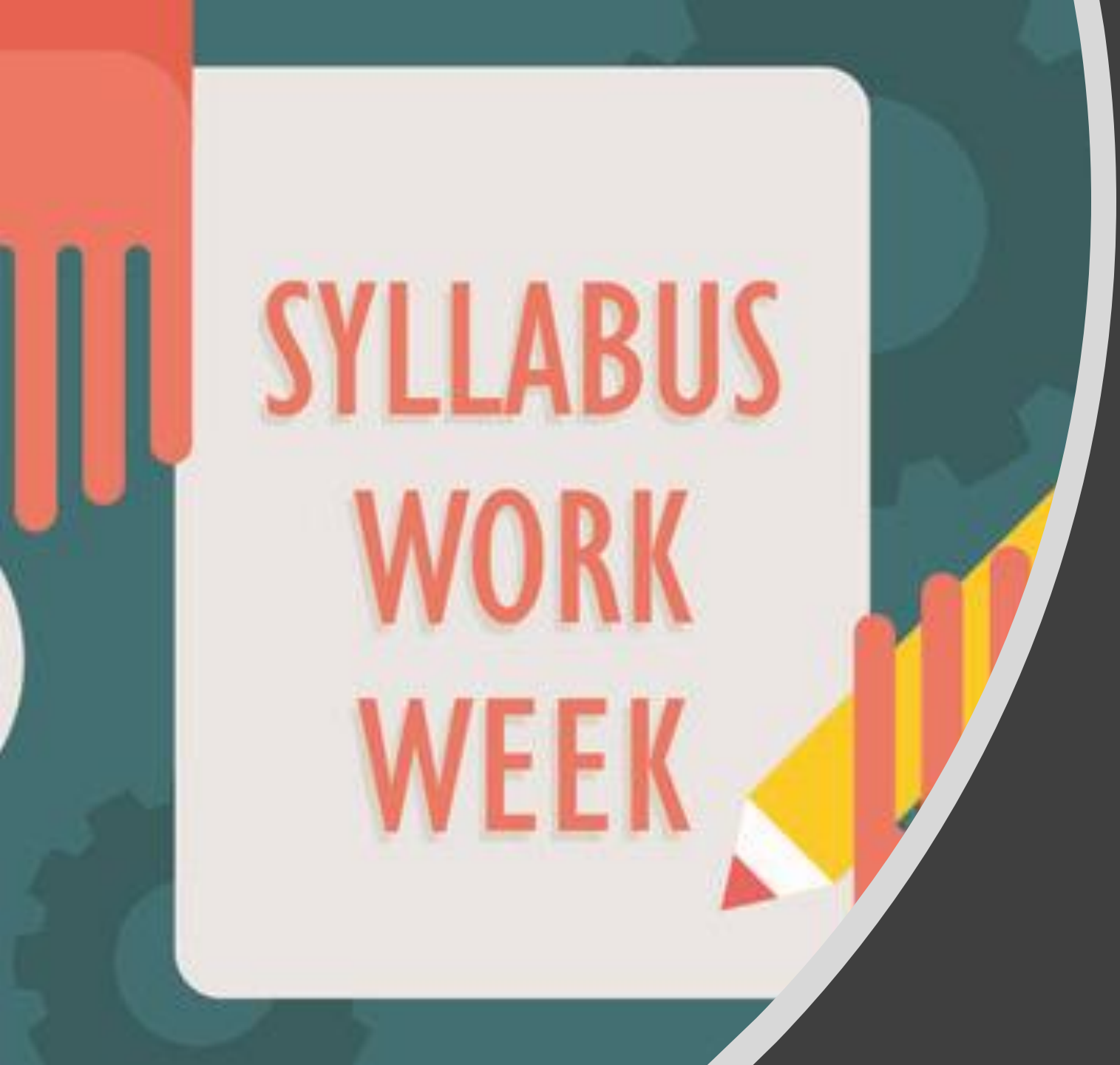


Composing a Student-Friendly Syllabus

Mascha N. Gemein & Katie Southard

Tuesday, Aug 15th, 2023 | 10-11am

Honoring and Acknowledging

Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum

Hidden Curriculum Defined

The “hidden curriculum” or “invisible curriculum” refers to the **unstated norms, policies, and expectations** that students **need to know to succeed** in higher education but are often **not taught explicitly**.

