

DISCLAIMER:

Many departments require faculty members to follow a specific syllabus format and include particular content. However, if that is not the case, you may find this example helpful. The guidelines presented in this document are suggestions only.

Suggested Guidelines for Drafting a Learner-Centered Syllabus

The syllabus is an important document in college education. It is one of the primary means of conveying course expectations, policies, and procedures to students enrolled in the course. In the traditional classroom, information provided in the syllabus can be supplemented by in-class discussion; if the instructor forgets to add a policy to the syllabus, that policy can generally be mentioned in class and students instructed to make the necessary revisions.

Such “on-the-fly” changes can be problematic in the online learning environment. The asynchronous nature of online learning requires that course documents – like the syllabus – be more complete and that the instructor anticipates students’ questions and concerns when drafting the syllabus so it is more comprehensive in terms of conveying important course information.

The more common format for syllabi is teacher-centered, which is used to convey what the instructor will be doing in the course. A *learner-centered* syllabus is focused more on the tools and information the instructor will provide in order to support student learning in the course. (*Note: It is possible to design a syllabus that is a hybrid of the teacher-centered and learner-centered styles; it is up to you, as the instructor, to design a document that is appropriate for your course.*) Use of a learner-centered syllabus is highly recommended in online learning because research has shown that the online learning environment is more effective when it is designed to be responsive to the needs of the learner (i.e., “learner-centered”).

Below you will find a list of the recommended sections of a learner-centered syllabus, along with a brief description of what information is generally provided in each section. A learner-centered syllabus need not include every single section; you should consider your students, the course, its content, the instructional strategies you plan to utilize, and the course timeframe as you design your syllabus. We have also provided an example syllabus that uses some sections of the learner-centered syllabus design.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

If your syllabus is longer than 8 pages, you should provide students with a table of contents. The table will help them access information within the syllabus more readily; it will also serve to show students the way the information in the syllabus is organized. (*It is fairly uncommon for syllabi of fewer than 8 pages to include a table of contents.*) Course maps (diagrams or charts) can also be used to organize syllabus content. Such maps are most commonly used in HTML documents, where different portions of the content are hyperlinked together.

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

This section should include all pertinent contact information: name, office location and phone number, office hours (if applicable), and email address. Since the College of Arts and Sciences Online Program requires its students to use their OU email addresses, we strongly recommend that use your OU email address, as well. It is also important to tell students how best to reach you and the timeframe (24-48 hours) within which they can expect a response from you.

LETTER TO THE STUDENT

This section is usually an introductory “welcome” letter, from the instructor to the student. It should welcome the students to the course and often sets the tone for your interaction with students. For instance, some instructors include anecdotes about why they enjoy teaching this particular course, or ways in which some of their past students have benefitted from taking it. The letter need not be long – in fact, it can be abbreviated to a short “welcome” statement – but if used properly, it can be a good tool for conveying your enthusiasm for the subject to your students. We suggest placing a similar statement on the D2L news page or the content page inside your course.

“HOW TO USE THIS SYLLABUS”

Explaining to students how to best make use of the syllabus can prove invaluable. For instance, students can be encouraged to read through the entire syllabus and refer back to it for important due dates and deadlines, explanation of course grading procedures, and information on course policies (late work, non-participation, etc.). This section is usually limited to a brief statement explaining that the syllabus provides the student with a framework for how the course is structured, conveys what the instructor’s expectations are (regarding student compliance with course policies).

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

As you address this section, consider why this course is being offered. You should discuss any prerequisites for the course as well as offer general information on who might find the course most beneficial and skills the course is designed to introduce, develop, or hone.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Course descriptions should specifically mention the content that the course will cover, and how it will be covered. Is it a survey course? A seminar? Are there multiple sections, or is this a new course on a specialized topic? Describe the primary emphasis of the course content and the general purpose of any assigned readings. (Note: Be sure that the course description on the syllabus matches your department’s records, though you can elaborate on a brief description here.)

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goals are general targets for the things you hope the student will gain from taking the course. They are usually expressed as statements about the general ways in which the student will benefit from the course. Objectives are more specific than goals. Your objectives indicate the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities students should have or be able to perform upon completion of the course. For this reason, they should be specifically tied to the structure of the course, and measurable (usually by the assignments, quizzes, and exams).

REQUIRED READINGS & MATERIALS (“Resources”)

Required textbooks, workbooks, and other reading materials should be described in this section. Though it is purely optional, it is advisable to provide students with the ISBN (10 or 13 digits) for the required course textbooks, along with the title and author(s). This information allows students to verify they have the correct edition of the text, which could be especially important if there are several editions, or significant changes between editions.

You can also include a statement about any supplemental materials provided for students (i.e., *“Supplemental readings (articles, etc.) will be available online through Desire2Learn (D2L): <https://learn.ou.edu> or on electronic reserve at the library”*). Many instructors also list recommended texts in this section – if you choose to do so, please make sure you differentiate (via headings) which materials are “required” and which are not.

NOTE: It is very important to inform students of the **technological requirements** of the course. If you will require students to use specific technologies in the course, that should be mentioned in the syllabus. If they will need media players to hear audio files or view video files, you should tell them which players (like Windows Media Player, RealPlayer, or Quicktime) are compatible with the files they will need to hear/view.

In this section, we also ask that you notify your students that they are required to take an online orientation. All students who take online courses offered through the College of Arts and Sciences (and Advanced Programs courses taught online by A&S Faculty) are required to do the orientation. The staff of the A&S Online Program manages the orientation (offered via Desire2Learn) and will notify you of students who have not complied.

