Foundations for a Learning Focused Syllabus

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Wednesday, Jan 4th, 2023 | 10-11am
Honoring and Acknowledging
Your Syllabus is...

1. A teaching tool.  
   ... assessed by your students

2. A component of your department’s degree curriculum.  
   ... assessed by your colleagues and administrators

3. A document in your teaching portfolio or dossier.  
   ... assessed by search and promotion committees

   It documents your scholarship of teaching!
The Intentional Syllabus

- Provides a clear road map for learning with aligned goals, checkpoints, and conditions.
- Centers the learner and learning experience.
- Clearly communicates expectations on individuals and groups (if given).
- Is descriptive and transparent about conditions and process of weekly student engagement and the assessment.
- Meets diverse learners where they are at rather than to make assumptions about preparedness or familiarity with conventions.
- Optimizes and illustrates accessibility and inclusivity.
Foundation: Course Curriculum
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>What to look for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Learning goals and objectives | • Clearly identifiable, whether explicit or implicit  
• Measurable with specific action verbs  
• Addressing all dimensions (Fink, 2003)  |
| Assessment activities    | • Aligned with objectives  
• Evidence for formative assessment with feedback  
• Summative assessments are clearly defined and scaffolded  
• Evaluation criteria available |
| Schedule                 | • Logical sequence  
• Themes/topics/units are clear |
| Overall learning environments | • Positive, respectful tone; personal pronouns  
• Content as vehicle for learning (not policies/punishment)  
• Promise: relevance of course; learning opportunities |
Backward Design
(Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; 2005)

Goals
Identify desired results (what students will think, do, & feel)

Assessment
Determine acceptable evidence (practice, milestones, final)

Plan
Plan learning experiences and instruction (format, content, materials, modalities)
Designing Backward with an Alignment Grid  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes / Objective(s)</th>
<th>Independent Action (Assessment)</th>
<th>Guided Practice (Formative Assessment)</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designate measurable outcome of students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes.</td>
<td>Design assessment tools that show and encourage immediate application of learning to determine successful student learning outcome.</td>
<td>Create practice activities or events for students to use the content material so that they may participate and contribute to learning.</td>
<td>Describe the strategies, tools, materials, and sequence you will use to present material to explore and explain content that will open their minds, show benefits, and integrate new learning with prior knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example Syllabus
Structure and Sequence

New template for GE Intentional Syllabus...

1. Course Curriculum
   1. Description; Learning Outcomes; Attributes; Assessment; Schedule

2. Course Information
   1. Contacts; Communication; Format; Resources & Tools

3. Policies
   1. Institutional & Course-level
Communicating Foundations Meaningfully: Focus on Learning and Learner
Building Learning Roadmaps

COURSE OBJECTIVES
Course Objectives are the steps throughout the course that move students toward accomplishing the overarching learning outcomes.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Learning Activities and Experiences are the strategic and aligned course stops that make course objectives actionable toward the overarching Student Learning Outcomes.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
Student Learning Outcomes are what students should know and be able to achieve at the conclusion of the course.
Chat Check In

Reflect: Who are your learners?
Consider what you know about your students:
• What knowledge and experiences do they bring?
• What are their interests and goals?
• What motivates and sparks interest? What discourages and causes confusion?

Reflect: What do they need from you to "see" a successful journey through your course?
• What are some steps you can take toward creating a map that serves all students well on the journey of learning through your course?
While there are several means of communication—there are also multiple layers of communication. Levels of Communication are not always addressed or considered to the detriment of the original message.
### Who is Centered in Your Syllabus Design?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written from point of view of</th>
<th>Content-Centered Syllabi</th>
<th>Learner-Centered Syllabi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td>(“I will...”, “You will...”)</td>
<td>Students/Community  (“We will...”, “You will...”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main focus</strong></td>
<td>Content to be covered</td>
<td>How to learn effectively in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key questions answered</strong></td>
<td><strong>What</strong> will happen in this course and <strong>when</strong>?</td>
<td><strong>Why</strong> is this course relevant and <strong>how</strong> can students be successful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tone</strong></td>
<td>Can range from dry/boring to punitive/controlling</td>
<td>Positive, encouraging, inviting, engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning is viewed as</strong></td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
<td>Partnership between teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivators employed</strong></td>
<td>Grades, punishment</td>
<td>Meaningfulness, curiosity, student autonomy, community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Created by Sara M. Fulmer*

*Information adapted from Cullen & Harris (2009) and Palmer, Wheeler, & Aneece (2016)*
For example...

Sample Assignment Descriptions

**Content-Centered**

*Journal Article Evaluation:*
You will be required to read three separate articles that demonstrate different research designs discussed in class. You will then be asked to answer several questions that pertain to one of the three articles.

**Learner-Centered**

*Journal Article Evaluation (tied to SLOs 1 and 2):*
This assignment is designed to assess your skills as a critical reader and to apply the concepts taught in class to published research. Becoming a critical reader will help you in your future career by enabling you to be accurate in your assumptions and predictions.

You will be required to read three separate articles that demonstrate different research designs discussed in class. You will then be asked to answer several questions that pertain to one of the three articles.

Another example...

Place emphasis on course objectives and provide a rationale for how specific assignments support these objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Want You to Know</th>
<th>What I Expect You to Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The field of psychology is very broad, encompassing many different subfields. As a science, it is highly applicable to the &quot;real world.&quot;</td>
<td>You will differentiate between the major perspectives in psychology and apply a broad range of psychological concepts to &quot;real world&quot; settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use critical thinking and the scientific method to conduct and critique research. Psychology is not just common sense!</td>
<td>You will demonstrate an understanding of the fundamentals of research and will evaluate claims using critical thinking and the scientific method.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shifts language from a list of requirements toward offering guidance and strategies for success.

Example from: [How to Build a Learner-Centered Syllabus](#)
Identify one or two concrete aspects you want to work on and apply in your syllabus between now and Friday. Please post in the chat.
Next up:

**Composing a Student-Friendly Syllabus**

Friday, Jan 6\(^{th}\), 10-11am

Resources:
https://ge.arizona.edu/support/syllabus-work-week

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