students in a way that will keep them thinking?

11. How will I spell out the intellectual and professional standards I will be using in assessing students' work, and why do I use those standards? How will I help students learn to assess their own work using those standards?

12. How will the students and I best understand the nature, progress, and quality of their learning?

13. How will I create a natural critical learning environment in which I embed the skills and information I wish to teach in assignments (questions and tasks) that students will find fascinating—authentic tasks that will arouse curiosity, challenge students to rethink their assumptions and examine their mental models of reality? How will I create a safe environment in which students can try, fail, receive feedback, and try again?

Particular Considerations Regarding Remote Teaching and Learning

These recommendations were gathered from pedagogical partnership program directors and student partners who worked with faculty members at nine different institutions through the shift to online teaching and learning in Spring-2020. See this more expanded resource: https://lacol.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/9-7-20-Student-generated-List-of-Resources-Antiracist-Pedagogy-and-Remote-Teaching-and-Learning.pdf .

"Be present...be communicative...be flexible...be encouraging." -Student Partner, Florida Gulf Coast University

Start with and Sustain the Human

"Be intentional about checking in with your students not only on their academics, but their well-being and stability of where they are living/staying as well. Show genuine care and understanding, and ask students how you can best be a support to them during the period of online learning." -Student Partner, Bryn Mawr College

Resources and strategies:
- Consult resources on trauma-informed teaching: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VrMrpeY73yKuaM84hceEdu42EAGlUfhU
- Begin with a questionnaire or survey that invites students to share what they are comfortable sharing about their living/studying situation, their state of mind/mental health, their access to technology and resources.
- If students are living in different time zones, consider how to make course meetings and activities accessible and flexible (more on this below).
- Recognize that different students will be experiencing these times in different ways, acknowledge that, and provide the support and guidance you can throughout the semester.

Embrace Equitable and Accessible Practices

Embracing practices that are equitable and accessible is always important, especially when inequities and lack of access are exacerbated by the pandemic and the different contexts and circumstances students experience in remote learning.

Just a few suggestions and resources:
- Offer flexibility (especially around participation)
- Record lectures, including if they happen live over Zoom
- Consider ways to check in with your classes and/or individual students
- Engage in regular communication with students, including providing feedback
- Here's a resource of accessible practices you might find helpful (Note: this was not created with remote learning in mind): https://udlbico.wixsite.com/udlbico

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Offer Students Choices

With so many things unknown right now, and everyone's lives looking so different, the ability to choose can be really powerful for students.

Examples of giving students choices:
- Different options for assessments, such as exams, essays, creative work, etc.
    - Students may have different goals for what they aim to get out of a class, so this offers the option to learn what most aligns with their goals
- Different ways to participate, including discussion boards and other written options (which may be preferable to shy or introverted students especially)
- Flexible deadlines for submitting completed assignments

Offer Regular Opportunities to Assess Learning Goals

This time can be used as an opportunity to "start looking toward [the] impact on learning as opposed to assigning work to meet the minimum hours needed to work on the class." - Student Partner, Haverford College

- Focus on the goals you want students to achieve and consider the ways to do that under the current circumstances.

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Backward Design: From Course to Class
Steve Volk, 2017

…In the simplest form, "backward design" asks that the planning process begin at the end by identifying the outcomes one seeks, figuring out how one will know if the goals have been achieved, and then planning the activities most likely to achieve the desired ends. It has been an important strategy in instructional design since an influential article by Robert Barr and John Tagg appeared in _Change_ in 1995. Barr and Tagg challenged the way that most faculty thought about their main purpose within the university. The old paradigm, that "a college is an institution that exists to provide instruction," they wrote, has shifted to a new one: "a college is an institution that exists to produce learning." Colleges, they suggested, had been caught in a "means/ends" confusion. To say that the purpose of college was to provide instruction was the equivalent of insisting that the purpose of an auto company was to provide an assembly line. What had gone wrong in higher education was that the means (instruction) had become the ends, whereas its real end point was learning…

Begin at the End
…Backward planning begins, as the name implies, at the end, by asking that we define the broadest learning goals we have for students in that particular class. What do we want them to have achieved when the semester ends? What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do we want them to have learned, practiced, or considered? Obviously, these will vary by discipline, course level, student preparation and other factors, but these questions provide a basic framework for backward planning….

