The Syllabus Evolution: Does the course environment impact the syllabus?

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- Look at your syllabus through the eyes of your students.
- Strategically prioritize the content of your syllabus
- Evaluate the tone – lean toward constructive.
- Begin to develop a mindful strategy for helping students navigate your course.
Most common complaint? Students [people] don't read the syllabus!
Canvas UX > Syllabus

Canvas UX

Jump to Today

Please note that the specifics of this Course Syllabus are subject to change. Instructors, changes and students will be responsible for abiding them. Even if you print this syllabus online version often.

Description

This course provides an introduction to basic concepts in the field you have chosen to semesters, you will be presented with information, interactive exercises, and thought-p
Syllabi, in a blended course, still need to be effective because...some things never change!

- Sets the tone
- Helps motivate students to reach for academic goals
- Planning tool for faculty
- Structuring tool for students – work management
- “Agreement” between faculty and students

The more explicit the course syllabi in terms of number of objectives, content, instructional resources, and grading components the better it enables the processing of the information gained in the learning situation and the students’ final grade performances...

Serafin (1990)
In a blended/online environment, the syllabus is how you introduce yourself to students.

- “The second [behavior] is about immediacy—the extent to which the teacher gives off verbal and nonverbal signals of warmth, friendliness, and liking . . . without [immediacy], teachers are seen as cold, uncaring, and incompetent by their students—as deserving targets of incivilities.”
  
  (Boice, 1996)
...but where are we going?

**Objectives**

What’s worth learning?

**Instruction**

What are the teaching and learning activities?

**Assessment**

Are learning objectives assessed?

Do assessments both reflect and inform instruction?

**SITUATIONAL FACTORS**

What should a Syllabus Contain?

- Faculty information, office hours, required texts, etc.
- Course Goals and Objectives
- Methodology
- Course Calendar and Schedule
- Course Requirements
- Course Policies
- Course Resources

Penn State Faculty Senate Policies for Syllabi

Faculty Senate Policy (43-00) requires that a written (paper or electronic) syllabus must be given to students on or before the first day of class and that the syllabus must include:

- Course goals (broad benchmarks describing general understanding and knowledge domains in the course)
- Course objectives (student skill sets with assessable learning outcomes)
- Contact information for all course instructors
- Location of program
- Examination policy (note evening exam schedule, too, if applicable)
- Grade breakdown by assessment type and percentage
- Required course materials
- Academic integrity statement
- Disability accommodation statement
- Information on available counseling and psychological services

Changes to the syllabus shall also be given to the student in written (paper or electronic) form.
Learning objectives *still* should:

- Reflect essential knowledge, skills or attitudes
- Focus on results of the learning experiences
- Reflect the desired end of the learning experience.
- Answer the questions:
  - If I’m a student in this course, what should I know and be able to do when I leave?
  - If I’m a student in this course, how will I demonstrate my learning?

These are *still* weasel words!

Students will …
1. Learn
2. Know
3. Be aware of
4. Be familiar with
5. Have a firm grasp of
6. Understand
7. Appreciate
**Students will be able to”....**

- Analyze
- Compare
- Critique
- Integrate
- Write
- Design
- Compute

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**Setting the tone and being clear becomes even more important when a syllabus is being shared in an online environment.**

- Be careful and accurate in using pronouns.
- Ask for the behavior you want!
  - Phrase expectations in positive terms.
- Think of your syllabus as the roadmap to that eternal question:  
  
  _How can I get an “A” in this course?_

- Be very clear in how grades will be determined.
  - “Participation”/”Attendance” grading should be clearly described (and administered carefully!)
  - Avoid describing grading in percentages [only] whenever possible.

- Help students understand the benefits of your course.
  
  _Why do I need to know this?_
  
  _Why do you love your course._
The course includes four exams composed of 25 multiple-choice and true/false questions, with each exam worth 100 points. Two 2-page papers will ask you to take a position on an issue and defend it with evidence from class readings and from your experience, each worth 50 points.

If you follow the advice I give you on how to do well on these graded experiences, you can earn up to 500 points (and an A in the course!).

- Four exams = 400
- Two 2-page papers = 100
- Total points = 500

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class participation is based on attendance and class discussions. If you're not there, you can't share. Each absence will result in a 10% reduction of the Presence grade. Ten absences will result in a 0 for the Presence, which reduces the final grade by one letter grade. Cell phones should not be on in class; please turn them off or on vibrate, so ringing does not interrupt class time. Ringing, beeping, and any other disturbance results in a tardy, and two tardies are the equivalent of an absence. A tardy also occurs when you disturb class time by arriving more than fifteen minutes after the beginning of class. One absence (or two tardies) will be excused. Those with perfect attendance will receive a grade of 110%. 
Course Requirements:

...A summary may not be handed in late unless you were absent for that class and have an excuse from a doctor or a funeral director....

This Course Is For:

...people who like to think and want to improve their ability to think and to write.

