Creating Your Syllabus

TA Development Workshop
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Workshop Goals

- Discuss the main parts of all syllabi
- Discuss strategies for putting those together
- Look at some model syllabi
- Outline cost/benefit of some syllabus choices
Syllabus = Contract

- Spell out what you expect and require
- Spell out what students can expect, and how they will be assessed.
- Any changes (in reading load, exam dates, etc.) should be avoided, but must be in students’ favor
Planning Stage

How much control do you have?

Does your department give you a template?
   Ex: ENC 1102 requires fiction, poetry, drama; 6000 evaluated words

If so, start with department requirements

Look at syllabi from profs & experienced TAs
Planning Scope

How much can you realistically cover?
- Concepts/ideas
- Pages of reading
- Numbers of labs/experiments
- Quizzes & tests
- In-class activities (group work, discussion, presentations)
Scope involves Priorities

- Start with Learning Objectives
- Try *wish list* of ideas/readings/activities next
- Then use the *target method* to help you prioritize
Parts of Generic Syllabus

Course info - #, section, time, location
Instructor - name, office, contact info
Texts - books, tech (clickers, software)
Goals/Objectives/Mission Statement
Assessment/Grading
Policies (attendance, honesty, etc.)
Schedule of assignments
Don’t forget DRC

- Announce that students with diagnosed disabilities need to inform you and give you their letters ASAP.
- These letters spell out which accommodations a student is entitled to.
Goals Statement

- Articulate the goals from your planning phase
- See sample syllabi
Assessment/Grading

- Include a grading schedule that lists the value of all assignments
- Use grading rubrics where appropriate
- Consider diverse grading plan, to accommodate different learning styles: tests, papers (formal vs. response), discussion, lab work or projects
- Late penalties?
Papers

- Minimum word counts, or word-count ranges?
- Due dates, & late penalties?
- Preferred/required citation format (MLA or APA)?
- Shameless plug: send them to the Writing Studio
Participation Grades

If you want discussion, **reward it**

Offer various ways to participate:

- impromptu vs. planned
- small groups w/ assigned speakers
- voluntary “raised hand” discussions
- forced “calling on” discussions (be sure to call on everyone)
Participation Issues

Pros: allows you to reward non-objective work/contributions, gives you grading “wiggle room”

Cons: can be vague/ambiguous, open to charges of favoritism

Advice: Be as clear as possible up front; take notes after each class
Policies

- Clarify how you will punish plagiarism or cheating
Plagiarism

- Do you see accidental vs. intentional differently?

- Will you use Turnitin.com?

- Consider having students watch the UWS video on plagiarism & citing sources: writing.ufl.edu, then “Video Resources”

- On tests, will you forbid phones, calculators?
Attendance/Tardiness

How many absences will you allow, if any?

What is your policy on excused vs. unexcused?

How does that impact make-ups?

If you cite tardiness, you need to note it each day, and set a specific limit (more than X minutes late, etc.)
Attendance Policy Pros & Cons

**Pros**: produces higher attendance

**Cons**: requires more record-keeping; can lead to disputes about the legitimacy of absences

**Advice** - Think it through: What absences will you accept? Documentation? If they use up allowed absences early, what happens if they miss late?
Other Banned Behaviors

- Cell phones & texting
- Reading the paper
- Talking
- Laptops?
Pros & Cons of Banned Behavior Section

Cons – spend too much time on this, and you risk looking punitive, negative

Pros –
- ethically, it’s good to let students know what to expect
- pragmatically, your position is stronger if a dispute arises if you’ve covered the issue
- leases and syllabi analogy
Schedule of Assignments

- Coordinate with your department?
- Consider workload throughout semester (goal: steady effort, instead of “feast & famine”)
- Give reminders (in-class and on-line) and waypoints often.
- Consider using progress checklists
Online

- Use a “due dates” page, & link to it from everywhere
- Use a policy quiz – students must take and submit this at the term’s beginning, and so can’t plead ignorance later.