Determine the Evidence Needed to Demonstrate the Achievement of Outcomes
…Having specified the desired outcomes, you need a way to determine whether students have achieved those outcomes, and at what level: you need assessment tools that give you the evidence needed to allow you (and your students) to demonstrate competence or mastery in the outcome areas you find most important. Staying with history for the moment: having determined that the evaluation of primary sources was an important learning outcome, if I didn't design an assignment that required students to read and evaluate primary sources, I wouldn't be able to know if they had met one of my key learning outcomes. Figuring out whether students have achieved a level of competence in terms of subject matter knowledge, by the way, is rarely an issue, for the most standard assessments are exams based on content. But assessing important skills or dispositions often falls through the cracks…

Read the entire blog with multiple, helpful links regarding effective ways to design courses:

https://steven-volk.blog/2017/02/27/backward-design-from-course-to-class/

The 3 Essential Functions of Your Syllabus, Part 1

Your plan for your class is more than a contract with your students

By James M. Lang FEBRUARY 23, 2015
The Chronicle of Higher Education
http://chronicle.com/article/The-3-Essential-Functions-of/190243/

Our campus teaching center recently invited a brave group of student tutors to share their views on effective teaching with our faculty. The four tutors reported what they had heard from students about course designs and teaching practices that seemed to help, and ones that seemed to interfere with learning. Three recurrent themes in the tutors' remarks caught my attention.

First, they suggested that students needed more help in seeing the large organizational sweep of a course. Undergraduates who came to the tutoring center often had no idea how the first week of the semester in a class connected to the last, or even how different units related to one another. For many students, courses appear less as logical progressions than as, to quote the American writer Elbert Hubbard, "one damn thing after another." So course designs that might seem so clear and elegant to us as faculty members, apparently, do not always appear so lucid to our students.

Second, the tutors said faculty members needed to be much more transparent in their teaching. Students may not see the reasoning behind why Monday is a lecture and Wednesday a discussion, and how our expectations for those very distinct pedagogical models might differ.

Some of the tutors even reported being confused about what they should take away from class discussions, or how they fit into the larger picture of a course. Class discussions that sparkle with life and energy, and that we view as triumphs of great teaching, might just seem pointless and confusing to students.

Finally, the tutors suggested that we could do a better job of sharing our excitement about our disciplines. "We know you have passion for the course material," one of the panelists said, "but students don't always see that in classes. I know that when professors get really excited about what they are teaching, it makes me more curious and interested to find out about it." Without that contagious energy from the professor, they noted, it was especially hard to become motivated in required or introductory courses.

I came away from the gathering with a lot of ideas, but the most immediate conclusion I drew was: It's time to rethink my syllabus. A more thoughtful approach to this essential classroom document, and to my use of it throughout the semester, could help alleviate the three major concerns articulated by those tutors.

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The "learning syllabus." In this two-part series on the creation and use of what I will call a "learning syllabus" in college and university courses, I want to argue for three essential functions that a syllabus should play in any course. Those three functions do not exhaust the list of what a syllabus should contain or accomplish, but thinking about the implications of these three things will go a long way toward populating your syllabus with the standard material it should have and, at the same time, add elements that will support student learning and that we can return to over and over again throughout the semester.

Too often I hear of the syllabus spoken of as a contract, and I understand that it has a contractual function. But surely we can do better than handing out a contract to our students on the first day of class. Ultimately the syllabus should serve the same purpose as every other aspect of the course: It should help students learn. Consider the following three principles as driving a learning approach to this essential course document.

Make promises. The "promising syllabus" is a concept based on the research of Ken Bain. He's argued for years that the syllabus should be a place to demonstrate your energy and excitement for the course content. Because this document often represents the first official meeting between your students and your course material, it can be an ideal moment to help them recognize the value of the content and stimulate their interest in learning it.

Bain developed the notion of a promising syllabus by looking at the syllabi of dozens of highly effective and award-winning faculty members. What he saw there, he explains in his 2004 book *What the Best College Teachers Do,* were syllabi in which faculty members would "lay out the promises or opportunities that the course offered to students. What kind of questions would it help students answer? What kind of intellectual, physical, emotional, or social abilities would it help them develop?" The syllabus "represented an invitation to a feast, giving students a strong sense of control over whether they accepted."

Does your syllabus offer students an invitation to an intellectual feast? Are you promising students that—if they put in the required work—your course will help them gain deep new insights into life? Or valuable skills that will benefit them throughout their careers? Or knowledge that will enable them to succeed in their chosen professions?

Or, instead, does your syllabus offer some version of the statement "In this course we will cover … , " which is the syllabus equivalent of presenting your lectures in a dull monotone, in a darkened room, from behind a podium?

You no doubt believe in the value of your discipline and your course. You believe it has something incredibly valuable to offer to your students. The challenge of the learning syllabus is to convey that value to students. You want to convince them, in that initial meeting, that learning in your course, if they put in the effort, could change their lives for the better. A learning syllabus exudes the enthusiasm that will stimulate the curiosity of students.

