

Undergraduate Council Sub-Committee Report
Standardization of Syllabi
Stephanie Richardson, Maria Newton, Jeff Mathis
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Purpose of the document

In order to designate a course as fulfilling General Education, Diversity, Communication/Writing, or Qualitative Intensive requirements, members of the Undergraduate Council review course syllabi. We often comment on two things: 1) the uneven quality of syllabi submitted to us for our consideration, and 2) our struggle to achieve rigor in our review without compromising the academic freedom of the faculty member submitting the course. We offer this document as a partial solution to our concerns, as a guide to syllabus preparation. As a template for those submitting course materials for review, and for Undergraduate Council members charged with the act of reviewing, we hope to provide enough structure without stifling creativity and expression.

Purpose of a syllabus

A syllabus communicates in writing between faculty and students the content and processes of a course. While not strictly a contract, in that it may be altered and amended by the faculty without input from the students, it does represent a codification of course procedures. Students and faculty are expected to follow the syllabus and are held accountable for its content. It acts as an important guide and reference for course participants.

Syllabi vary in format, content, and length, once very basic information has been included. Basic information serves to anticipate and answer student questions about why they should take this course, their ability to complete the required work, and the teaching-learning styles contained in the course. Students appreciate complete, comprehensive syllabi because information in the syllabus helps them succeed, and students urge faculty to make syllabi inclusive, rather than eliminate information in order to conserve natural resources. That said, a one-page syllabus is probably too short unless one of the instructor's course objectives is for students to learn to construct a syllabus, while a very lengthy syllabus filled with original writings may mean the instructor is ready to publish a text.

For the instructor, preparing information for inclusion in a syllabus helps organize the course calendar, identify areas of emphasis, and formalize policies on evaluation and procedures. For both faculty and students, syllabus information minimizes misunderstandings about due dates, grading criteria, and similar policies. In this way, syllabi serve to protect the rights and spell out the responsibilities of participants.

Responsibilities of faculty are spelled out in Rights and Responsibilities (www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-12-4.html), thus it is helpful to include as many of these as possible in the syllabus and read those sections in class on the first day. The responsibilities include the following:

Faculty will:

- *Convene classes unless valid reason and notice given.*
- *Perform & return evaluations in a timely manner.* (Now, don't make impossible promises. A two week turn-around time is customary but may not work for everyone. Just don't let things go longer than you say they will).
- *Inform students at beginning of class of:*
 1. *General content*
 2. *Course activities*
 3. *Evaluation methods*
 4. *Grade scale*
 5. *Schedule of meetings, topics, due dates.*
- *Ensure environment conducive to learning.* (Most students are relieved to know you are aware this is your job, and this is where you can speak to cell phones, whispering, arriving late & leaving early, bringing children to class, etc., whatever is disruptive in your classroom.)

- *Enforce student code.* Containing proscribed behaviors and consequences of same, many students are not aware that there is such a code, and that they receive a copy in Orientation. It is also available on the web (www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10_pdfs/8-10_section_1.pdf) and in Student Affairs.

Finally, a well-constructed syllabus shows students and colleagues that this course is a serious academic undertaking. Demonstrating serious intent in this way is most helpful in two arenas: 1) in the large-format freshman-level general education course, where socialization into the university classroom can be as important as mastery of the course content, and can be as difficult to achieve and 2) when a course syllabus is being reviewed by peers for purposes of accreditation, for RPT file review, or for adherence to criteria for general education.

Basic content of a syllabus

Number and title of course. You'd be surprised (maybe you wouldn't) how often students will sit through the first class session until they realize they are in the wrong course. The course number at the top of the page can reduce this error.

Department(s) offering course. Students can get quite confused about where a course is housed, academically, particularly if it is cross-listed. This information becomes important when a student has questions, needs to find you, or wants to appeal a decision.

Pre- or co-requisites. Essential information for students wondering if they can succeed in the course.

Credit hours. At least partially answers student questions about the work load. You can read this to them on the first day of class and explain how many preparation hours you will expect for the number of credit hours listed on the syllabus.

