Center for Teaching and Learning
Syllabus Guidelines

Learning outcomes management is going to require careful attention to syllabus construction. The following information is intended as a guideline/checklist for your syllabi. In almost all cases you should have an online syllabus, which is your primary/reference document, and a shorter printed version that you may want to hand out to students in class.

The syllabus is an important tool in conveying course intent and policies. A well designed syllabus is very helpful in setting your expectations and informing students what participation in the course will entail. In cases where a student challenges a grade – a clearly written and complete syllabus is a valuable tool in quickly resolving the dispute.

Course syllabi have become longer, more explicit and more complex documents. While there are a number of "boiler plate" components that can be moved from syllabus to syllabus, current syllabi are much different from syllabi that were perfectly appropriate a few years ago.

Where a course has multiple sections taught by different instructors a common syllabus is strongly suggested. Course objectives, Hamline plan designations and grading should be consistent from section to section. Lectures, course activities, and pacing can/will change depending on the instructor but the goals, grading weight, and learning outcomes should be consistent.

Course Description

Cross check the Bulletin description against the course description you are using in the syllabus. If there is a significant difference between the Bulletin and the actual course a change should be sent to the Registrar so that the electronic bulletin can be updated. If you are teaching one section in a course with multiple sections there should be a standard course description in use. Before making any changes in this part of the syllabus consult with the Department Chair or Program Director.

The course description that is in your syllabus should indicate your instructional approach, course activities, major projects and how the course fits into the structure of the major.

Hamline Plan Designations in Undergraduate Syllabi

Check on Piperline to see what Hamline Plan designations the course is officially listing. The syllabus should mirror these designations. If you have changed the Hamline Plan designations make sure that the Piperline list is corrected. An explanation of how the course addresses the Hamline Plan designations should be provided. You may not want to include this information in the body of the syllabus but is can be included as a link within the online syllabus.

Learning Outcomes

The course syllabus should indicate which University Learning Outcomes and which Department or Program Outcomes the course addresses. This part of the syllabus is going to

be developing as the learning outcomes materials are created and approved. Assessment of how these outcomes are being met will be a required part of every course and the information on student achievement will need to be collected.

Course Objectives

Each course should have a set of specific learning goals. These goals are most successful when presented as observable, measurable outcomes. Usually the outcomes fit into one of three categories – skill, knowledge or disposition/attitudes. The key to creating effective course goals is to use language that will indicate what the student will be able to *do* at the conclusion of the course. There a number of resources to assist in writing course objectives, if you would like some materials and information please contact the Center for Teaching and Learning.
More Information at -
http://www.vcu.edu/cte/resources/nfrg/10_03_writing_course_objectives.htm

Texts and Required Materials

The titles of all required texts and materials should be listed. If the course has online components students should be informed – especially if there are connection speed issues or computer configuration specifications they will need to consider. If there are specific computer programs that students will need to obtain or download that should also be indicated.

Side note – Occasionally students will comment that books are listed as required in a course but are not used (or, more often, not used as they expected).   It can be helpful to let students know how you are using the book and why specific texts have been selected. This does not need to be a part of the formal syllabus but it can be a helpful comment during the discussion of course expectations.

Course Fees or Additional Expenses

If there are course fees or additional expenses for field trips, tickets, course supplies, etc these should be listed. Note when the fee must be paid and how you will take payment (cash, check, account transfer, etc.) The instructor will need to account for the collection and disbursement of all course fees.

Grading Procedures

The grading scale and procedures should be clearly stated. A point system is much more manageable (especially when working with assessment rubrics) than the more traditional letter grade systems.

The number of points required for the final grade should be included as a part of the syllabus. You should also consider including language that notes that all course assignments need to be completed to obtain a passing grade. This clause will help prevent students from reaching the minimum number of points to pass the course and then not completing some of the latter assignments/projects that are part of the course objectives.

Points should be allocated to reflect the weight/significance of each assignment. Where practical, the course grade should be determined across a number of different course activities rather than a single "high stakes" paper or project. The University does not have a policy on grade values. Each instructor is able to set their point scale to determine each grade. As a general rule at Hamline it seems that an F is awarded when a student has less than 60 to 70 percent of the available points.

If you provide extra credit options to bolster a grade, that opportunity should be noted in the syllabus. Occasionally students comment that the instructor announced an extra credit project on a day they were absent and they missed out on the opportunity. If you grade on a curve as opposed to working with a straight point system that policy should also be included in your grading procedures.

An online gradebook gives students an opportunity to see their progress. The gradebook has a number of features and will automatically total course points – which will simplify the process of assigning the final grade. Where feasible, using the online gradebook in Bb is strongly suggested. If you would like to review the gradebook and experiment with adding materials please contact the Instructional Technologist in your College or Program or the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Late Assignments or Papers

Include a clearly stated policy on late papers/projects in your syllabus. It can range from "Late work is not accepted" to a statement about how lateness affects the grade given to any particular assignment. If you do accept late work you should have a cutoff date after which you will not longer accept a paper or project - this will prevent students from "dumping" late assignments in your inbox at the end of the term.