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Orient your students. Your syllabus, through its course description or schedule, should help students recognize the course's larger organizational framework and continue to see it throughout the semester. Students should be able to pull out their syllabus in any class period and use it to help identify where the course has been, where it stands now, and where it is headed.

That can happen in different ways. Some faculty members like to plot out the course on the syllabus in great detail, including the topics and readings covered in each class session, the due dates for homework and other assignments, and the dates of all quizzes and examinations. Predicting all of that before a course even begins can be a difficult and time-consuming task, but it does help students envision the whole course from the outset of the semester. And as the tutors explained, that also helps students plan their schedules effectively. Dropping an unexpected exam or assignment date on students midsemester might mean that those who have carefully planned out their studying time around work and extracurriculars now have to rearrange everything in their lives to accommodate your late decision.

Still, in some cases it may be best to leave room for flexibility on a syllabus. Where I live, we have had three vast snowstorms in the past three weeks, each of which entailed a day of class cancellations. Faculty members who had mapped out their schedules in intricate detail are now fumbling a bit. Likewise, faculty members should be flexible enough in their planning to accommodate students' problems or events within or outside of the class.

But aside from the question of how much you want to pin down the dates, the key to this principle is laying out the content of the course in ways that enable students to see the learning arc. Undoubtedly the topics of your course build on one another throughout the semester. Does the course also divide up into logical units? Do certain topics recur from one week to the next? Can you find ways to indicate those kinds of progressions, divisions, or cycles on your syllabus?

New learners in a subject area typically need help seeing frameworks and big pictures. A learning syllabus can help them acquire that vision from the first day of the semester.

Be transparent. So much of what we heard from the tutors on the panel, and so much of what I hear from my student advisees, is puzzlement: Why are we doing *this?*

Our tutors reported their bafflement, for example, about how to approach and learn from class discussions. Were they supposed to take notes on what their classmates said? Were they responsible for things their classmates said on exams? How about seemingly casual comments made by the professor during the discussion? Should they write those down?

Students may have such questions about almost everything we do in class: Why do we take quizzes? What's the purpose of these presentations? Why should I have to take a cumulative final exam? Why do you grade participation?

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The rationale for all of those decisions might be clear enough in *your* mind, but how often do you answer those questions for your students? If they never hear answers, they might see your course practices and assessments as hoops to jump through or boxes to tick instead of opportunities to learn and improve.

So consider the syllabus as a place to set down in writing the rationale for what you do in the course. The learning syllabus should be a transparent syllabus, a place where your students can find answers to the questions that might arise when they are struggling with a difficult assignment or wondering why they should trudge across a cold snowy campus for a discussion session on a Friday morning.

Creating such a learning syllabus, though, won't get you very far if students don't pay close attention to it. So the syllabus represents the place to put—in concrete terms—the incredible value of your course, the organization of its parts, and the logic behind it. But a true learning syllabus does not simply reside in the paper or electronic folders of your students; it sparks and maintains a continuing conversation about your course, and about the learning of your students.

Next month, in the final part of this series, we'll consider how the learning syllabus should form a regular part of your course, as a living document that can inspire and guide students throughout the semester.

James M. Lang is on sabbatical this year as director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and a professor of English at Assumption College, in Worcester, Mass. His most recent book is Cheating Lessons: Learning From Academic Dishonesty. Follow him on Twitter at @LangOnCourse.

The 3 Essential Functions of Your Syllabus, Part 2

So students "never read the syllabus"? Here are ways to ensure they do

By James M. Lang MARCH 30, 2015
The Chronicle of Higher Education
http://chronicle.com/article/The-3-Essential-Functions-of/228909/

I have the mixed fortune of living in a city that, as of this writing, had the highest total snowfall in the United States this year (woohoo Worcester, Massachusetts!). As a skier, I welcome snow; as a homeowner, I have been both lamenting the massive drifts blocking the streets and driveways of our city and cringing at the thought of the water that will inundate our basements in the coming thaw.

In anticipation of that flood, I recently pulled a trunk of old books and papers out of the most vulnerable part of my basement, only to discover a lost trove of documents from my college years. I

saved much more from my undergraduate and graduate courses than I realized: notebooks, handouts, papers I wrote, and even some syllabi.

The latter documents, now 25 years old, were a fascinating read: They tended to be bare-bones statements of policy, required readings, and due dates. They presented a stark contrast to the syllabi that I use with my own students now: multipage documents with their detailed course descriptions, learning objectives, and schedules.