This Course Is Not For:

...those who don’t attend class faithfully and/or don’t make a good effort to fulfill the course requirements and to learn. Although I am a very nice guy, you and I will clash if this description fits you. If it does, you should go waste your time and money with some other professor: I’m definitely old-fashioned about education and I’m not the guy for you.
We assume you will attend every class prepared to discuss the readings; any student who does not will be in peril of being dropped from the course. Our readings are diverse, and in our views not especially demanding. If, however, you find yourself overwhelmed or encounter any sort of unexpected difficulty, be certain to get in touch with either one of us; part of being a college student is to anticipate difficult patches in a semester and to make arrangements with your instructors, who are almost always sympathetic.

**Attendance and Syllabus Change Policy:**

It is extremely important that you attend class. Your attendance and class participation will be used as a guide to make decisions in borderline cases. The syllabus can be changed at any time as needed by the instructor. Any such change will be announced in class and also through ANGEL.
This course provides an introduction to how the world wide web utilizes new media technologies. Students will acquire a sound conceptual understanding of how simple to complex web sites are constructed, and how this knowledge can be applied in their professional career. Knowledge gained in this course will dovetail into Information Sciences and Technology Associate degree options.

There are three major course objectives: (1) students will be able to perform a written critical evaluation of any web site, using the criteria listed below for evaluation; (2) students will be able to develop a written and/or electronic comprehensive proposal for the design/redesign of a web site; and (3) students will collaborate in meaningful, deep discussions of the topics listed above with peers, experts, and faculty via interactive technologies, as demonstrated by chat logs or other interaction records.

Students will construct a simple web page that exemplifies the weekly topics. This web page may be built over the course of the initial 10 weeks as new topics are introduced, or the students may construct separate examples for each topic area. In some cases (such as e-commerce) the students may construct a non-functional prototype as opposed to a fully functional site. A quiz on the weekly topic(s) will occur at the end of each week. The quiz will be derived from the assigned readings and chats. This quiz will be on-line and automatically scored.

Students will develop a comprehensive proposal for the design/redesign of a web site….

What can an athlete “choking” during a big game tell us about user interface design? What do public radio donation campaigns and Wikipedia have in common? Why do computer users do things that seem irrational even when interfaces are designed to be “user friendly”? This semester, we’ll grapple with these questions by studying one of most complicated parts of information systems design: people and the contexts in which they live, work, and play. In the first half of the semester, you’ll learn surprising facts about individual, group, and cultural characteristics that can predict whether a technology will be usable and useful. You’ll also sharpen your visual communication skills. In the second half of the semester, you’ll apply these facts and skills to design and evaluate technologies that meet the needs of a target audience, and learn how to communicate with design clients. The goal in this class is twofold: to challenge your assumptions about human nature and provide you with knowledge and skills requisite for designing usable, useful, and enjoyable technologies.

The course will provide a working knowledge of animal behavior; how animals behave and the ways in which this relates to wildlife. To effectively manage and understand the needs of wildlife, we must understand what affects the decisions that animals make and what influences key behaviors such as finding food, courtship, reproduction and migration. Ecology, evolution, physiology and neurobiology all influence behavior and the course will use examples from these sub-disciplines to illustrate how behavior is generated and adapted to the current environment. The class will be oriented around discussion of current scientific understanding of animal behavior.
Tips for Writing Course Descriptions

1. Use the second or “you” person.

2. Create an engaging first sentence.

3. Use action verbs (discover, acquire, get etc.).

4. Vary words and techniques.

5. Spice it up.

What was the landscape designer thinking?

Are we making the same mistakes in our online syllabus design?
Understanding Student Preferences to Help Inform Online Course Design: Canvas UX Study

https://sites.psu.edu/canvasux

- Amy Garbrick—Director, Learning Design; College of Information Sciences and Technology
- Dr. Andrea Gregg—Associate Director for Research; World Campus
- Jana Hitchcock—Instructional Designer; World Campus
- Ronda Reid—Instructional Designer; College of Information Sciences and Technology
- Dr. Vicki Williams—Assessment Manager; Teaching & Learning with Technology

The major finding is... in a word:

**EFFICIENCY!**
April 4 - May 21, 2016

- IRB study
- Help of Dr. Jessica Kropczynski, College of IST
  Mix of screenshots, ratings, and open-ended text questions
  - Canvas Home page preferences
  - Syllabus page and components
  - Navigation preferences and order

- Open questions regarding the perception of “community”

Navigation
Preferred navigational order (4/2017):

1. Assignments
2. Announcements
3. Modules (or Lessons)
4. Course home page
5. Grades
6. Syllabus
7. Discussions
8. Quizzes
9. Files, Pages, People, and Conferences
Based on the **EFFICIENCY** finding:

**Syllabus**

- **Brief text** with the course summary visible was most preferred (schedule, grading, required materials)
  - Easy navigation and clean, short organized format
  - More than 80% of the students said it is **VERY** important that the course summary be easy to find
  - They **STILL** want to **PRINT** syllabus
From this …

...to this.
References


References


- Serafin, Ana Gil. (1990). *Course syllabi and Their effects on Students’ Final Grade Performance*. Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.


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