If you will require downloading of special character keyboards (for foreign languages) or software viewers/readers (like Adobe Reader or Microsoft Powerpoint Viewer), be specific so the students have the opportunity to adequately prepare themselves for the course. Though it is optional, you can include a statement regarding technological requirements:

“You will need access to a high-speed computer equipped with internet access, a sound card, functional speakers, Microsoft Powerpoint (or a MS Powerpoint viewer, which you can download for free from the internet), video-playing software (i.e., Windows Media Player or RealPlayer), video-playing equipment (VHS or DVD player), and a printer. You should also be able to check-out materials from the OU Libraries, and/or rent and view selected materials (as necessary) for assignment completion.”

COURSE CALENDAR

This section can either be general or specific, and should be based on the length of the course (i.e., long semester, accelerated/short-course, etc.). The course calendar should include a description of the course activities that will occur during specific time periods within the course (assigned readings/viewings, group activities, project due dates, etc.). Even if you determine it is best to design a separate course schedule document, your syllabus should include at least all key calendar information (such as assignment due dates, exam dates, etc.). If you opt for a comprehensive course schedule, we recommend that you specify due dates and give students

guidelines for weekly work and activities. Such an approach fosters student engagement and helps students manage their progress in the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

If this information is not presented elsewhere, you can use this section to describe the skills the student needs to possess in order to be successful (i.e., computer literacy, presentation skills, writing skills, etc.). Your course requirements should also include a list of the required assignments, quizzes, exams, activities, participation points, etc., that count toward the final grade in the course.

COURSE EVALUATION & GRADING PROCEDURES

This section explains the evaluation and grading procedures used in the course. Here, you can explain the criteria for assignments, discussion board posts, research papers, projects, etc., or you can opt to draft separate instructional documents for that purpose. As you draft this section, consider the following questions:

- How many assignments, quizzes, exams, discussion board posts, projects, etc.?
- By what criteria are they graded?
- How are they weighted?
- Are there any grades given for peer review?
- If applicable, how are the quizzes or exams administered (download, write and submit – or online, via D2L)?
- How is the final grade in the course determined?
- Do the grades on all course items count, or are any graded “dropped”?
- What is the grading scale for the course?

“HOW TO STUDY FOR THIS COURSE”

This is an optional section that you can use to suggest approaches students can use when studying for the course. A few suggestions you can offer here include time management techniques; whether or not you offer assignment examples, models, review documents or sessions; information about tutoring assistance available online, on campus, or through your department; and study strategies for completing assigned readings (i.e., SQRW, ASPIRE, etc.).

COURSE POLICIES

This section includes information about your policies, the department’s and/or the university’s. As you draft this section, consider:

- What is your participation policy? Excessive non-participation?
- What do you expect from students, in terms of their responsibility for their own learning?
- Do you accept late work? Missed assignments or exams?
- What is your make-up work/exam policy?
- Do you offer extra credit – and if so, under what conditions?
- What is your position on incompletes and administrative withdrawals?
- Do you have guidelines for students’ communication or ‘online course conduct’?

- You will also need to include an explanation of the University of Oklahoma’s “Official Statement of Policies,” covering religious holidays, the statement of reasonable accommodation, codes and policies of behavior statement, and the academic integrity policy.

LEARNING TOOLS

Information presented in this section typically explains tools provided to the student to help them in the course. This could be something as simple as a graphic organizer for the content to be learned (concept maps, flowcharts, Gantt chart, etc.), or something more complex (like D2L widgets designed by the instructors and available through the D2L course site).

REFERENCES:

- Center for Instructional Technology, Northern Essex Community College. (2006). “Designing a learning-centered syllabus.” Retrieved on January 10, 2008, from <http://cit.necc.mass.edu/atlt/Syllab1.htm#anchor1682809>
- Center for Teaching and Learning, Brigham Young University. (2007). “Creating a learning-centered syllabus with the online syllabus designer.” Retrieved on January 9, 2008, from http://newctl.byu.edu/?page_id=677
- Center for Teaching Effectiveness, University of Delaware. (2005). “Designing a learning-centered syllabus.” Retrieved on January 8, 2008, from <http://cte.udel.edu/syllabus.htm>
- Grunert, J., Mills., B. J., & Cohen, M. W. (2008). *The Course Syllabus: A Learning –Centered Approach*. 2nd edition. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co, Inc.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

(Course and Section Number)

(Course Title)

An Online Course

(Institution - Campus)

(Semester)

(Instructor Contact Information):

(Name)

(Office Location and Hours of Availability)

(Contact Phone Number)

(Contact Email)

(Instructor's Communication & Response Policy)

Purpose of the Course:

(Explain the purpose of the course here.)

Course Description:

(Describe the course and the content it covers here.)

Required Texts, Resources, Supplies, & Materials:

(Insert information about required textbooks, technological requirements, supplemental materials available through D2L, and other resources.)

Course Goals:

(Explain the general goals of the course.)

Course Objectives:

(Provide a descriptive list of what students should know or be able to do upon completion of this course.)

Course Requirements:

(Describe the requirements of the course (assignments, quizzes, exams, participation, etc.).)

Course Policies:

(Explain your expectations for student participation, performance, and behavior, and your other course policies.)

Course Evaluation & Grading:

(Explain how grading and evaluation will occur. *You should also include an example of the grading scale: A = 90% - 100%, B = 80% - 89%, etc. – or make it point-based, if that is how you will determine grades: A = 90pts – 100pts, B = 80pts – 89pts, etc.*)

Additional Information (Optional): Include any additional information that students may need to know, including descriptions of any relevant university assistive services offered online (Writing Center, etc.), and/or a statement regarding future revisions to the course syllabus (i.e., "Syllabus subject to change with notice.").