That evolution of the syllabus was not particular to me. Linda B. Nilson identified it as a trend in her 2010 book, *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors.* "Over the past few decades," she wrote, "the syllabus has evolved from a short, sterile list of required readings, topics, assignments, and dates to an elaborate, detailed blueprint for a carefully constructed learning experience. … It is rare for an official document to undergo such a radical transformation so quickly."

As you might surmise from Part 1 of this two-part series on how to create what I call a "learning syllabus," this transformation strikes me as a positive development. An effective syllabus can stimulate interest in a course, help students see how it develops and coheres, and provide them with the rationale for the decisions we have made about what and how we want them to learn. Those three essential functions of a syllabus, which I outlined in Part 1, can render it into a document that promotes learning rather than one that simply states contractual obligations between teacher and student.

But whenever the topic of syllabi arises in faculty discussions, and especially when I make the argument that we can use our syllabi to promote learning in our courses, the same objection always arises: Students don't read them. Why should I waste my time making a syllabus into a learning-oriented document, faculty members complain, when students will just glance at it, stick it in their folders, and never look at it again?

That's a legitimate concern. After he read Part 1 of my series, Joe Incandela, an inspiring former professor of mine whose religious-studies class I still remember with fondness, sent me a link to his current online syllabus. It's an absolutely gorgeous document, one that fosters and promotes learning on every page. But it also stretches to more than 30 pages (although the wide array of graphics contributes to that bulky total). Will student engagement with his lovingly crafted syllabus repay all of the time and effort that he put into it?

In answer to that question, I want to finish this series by arguing that a lengthy syllabus can be worth every page — *if* we think about it as a living document, one that continues to inspire and aid students throughout the semester. And it will be a constant source of guidance if, as I recommended in February, you use your syllabus to outline the frame of your course and help students see the arc of intellectual development they will undergo during the semester.

Some faculty members like to think about a syllabus as a map to the course. But whether we are talking about maps on paper or on our phones, we don't look at them once before the trip starts and then put them away. We continue to refer to them (or listen to them) throughout our trip. A map can help get you from one place to the next, but it can also help orient you when you get lost, give you a bird's-eye view of the place you are visiting, and show you how near (and far) other potential destinations might be. I even like to keep maps of foreign cities I have visited hanging around my desk or office for a while after the trip, and glance at them in nostalgic moments, reminding myself of where I have been and where I might still like to visit.

To that end, here are four ways to help your students continue to interact with your syllabus throughout the semester.

The syllabus quiz, Part 1. This idea comes from Linda Nilson's *Teaching at Its Best* book. She argues that a syllabus quiz does not have to be as simplistic and punitive as it might sound. If you hand out and review your syllabus on the first day of class, you can assign a more careful reading of it for the first night of homework. That assignment will be especially worthwhile if your syllabus includes a thorough description of the course as well as its objectives, organization, and logic.

You can quiz your class on any aspect of the syllabus, but Nilson makes a more interesting suggestion. Ask students short-answer questions designed to help them connect their own learning objectives with those of the course: "Which of the learning objectives for this course are most important to you personally, and why?" or "Of the four papers assigned, which are you least (or most) looking forward to writing, and why?" Those kinds of questions, Nilson writes, can "motivate your students to think about the value of your course to them personally and professionally."

Don't feel obligated, by the way, to use the first class to review the syllabus. You might choose instead to create an opening-day activity that demonstrates the fascinating nature of the discipline or the course, and let students know you'll review the syllabus next time. In that case, you could still hand out the syllabus at the end of class, and ask them either to answer questions about it, or bring in their own questions, in that second class.

Detailed learning objectives. Many faculty members are already required to spell out their learning objectives on the syllabus. I receive an email from an administrator each semester reminding me to put them there. But those objectives strike me as likely to zip right out of the minds of your students after that first-class review — unless you explain why they should care and keep caring.

Nilson's quiz questions are one approach. A second route: Set detailed objectives for every assignment and even for a specific class session, and link them to the larger learning objectives of the course. For example, instead of simply putting down page numbers on the syllabus for the next reading assignment, take a few minutes to note the purpose of each new reading or set of problems. Use language that connects the daily work to the larger course goals. If you scroll down to the

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schedule section of Joe Incandela's syllabus, you will see that each day's entry includes a set of "Homework Learning Outcomes" and "Seminar Learning Outcomes."

One of the major differences that separates expert learners (faculty) from novice learners (students) is the ability to see the frameworks in addition to the individual pieces. The frameworks seem obvious and natural to you; they do not appear so to your students. Just as you can use your class schedule to lay out the intellectual structure of your course, you can use it to make transparent and continually engage students with the learning objectives of the course.