(Gonin, Truglia, Pedzinski, & Sidky, 2023)
Also drawing from: Alsubaie, 2015; Cornbleth, 1984; Gofton & Regehr, 2006

Consider: are students in higher ed evaluated on their **academic work products** or on **how well they can navigate** the college environment?

Evidence suggests... both.

Your students might not know how to:

- Read for your class
- Take "good" notes
- Participate "correctly" in class
- Ask for help

Consider the **disproportionate impact** of uncovering the hidden curriculum on underserved and/or at-risk students..

A good starting place:

Remember, listen, and take small steps.

Examples from Samantha Orchard, Plant Sciences

Dr. Orchard's open-office hours Mondays 2:15-3:30 pm

Link

"Open-office hours" are times I set aside to meet with students in my courses without students needing to schedule an appointment with me. If the scheduled day/time does not work for you, please contact me at orchard@arizona.edu to schedule a private meeting with me on a day/time that is better for you.

What is "literature"?

For the purposes of this assignment, literature is any printed or recorded material that has information on your chosen topic. You should use reputable sources of information but I generally discourage the use of technical papers written by scientists for scientists, because they are likely too technical/challenging for most students in this course. However, if you feel like you can understand those papers, you are free to use them. For more information, see the Assignment instructions for links to websites with more information on this style of paper and on choosing appropriate sources.

Notes about the role of teaching assistants in course

The TAs will assist Dr. Orchard by grading all the Discussions and Module Writing Assignments, applying late penalties to Quizzes, and grading and providing feedback on the Literature Review papers for most of the students in the class (Dr. Orchard will also do some of them for Part I and Part II).

For questions about the course material, post your questions in the Questions about the course Discussion forum, or contact Dr. Orchard (orchard@arizona.edu).

Please contact Dr. Orchard (orchard@arizona.edu) for any questions about course logistics (due dates, absences, extensions, grade concerns, etc.).

Example from Rob Groves, Classics

MODERN ADAPTATION PROJECT, CONT.

Grading: This project will be graded on a rubric that will be shared with you on our workshop day, but which will prioritize the following:

- A **persuasive articulation of your vision** that effectively makes the case for your ideas. The persuasiveness of your argument will be supported by specific and accurate details.
- The **accuracy, precision, and depth** of your discussion of the play(s) and their content.
- The **accuracy, precision, and completeness** of your discussion of the historical details of Greek theater practice.
- The **depth of thought** and **clarity of articulation of purpose** of your artistic vision.
- The **professionalism** of your presentation, including both compositional mechanics and standard citational practices.
- The **"genius factor"** for especially interesting, exciting, and/or unexpected ideas.

To aid in your work on this project, please see the details on its purpose, audience, genre, etc. below!

Purpose: The purpose of this document is two-fold: 1.) in service of the theater company's goals, your document should persuade the creative team and directors of a great way to create a meaningful, impactful experience for their audience, and contribute to their mission. If they listen to you, the show will be developed as you envision, and its success will depend largely on your recommendations. 2.) as a consultant, your professional reputation is at stake. They have trusted you with more high-level work. If your work is shoddy, factually incorrect, based on simplistic interpretations, uninspired and/or unprofessional, you are not likely to get more work like this. If on the other

Now you try!

Making Policies for Learning

… not for anxious minds

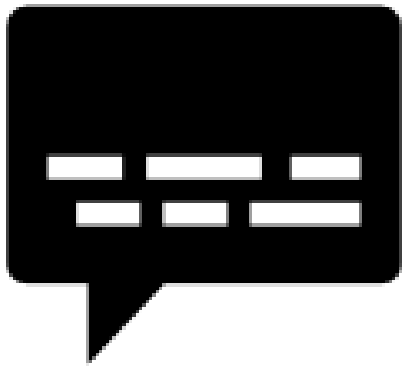
What is a policy and why have one?