Meeting time(s) and location. Critical information if attendance is important to you.

Faculty name(s) and rank or professional title or degrees/credentials. For faculty who may, for whatever reason, experience negative stereotyping from students, rank, title or degree provides credibility. It also provides students with information about who is teaching the course. Some disciplines prefer that you list rank (e.g., Jane Doe, Associate Professor). In some disciplines, professional title is preferred (e.g., Dr. Jane Doe, or Professor Jane Doe), while in others, it is the norm to follow your name with degrees and any credentials (e.g., Jane Doe, PhD, FNP).

Faculty office number, location & hours. You probably already know this, but just for the sake of form: if you list office hours, you are expected to be there waiting for student interactions, at the stated times. If you do not wish to be tied to those hours, relatively unoccupied, simply list "by appointment" and then explain to students on the first day how they can make an appointment to see you. The expectations regarding minimum office hours vary by department; there is no University of Utah standard.

Faculty phone number(s) and e-mail address. Only put the information there if you use the medium. For example, if e-mail is not a very good way to find you, there's no real benefit in listing it. Students often find it helpful if you tell them what method is the best for contacting you.

Course description. Check that this matches what is in the catalog – and that there even is a description in the catalog - and that it contains a general content overview, not what faculty or students will be doing. This should take one paragraph.

Course objectives. Because these are usually decided upon by a departmental curriculum committee and so not changeable by the instructor, objectives are very important for faculty reviewers. Objectives describe what the students will be able to do after taking the course, e.g., "Recite the second act of Monte Python's *Holy Grail*.", thus, these should begin with a verb and describe a measurable learning outcome.

Content overview. Here, describe what will be covered in the course, in more detail than the course description. You can use your own voice and be more creative in this section.

Teaching and learning methods. List all the activities that occur in the course; for some courses this will be one word (“discussion” or “lecture”) and for others there will be a varied list (debate, term paper, oral criticism, readings, performance, etc.)

Evaluation methods. A critical section for students who want to know how they shall achieve their grade. List the ways the student will demonstrate learning to you; for some courses this will be two words (multiple-choice examination) while for others, there may be many methods. There should be parity between evaluation methods and objectives. Note: attendance is usually not a learning objective, so most instructors evaluate participation, or an activity that must be done or completed in class instead, to assist with getting students into the room. University of Utah instructions to students regarding attendance can be found at www.sa.utah.edu/regist/pages/policies.

Grade scale or points scale. Each method of evaluation is given a weight or number of points. This tells both students and instructors what matters most. Also, include the total points possible. See www.sa.utah.edu/regist/pages/policies for assistance.

Text or reading list (includes course materials). Use the citation to show the students disciplinary norms for scholarly citations. It will also show faculty peers that you are a serious scholar. If you use course materials other than the usual texts or articles, such as videotapes or supplemental packets, describe them and state where they are available.

Weekly schedule of topics and due dates. If your course is quite fluid and the calendar changes during the semester, list major topics and generally when you expect to get to them. Include deadlines for papers, etc. and timing of exams, field trips, etc. The calendar is a major help to students struggling to get organized while learning to juggle study schedules, play time, and planning weddings.

ADA statement. Use the statement verbatim from OEO, which has recently changed: (www.hr.utah.edu/o eo/ada/guide/faculty/).

“The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.”

Faculty responsibilities. Use the wording from Rights and Responsibilities (www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-12-4.html) as a check that your syllabus contains the minimum requirements. Extremely helpful should a grade ever be appealed. Here’s one example:

“All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, and I will do so, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from and class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.”

Syllabus Checklist

Number and title of course	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Department offering course	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Pre- or co-requisites	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Credit hours	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Meeting time(s) and location	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Faculty name(s) and rank(s)	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Faculty office number, location & hours	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Faculty phone number(s) and e-mail address	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Course description	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Course objectives	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Content overview	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Teaching & learning methods	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Evaluation methods	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Grade scale or points scale	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Text or reading list	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Weekly schedule of topics and due dates	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
ADA statement	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable
Faculty responsibilities	Yes	Partially	No	Not applicable