The blank syllabus. If we want students to learn for mastery, rather than simply for a grade, we have to help them feel as if they are in control. You can find research on the importance of this principle in a range of books on teaching and learning in higher education, from James Zull's *The Art of Changing the Brain* to the multi-authored *How Learning Works.*Students who feel controlled or manipulated by the classroom environment tend to check boxes rather than truly engage with the material.

So consider leaving a portion of your syllabus open for students to help create. I first heard of this idea from Chris Walsh, an assistant professor of English at Boston University, who spoke about his technique of allowing students to peruse their anthologies in the opening weeks of the semester and help select the readings for his American literature survey.

But if you can't cede that kind of control, you can find other ways to give students a shared role in course creation: Offer a menu of possible assignments and ask the class to pick the ones that will count for a grade. Give students a choice of how to weigh assignments you have selected. Or give them the responsibility for offering you a list of possible final projects and choose one for them to complete. No matter how you do this, explain that their choices have to align with the learning objectives of the course, and require them to state the connections and rationale for their decisions.

The syllabus quiz, Part 2. Another clear principle that emerges from learning research is that students need repeated, spaced exposure to course topics. In *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens,* Benedict Carey says "spaced-out study is as close to a freebie as anything in learning science." It's cheap and easy, and can be incorporated into any course.

So every few weeks, end class with a different type of syllabus quiz. Stop 10 minutes early, ask students to pull out the syllabus (or pull it up online), and then point to a past topic or reading and ask them to write whatever they remember about it, or write about how it connects to what you covered that day, or what they still need help with. Do that once a week, and you will not only draw students back to the syllabus and provide spaced exposure to your course topics, you will also give them enormous help in preparing for any cumulative exams you might give, since they will be continually revisiting and rethinking earlier course content.

Of course any of these exercises mean students have to bring the syllabus to class every day, or have it open on their devices. Don't be shy about that; make it a requirement. Every time you walk out of

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your hotel room in a foreign city, until you become an expert in its geography, you bring your map (paper or electronic). Your students should do the same.

If you have carefully crafted the syllabus, and want students to read it, then make it part of every class period. They will benefit from that habit more than you might expect — especially if it can help them keep one eye always on the big questions and learning objectives of the course.

James M. Lang is on sabbatical this year as director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and a professor of English at Assumption College, in Worcester, Mass. His most recent book is Cheating Lessons: Learning From Academic Dishonesty. Follow him on Twitter at @LangOnCourse.

What Haverford and Bryn Mawr Students Hope for in Syllabi

This is a list of suggestions compiled from student input. Students majoring in the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences contributed. Of course, student hopes vary, but this set of guidelines offers a glimpse into some students' thinking about syllabi.

1. What do you look/hope for in a syllabus?

Format: Use bullet points and lists; the syllabus needs to be accessible, clear, and concise.

Course Description/Rationale
- A course description and why the professor is teaching it. What is the rationale behind the topic, why are they interested in it, and why should we be interested in it? This doesn't have to be more than a paragraph or 2, but it's always nice to see on the front.
- Summary of the premise of the class & how it relates to current day/world events/why it's important to study
- General perennial questions the course seeks to address (and often not fully answer) - along the lines: of What are the effects of globalization on women's rights? - for a global feminist theory course or perhaps for a philosophy course How does the theory interact with practice?

Formal and Informal Expectations
- An objectives section: Clear class objectives including absence, late, and class participation policies gives me a feel for the professor and lets me know [their] expectations.
- What kind of work does the course involve (assignments, problem-sets, projects, readings, exams) and the work load (how much I'm expected to do every week).
- Expectations about participation, writing, etc. What are the goals of the professor, and what should our goals be?
- If there are general expectations that the prof has for weekly readings or participation, that is helpful. Maybe they want students to focus on a particular element of reading, or come up with

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a couple of focus questions on their own. This can be helpful guidance from week to week--a constant reminder.
- Professor preferences on citation style
- A note on flexibility. How flexible are due dates? What happens when you have an emergency? Even if it's as much as emailing before the day that an assignment is due, that can be helpful to see. Also, if there is no flexibility, that should be noted.

Semester-long Schedule
- A tentative course outline by date (the more specific, the better; the best syllabi have every class mapped out)
- A schedule of due dates of major assignments and explanation: 3 short papers spaced out evenly? 1 long paper due at the end? weekly response papers? I think that when figuring out a workload, students really appreciate this information.
- A schedule of each week, even if it's just "Week of September 5/7" or something like that--with a schedule of readings, articles, and a note that they may change. During the first class, some professors will always say, "This schedule may change and we may have to adjust." That creates an environment of flexibility and understanding in learning. Obviously some will hold themselves to very high expectations to remain on the predicted schedule for 3 months, but then when it's absolutely necessary to make an adjustment, everyone (prof and students) can get frustrated--never a good thing!