- Policy: a course or principle of action adopted by an individual or group
  - "a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions" (Merriam Webster)
- Rationale includes setting of expectations and accountability, and developing a strong culture

Students' Unspoken Queries About Us

- Why are they here?
- How much do they know and care about me?
- How much do they respect me?
- How real are they? Do they know who they are in relation to me?
- Do they know how to help me learn?
- How close are they willing to get to me? What are they willing to do to help me learn?

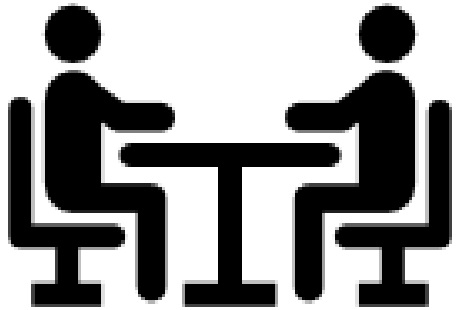
(Artze-Vega et al. 2023. *The Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching*; adapted from Demerath et al. 2022. "A Grounded Model of How Educators Earn Students' Trust in a High Performing U.S. Urban High School")



Audience(s)

Content

Goals

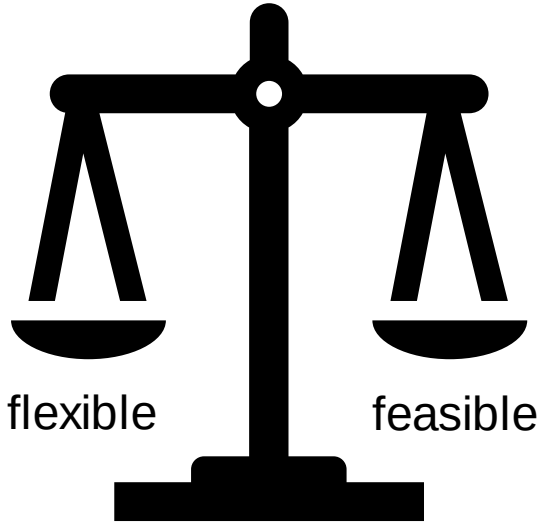


Tone

Considering Policies

If policies should help students in anticipated and unexpected circumstances, shouldn't their tone reflect caring while being clear on the expectations?

Solution-oriented



Goals/Intent vs. Communication/Impact

- Provide a help manual
- Streamline problem-solving
- Ensure equity in handling cases

Common emphasis:

- Rules and demands
- Authoritative and top-down
- Threats of consequences for non-compliance

Caring emphasis:

- Solutions and resources
- Offering rationales and alternatives
- Inviting, maybe collaborative ("constitution")

Handling Institutional Policies

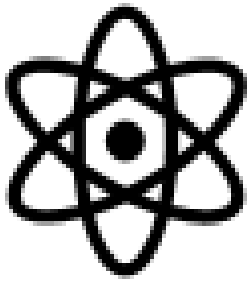
Only need to include link to mandatory policies:

"Please carefully review the UA Policies here: https://catalog.arizona.edu/policies."

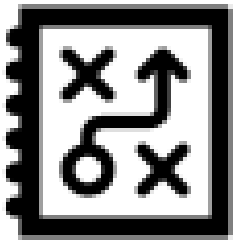
Comment on policies as a whole or highlight specific ones in your own words

Use recommended language and/or use your own – what are you signaling?