Academic Honesty

Syllabi should have a section on academic honesty. You may want to refer students to the University academic honor code:
(http://www.hamline.edu/shared/policies/cla_student/academic_honor.html)
 and use that as the statement of expectation and/or you may want to insert a policy of your own. Plagiarism is a particular problem in some courses. You may want to stress what will happen to student grades and/or continued participation in the course if plagiarism is discovered.
More Information at - http://www.udel.edu/studentconduct/syllabustats.html or
http://www.dso.iastate.edu/ja/academic/AcademicMisconductSampleStatements.doc

Attendance

You will need to determine if attendance is an important part of your evaluation procedures, Your attendance policy should be clearly stated. Usually missing three to five classes would be grounds to inform students of a significant grade reduction or the need to withdrawal from the course. In a T/TH class missing three classes means that the students have missed more than 10% of the course. If you are using an attendance policy you will need to keep very

accurate records and the number of missed classes should be indicated at midterm. You can add a column in an online gradebook to keep a running total.

Periodically a student claims an "excused" absence. Sometime they believe that if they send you an email announcing an illness then the missed class will not count against their attendance. You should be clear about your policy and if there are "excused" absences. You should also indicate your policy for missed classes due to religious observance. Some instructors inform students that they should use their allowable missed classes to cover for religious observances; others want students to inform them of religious events and do not count them against the missed class listing.

It is a good idea to include a clause about extenuating circumstances (major family situation, hospitalization or other serious issues) and how this will affect attendance. You may want to note that the student will need to inform you as soon as possible when there is a serious issue that will affect attendance.

Department of Education License Addendum

If your course fulfills part of the License requirements the approved licensure addendum should be included in the syllabus. The addendum was submitted to the Board of Education and the approved copy can be pasted into the syllabus. Each Department that supports a license will have these materials available for inclusion.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities and Course Requirements

The syllabus should indicate that students who have disabilities that may affect their work in the course should inform you within as soon as possible (perhaps during the first two weeks of the course) so that appropriate course adjustments can be made. The deadline here is suggested – the intent is to encourage students to contact you as soon as possible so that every possible resource will be in place to assist them in being successful. If the student waits until later in the course they may negatively affect their outcomes. The sooner you know about the need for accommodations the easier it is to make appropriate adjustments in course materials. It is worth noting that if a student is unable to provide you with appropriate notification early in the course the then the appropriate accommodations begin once you have received official notification. Accommodations are not required to be applied retroactively.

Some students may need encouragement discuss learning accommodations. There are students who want to start college "fresh" and do not want to bring their past experiences with accommodations into this new experience. As you can in the presentation of this section of the syllabus you might want to stress that your commitment is help student reach their full potential.

If your course has specific physical requirements or expectations those should be clearly stated. (for example, lifting, working on ladders at height, memorizing, or fine eye-hand projects).
More Information at - http://www.hamline.edu_info/offices_services/student_relations/student affairs/disability_services/faculty.html

Technology Disclaimer

Many faculty are starting to add a technology disclaimer or responsibility section to their syllabus. Essentially this section informs students that it is their responsibility to insure that their computer is functioning, they have backed up important papers or projects and that they need to have a supply of ink or arrange to use a campus printer. This kind of section prevents poorly printed papers or the excuse of lost files being presented to excuse incomplete or late work.

You may also want to use this section to inform students if assignments are to be turned in as hardcopy or if emailing an assignment (specify the acceptable format(s) is an allowed alternative.

More information at http://chronicle.com/blogPost/Technology-Policies-on-Course/22875/

Office Hours and Contact Information

Office hours and your office location should be included in the syllabus. Ideally office hours should be split so that there are some morning and some afternoon times. There should also be a statement that students can contact you to arrange for an appointment.

If you are using online or virtual office time you should include information on how to access your space and if there are any specific access requirements.

Note your preferred contact method, phone, email etc. It might also be worthwhile to note in your syllabus that emails are usually responded to in 24 hours (during the school week) or some similar policy. Some students expect that having sent you an email there will be a nearly instantaneous response.

You may want to require students to use a particular subject line in their email message to help you quickly identify course related emails. For example noting "For the fastest response please put **THTR 1120** in the subject line of your email" can help you manage course email flow.

Sidenote – you may want to create an email folder for your course and, as a matter of routine, dump all course emails into this folder. In case of any questions having a record of all course emails can be useful. If you cc or blindcopy yourself you will have a record of both the email and your reply.

Other Issues to Consider

- How are group projects evaluated?
- If you are posting your syllabus online you may want to create a document that works with links rather than a long single document.

You might want to consider adding a quiz on your syllabus/course policies, The quiz can be administered online and can be graded automatically. A quiz like this can help document that students were aware of course policies and procedures.

More Resources

Syllabus Development – Florida State University Resource Guide
http://learningforlife.fsu.edu/ctl/explore/bestPractices/syllabi.cfm

Course Philosophy

Many instructors find it helpful to post a course philosophy. Usually this is not a formal part of the syllabus but there may be a link or a separate document listing in the Course Information tab in Blackboard. The course philosophy provides you with the opportunity to explain why you have selected the content that you have, how your course meshes with disciplinary standards and how you view the learning process.