Assignments
- A basic outline of assignments that might be regular or weekly--perhaps the response paper is due on Thursday at noon. That can be stated once, though for the first couple of weeks it could be helpful to send an email reminder.
- Important assignments bolded: Distinguishes ahead of time what the big assignments are and lets me know what is important
- Subheadings for the assignments: These let me know what the professor was thinking when they were assigning the material.
- Not simply Essay Due, but Student Selected Topic, Essay on Machiavelli (or essay discussing a general theme of the class ... or research essay involving primary source documents)- alluding to the professor's particular expectations and goals (if they can somehow relate this to the learning goals for the class this also makes this a tight connection- and I am more likely to understand what they mean).

Guidelines for Reading
- Number of pages of the reading: Lets me know how much reading I will have each night
- Focusing questions for the subject matter or for the reading can also be very fruitful. I have used syllabi when reading assignments to ask questions, focus on given themes, generate essay prompts or to prepare for exams. Using syllabi to synthesize class material after I have been exposed to it in class makes me feel as if I am on the right track- developing my self and keeping up with the pace of the course.

Assessment and Evaluation:

- An outline for how I am to be assessed in the course (for example, what percentage each assignment is worth in my final grade), and an explanation of any special policies the professor may have (for example, guidelines on re-writes and such). Not having a good idea of how you are doing in a course can be very stressful, and it is very nice to be able to keep track of your grade.

Resources

- While this may seem obvious to some professors, posting a syllabus online is very helpful (some professors still don't do this!). The document handed out on the first day is easily lost or buried in other papers, and students may want to frequently check it throughout the semester.
- Citations for the readings: It lets me know the context and background of the reading and from where it came. This is helpful when analyzing the text.
- Office hours and contact information are also always helpful to include.
- A listing of teaching assistants, PLI's, and extra help sessions if they have been scheduled, etc.

Process of Introducing the Course and Syllabus

- It is helpful when the syllabus is introduced and gone over a bit in class as opposed to just being handed out as students leave on the first day. Helpful too when this is a document that is revisited as a class during the semester.
- It can be helpful and interesting for the professor to talk a bit about themselves--it develops the idea that they're human but also illustrates their approach and how they came to consider and do work in their field.
- Making a list of aspirations and expectations can also be helpful to do as a class exercise in relation to the syllabus and course introduction.

2. What should NOT go on a syllabus?

- I don't think there is ever too much that can be included, although a document nearing or over four pages can seem very overwhelming.
- A detailed outline of every assignment if they are different from each other. It can be overwhelming to see directions for each of the three large papers we have to do, or a page-long explanation of how papers will be graded. These can be noted (a short sentence about how this will be covered in class).
- An obvious lack of trust in students' ability to keep up, interest in the course, expectations for the class experience, knowledge of the subject, etc. Tone can be very obvious in a syllabus, and can create an important impression for students on the first day or during the first week of the semester. It's meaningful to see a classroom community growing right from the beginning-- where it's not just a teacher/student relationship, but a collegial colleague-colleague relationship.

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- "Office Hours TBA" - This happens quite frequently, and sometimes just a simple, by appointment only, or, will be announced from week to week, is especially helpful. In some courses, TBA has come to mean "rarely," which can dissuade students by the middle of the term. Also, it's great to put--if the door is open come in, or if you want to make an appointment, I am always available by email.
- When talking about communication with students, it's not necessary to include a story about the student who emailed at midnight the night before an exam. I think that the majority of students know that it's not appropriate (or it can be a part of the in class explanation run-through of the syllabus). If the professor has certain expectations about emailing, then they should definitely list them (will not respond after 9 pm, they check their email in the morning, etc. etc. if it's possible), but I remember one syllabus in particular where the teacher didn't seem to want to hear from students, or was much more accessible in office hours rather than email.

3. What kinds of larger contextual considerations faculty should be aware of in designing syllabi/courses and assignments (lull or crunch times during the semester; rhythms of the semester [when there should be what kind of work in a course and why]; etc.)