Leveraging Course Policies

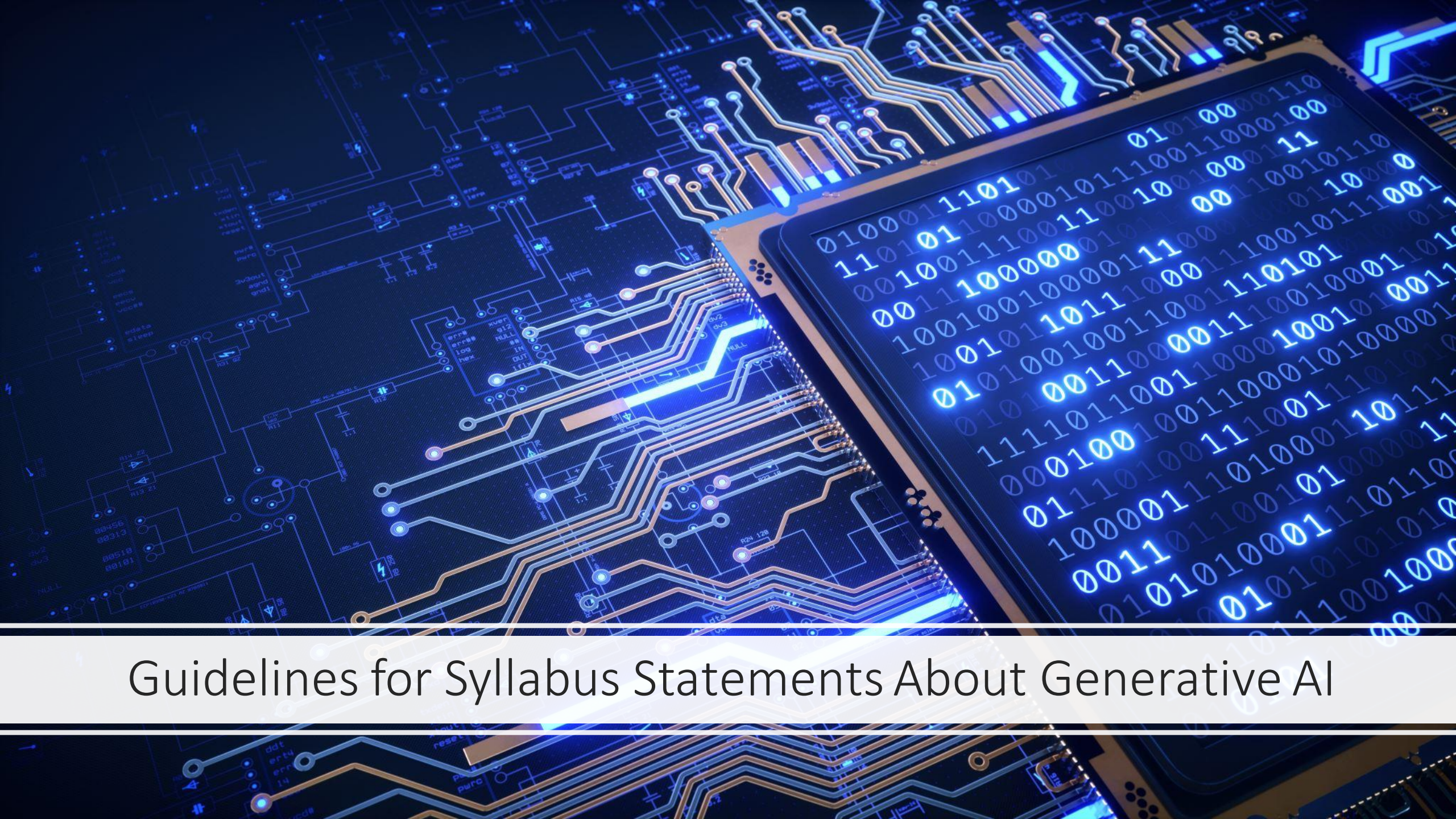


Context



Progress and Completion

Culture and Community



Guidelines for Syllabus Statements About Generative AI

Consider...

Culture Shifting

What might be shifted in your learning environment culture by engaging the syllabus this way?

Welcoming Student Inquiry

How might this process welcome student inquiry for the duration of the course?

