Syllabus for Online Teaching Considerations

1 What is it?

A syllabus is an agreement between students and the instructor that sets the pace for the course, provides key information, defines assignments and assessments, set expectations for students and the instructors, besides including due dates, and policies.

2 Why is it important?

The syllabus serves as a map and helps create a structure for students with a clear listing of expectations in terms of course delivery, guidelines for class participation, assignments, and communication. It should also be the first stop for students to check if they have any procedural questions. For online courses there needs to be as much specificity as possible simply because you can not easily AND quickly convey misunderstandings.

3 How to do it?

Your department may have specific expectations and templates for information to be included in the syllabus. However, make sure that the following information is included ([See also "Course Management and Learner Guidance"):](#)

- **Instructor information & communication strategy**: name, contact information, ways of communication with the instructor and response time, instructor availability in general. If you will be holding online office hours, provide information (e.g., Skype, Webex).
- **Course information:** course description, the purpose of the course, and how to access the course.
- **Prerequisites** (if any): list of prerequisite skills needed or courses that must be completed prior to enrolling in your course.
- **Course instructional goals:** list of student learning objectives and learning outcomes

- **Course readings & resources:** course text(s) and readings, and additional materials.
- **Assignments and grading:** list of assignments, assessment used, an explanation of grading criteria, grade components.
- **Learning activities:** organization of a learning environment, participation standards (e.g., the frequency of discussion posts), student expectations, and responsibilities.
- **How to succeed in the course:** information on how students can succeed in the course. Include approximate time to be spent completing course activities each week, encourage students to ask questions, tell students to back-up their work.
- **Policies:** general class policies, university policies, academic integrity policies, policies on late submissions and incomplete work, netiquette, accessibilities statements, emergency/weather statements, and diversity statements.
- **Schedule** (may be a separate document): week-by-week schedule with due dates, reading materials assigned per session, activities, and resources to be used. Indicate how time zones impact due dates (11:59 p.m. Purdue time! EST).

Tips and Tricks

- Make all your expectations explicit.
- Review your course description, objectives, and outcomes to ensure they match what is present in the course catalog at your institution.
- Define your role as the instructor and responsibilities towards students.
- Be explicit about instructor availability. For example, "You can expect Dr. R to be in the course on Monday, Thursday, and Saturdays. She also has virtual office hours at 8 p.m. on Thursdays" - this way students understand the instructor is not available 24/7.
- Email the course syllabus before the beginning of the course.

- Create a "Getting Started" folder in your course where you can provide all of the info you would generally provide on the the first day of class in face-to-face environment (e.g., syllabus, course biographies, citation guides, library resources, resources students may use throughout the course).
- Ensure that the syllabus is accessible for students with special needs. (See "Accessibility 101").
- If you modify the syllabus during the course, inform students that a modification has been made via announcements AND email.
- Repeat important information multiple times within the syllabus (e.g. under assignment description and in activity/due date table) AND within the course.
- If a course has multiple sections, make sure that all instructors and TAs have a clear understanding of all points within the syllabus.
- Remind other instructors and TAs to personalize the syllabus (e.g., their contact information) for their section, as applicable.

4 Additional Resources

- **Syllabus Template**, Purdue University.
- **Addt'l sample syllabus statements** from Purdue University.
- **How to create a syllabus**: Advice guide by Kevin Gannon (The Chronicle of Higher Education).
- **Objectives Builder**, Resources for teaching online, Arizona State University.
- Purdue users can contact the **Center for Instructional Excellence** (cie@purdue.edu) for consultations.

5 References

Ko, S., & Rossen, S. *Teaching online: A practical guide (3rd ed)*. New York, NY: Routledge

Slattery, J., & Carlson, J. (2005). Preparing an effective syllabus: Current best practices. *College Teaching, 53*(4), 159-164

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