Consider how best to support the rhythm and the development of student learning
- I like when a professor uses assignment "scaffolding" — for instance when there are several due dates for different phases of a larger project. The most valuable projects come out of a process where a student can receive criticism and edit accordingly along the way.
- I think that consistency throughout the semester is also important. I remember one history course where the professor assigned one paper between the beginning of the spring semester and spring break (3-5 pg?), a midterm paper (5-7?), between spring break and the end of the semester (3-5?), a different sort of paper due the last day, and a final paper (8-10 pg?). It was wonderfully spaced out, and I saw the two shorter papers as practice runs--I think they were more focused on our readings. Nothing was too excessive, and there was a gradual development of assignments during the fourth month term. It functioned well in comparison to a long midterm paper (10-12 pg) and a long final paper (12-15)--when there wasn't as much guidance.
- If the professor chooses to have work due on the last day of classes, as well as the last day of finals, students should know what the differences are between the two assignments (paper and paper, paper and exam, etc.). Large papers are often due the last day of classes. Also, in the same way that thinking about working during breaks can be daunting, papers due in the middle of the finals period can be daunting as well. However, having a paper due on Dec. 14 rather than the 18, or May 10 rather than the 17, can help students get it done and flesh things out earlier. Helpful explanations are that the prof needs to get started earlier b/c of senior work, they don't want the whole thing dragging on--students can really get caught up in one assignment. Having a rough draft or an outline due at the end of classes, perhaps, and then the final product due in the middle of finals, is a nice way to space things out.

Students have multiple/various needs and responsibilities
- Consider level of experience of the students, is the class mostly freshmen and sophomores or juniors and seniors, and if the students need more time to complete difficult readings or might be assisted with having rough drafts due or having a required trip the writing center.
- Remember that students have other commitments, classes, and work.
- Consider take home finals or a mix of finals or papers/ presentations.

Keep in mind campus and cultural events
- Halloween, May Day, Parents Weekend and other religious or celebratory holidays and events are important to consider.
- Faculty should be aware of the days that many other classes are canceled (usually the day before Thanksgiving), and campus-wide events/traditions. For instance, it would not be wise to hold a review session for the final on May Day, nor would be it a good idea to administer an exam during Hell Week.
- I think professors should definitely consider the traditions when creating syllabi.

Typical crunch times
- Faculty should always include guidelines of when is the latest or maximum amount of time they need if students have "crunch time" with other classes and might need extensions.
- Faculty should be aware of peak exam times (the weeks before fall break, thanksgiving, and spring break), although many courses have their exams at different times too.
- The bulk of assignments are usually due before or after breaks. Learning to add variety to the schedule can be very helpful (having things due two-three weeks after/before break) can help students ease the burden of too many assignments at the same time.
- I've noticed that most students don't like their exams or projects due directly after a break because studying can then consume what should be their time off.
  - I am not in school mode during breaks so I am not giving my best work but instead working or studying the day before class.
  - I personally hate having large assignments due immediately after vacations, especially Thanksgiving. While many assignments are due before breaks, it makes for a far more relaxing vacation if the majority of the work is due beforehand. In addition, our breaks and time with our families are so short, and it is sad when this time is made more stressful by assignments.
  - I really dislike exams or papers due after fall break or thanksgiving as I feel that is a waste of break.
  - Over breaks I think it is best to honor the fact that it is a break and students probably need it but I think it is sometimes nice extra prep time for a larger project and I wouldn't object to some reading or initial research during these times.
  - Although it can be difficult to think about during fall break, having a midterm or a paper due the week after fall break, or the last week in October, reduces the pre-break stress. This is especially true for a shorter paper that can be difficult to fit into a midterm study schedule. The same probably goes for spring break.

- The last day of classes is always a very difficult day. Many students have finals that day, or have to complete major assignments before the end of the semester. I would think it would be kind to have some of these assignments pushed forward, so that students do not feel all of that stress the last day (that day is always the worst of the semester for me).

Some narrative explanations for why these considerations are important:

There are certain classes that one really wants to take or has to take during a particular semester. In those courses, the syllabus doesn't affect my decision to enroll much at all. But, for the other courses/electives that will fill in the rest of my schedule, I look for the course structure to see if it fits with the other classes I'm taking. I want to make sure I don't have too many courses of the same kind so that all my homework involves papers and reading every week. I look for as much information as possible on the syllabus. The more I know ahead of time, the better I feel about taking a course. I don't like to be surprised when I hear that there is assignment coming up that wasn't listed. I always plan out my semester with a comprehensive semester-at-a-glance page for myself that includes all major test and project dates, campus events I'm involved in, and trips off of campus that I may have planned. I want enough information on the syllabus to be able to fill that out.   I also like to see a general list of topics that will be covered weekly and a breakdown of the grading percentages. I'm a lot less likely to take a course where the entire grade rests on just a couple of exams/papers since I prefer to have lots of opportunities to contribute to my grade.   There should be a description about what happens with late assignments (whether they are tolerated, by how much one's grade decreases every hour/day the assignment is late), if redos of assignments are allowed, what happens (if anything) when a student misses class, and how much participation in expected in class.