Student Autonomy and Engagement

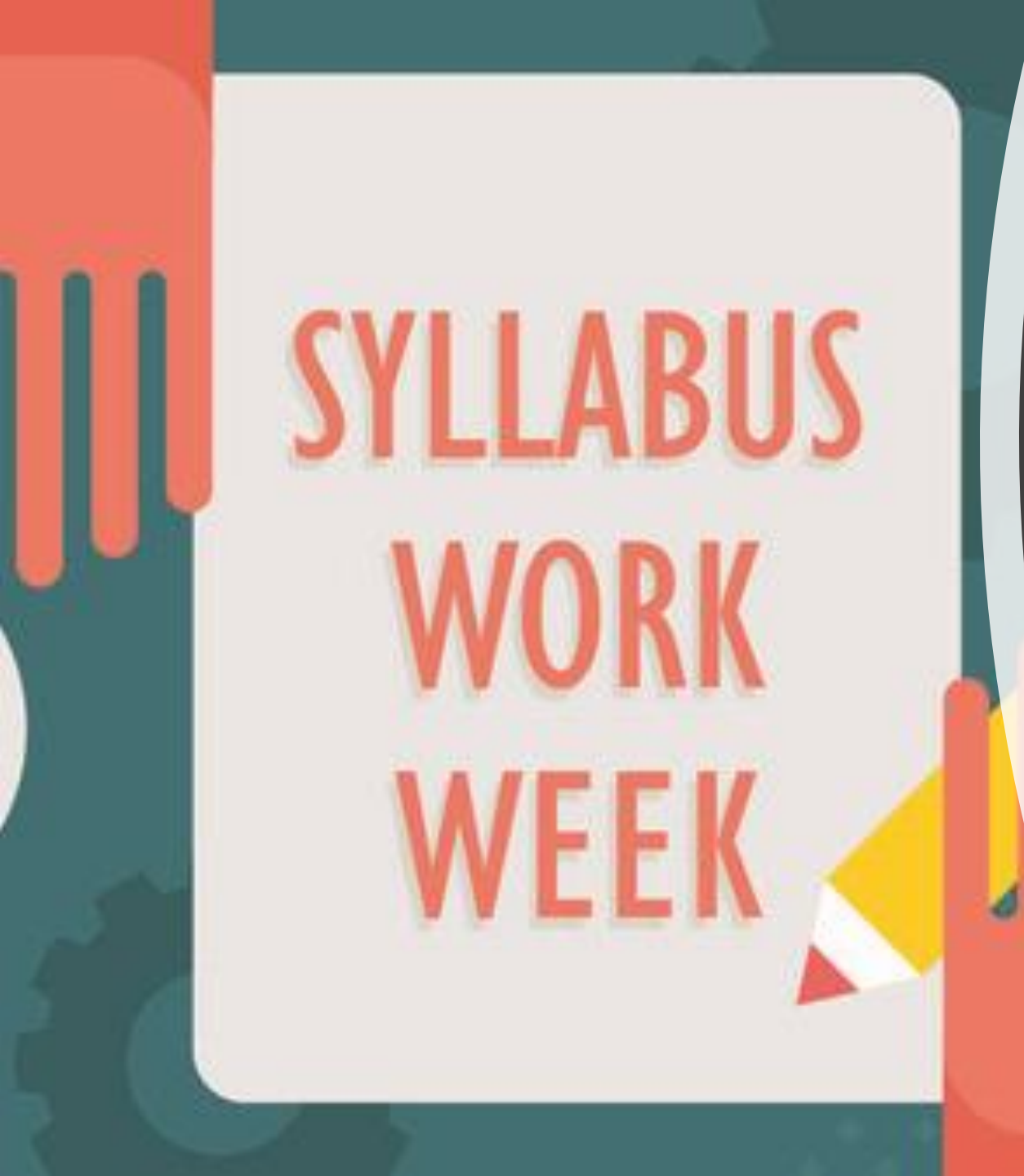
How does the syllabus invite students to navigate, question, think through, etc. the syllabus?

An Invitation for Learning

In what ways does this invite students into the learning process?

Language Matters

How might the language that you use create barriers, privilege experiences, or center the student?



Next up:

Introducing the Instructor's Guide to Syllabus Composition

Wednesday, Aug. 16th, 10-11am

Thank you!

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Mascha Gemein, mngemein@arizona.edu

Find more resources at:
https://ge.arizona.edu/support/syllabus-work-week

https://ge.arizona.edu/syllabus-guidelines

Q&A