Sometimes syllabi can be so enormous that students do not have time to read it through completely, and the important information inside is never found. I'd advise professors to be concise in their syllabi, but also detailed in the information that students really want to know (like how they are assessed).

Syllabi should ideally include a detailed overview of class topics and possible assignments/reading (the latter is not always realistic). They should also always have dates specified for when major assignments or exams take place. (Sometimes faculty neglect to put this information in and do not announce them to the last minute).   At the same time, faculty members have different styles. Some follow their syllabus to the mark, while others might go ahead or behind which could cause confusion for the students and render the syllabus useless. For faculty members who do not follow the syllabus exactly, they should design syllabi with estimates in mind of what the topics are and when they expect major projects, exams, papers to be due so students understand there is more flexibility.

Most students like myself, don't know if they are able to discuss the syllabus with the professor, and don't know if they have any agency in possibly altering things that they may find unfair or unreasonable. For example, I had several professors write on their syllabi that they would prefer students to not leave class during a discussion to go to the bathroom. I personally found those comments to be highly minuscule and elementary, and would've preferred for them to either not be on the syllabus or stated informally during class time. Reading it made me feel like I had almost regressed back to high school, and rather awkward around the professor. I would've liked to have raised my hand and asked the prof why they chose to list that on the syllabus, but I felt there was no space to do so. So, it could be cool (probably not entirely possible) for profs to have some sort of discussion with students on syllabi.

Other Resources on Syllabus Development

Lesnick, A., & Wilson, C. (2020). Creating and Rethinking Syllabi:
https://www.brynmawr.edu/tli/syllabusdesign

For more than a decade, the Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) on Bryn Mawr and Haverford's campuses has offered summer syllabus design workshops. Typically, these are offered to incoming faculty, but this summer they will be open to any interested faculty member at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges. Facilitated by Alice Lesnick and Chanelle Wilson, the workshops focus on supporting faculty in developing syllabi that honor diversity, promote equity and inclusion, and spur decolonizing practices of thought. Recognizing that there is no one right way to put together a syllabus, these workshops support exploration of various approaches in the context of the BiCo, and the Summer Syllabus Design Workshops website includes associated readings and example syllabi, together with direct student perspectives, that can inform each faculty member's syllabus design process. You may participate in one, two, or all three workshops. Please complete this form to indicate which workshops you plan to participate in.

Pistone, Amy. (2019). Creating Inclusive Syllabi
https://www.amypistone.com/2019-scs-workshop-centering-the-margins-creating-inclusive-syllabi/

Materials and examples from 2019 SCS Workshop, Centering the Margins: Creating Inclusive Syllabi

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles for Syllabus Design
http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/planning_syllabus

- *Provide multiple means of engagement*: Outline the learning goals and objectives, the relevance of the content, and any opportunities for choice within the course.

- *Provide multiple means of action and expression*: Use the syllabus to communicate regular routines to establish expectations, outline the timing and format of assessments, and offer resources for the management of information.

- *Provide multiple means of representation*: Be explicit about the ways in which students can access content (e.g., textbook, slides, course website, videos) where to find background information and multiple examples.

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Volk, S. (2015). The Dual Life of a Syllabus
http://languages.oberlin.edu/blogs/ctie/2015/08/03/the-dual-life-of-a-syllabus/

"…conceivably the most important (and complicated) teaching document you will prepare each semester and yet, after you hand it out, most students use it for one thing only: to find out the readings assignments or when papers are due or exams scheduled.

The root of the problem is that the syllabus is really two different documents serving two different purposes. On the one hand, it is the most comprehensive guide that you will prepare detailing how you plan to organize a body of information in such a way as to reach your educational goals while having the greatest impact on student learning. On the other, it is seen as a quasi-legal contract that sets out your responsibilities to the students and what they must do in order to successfully complete the course. The first purpose is most often invisible and implicit; the second needs to be explicit and unambiguous…"

Sinor, J., & Kaplan, M. Creating Your Syllabus
Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2_1

"Your syllabus represents both an end and a beginning—a final product of your course planning and a valuable way to introduce yourself and the course to your students. Because your syllabus is one of the few formal, tangible links between you and your students and because it will be referred to throughout the semester, time and energy should be spent on constructing your syllabus. Research indicates that outstanding instruction and a detailed syllabus are directly related (Grunert, 1997). Students will appreciate and respond positively to a syllabus that bears the marks of being well planned…"

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