

Mindful and Learner-Centered Syllabus Checklist

Use the seven steps and checklist to determine whether your course syllabus includes these learner-centered components.

Seven Steps to a Learner-Centered Syllabus

- Step 1. Evaluate your existing syllabus using this checklist to identify areas for improvement.
- Step 2. Create a plan for implementation by identifying which syllabus element you would like to improve.
- Step 3. Experiment with your syllabus. Memo on your syllabus when your students ask questions or requests. Use these memos to continue to improve your syllabus.
- Step 4. Assess the implementation of changing your syllabus. Conduct a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project, publish your syllabus in outlets such as Project Syllabus by the Society of Teaching of Psychology (<http://teachpsych.org/otrp/syllabi/index.php>), and/or The Open Syllabus Project (<http://opensyllabusproject.org/>).
- Step 5. Review guidelines, resources and examples found on CELT's How to Create an Effective Syllabus webpage (<http://bit.ly/isusyllabus>). This checklist is updated periodically with the revision date listed on the back page.
- Step 6. Repeat steps 1–5.
- Step 7. Never stop repeating steps 1–5.

Overall Syllabus

- Use positive, welcoming, inviting and inclusive language in your syllabus. Examples: "Late work is eligible for 60% of the original points," or "Attendance will benefit you in several ways," or "You have what it takes to succeed in this course without engaging in academic misconduct. Do not jeopardize the hard work you've put into this course."
- Follow steps to an accessible document using resources on CELT's Accessify Your Course webpage (<http://bit.ly/celt-accessify>).

Course Information

- Course Title, Course Abbreviation and Number
- Semester and Year (Start Date to End Date)
- Number of Credit Hours
- When and where the course will meet (campus learning space, online, etc.)

Instructor Information

If an instructor has teaching assistant(s) or co-teacher(s) please include similar information.

- Name
- Office Address
- Student Hours (Consider using "Student Hours" instead of "Office Hours" to promote that these times are set aside specifically for students in case they need help outside class). Provide student hours via multiple means of access (your office, phone, e-mail, virtually using webcasting software). Example: Student Hours - T & R 8:30-9:30 a.m. in my office or via Zoom. Individual assistance is always available by appointment. I look forward to seeing you during student hours.
- Telephone Number (If you don't have a campus landline communicate with your students using the Canvas Conversations tool to record a message. Learn how via the Canvas Conversations Overview video (<http://bit.ly/2YEgyJp>) or read the Canvas Conversations web guide (<http://bit.ly/2YAkUYZ>).
- Email Address
- Other Contact Information

Departmental Information

- Name of Department and location of Departmental Office
- Preferred Contact Information for the Department

Course Goals, Learning Outcomes, and Learning Objectives

- To give a basic background and starting point for course design use CELT's Basic Course Design: Aligning Course Objectives with Class Assignments and Your Teaching Approach webpage (<http://bit.ly/1TqBeW3>)
- Share with students how the course fits into the overall curriculum and what they will leave the course being able to do. Answering the question, "Why is this course useful?" Also, orient students to the discipline if it's an introductory course.
- List 4-5 broad-based learning outcomes that reflect what the students will learn and skills they will develop by successfully completing the course. Provide rationales for assignments, activities, methods, policies, and procedures tied to these learning outcomes.
- Visit CELT's Tips on Writing Course Goals/Learning Outcomes and Measurable Learning Objectives webpage (<http://bit.ly/1QvTjzt>) as a resource for developing your course.

Describe Course Format

- Specify textbooks and readings by author and editions. When possible, explain connections to the course goals and how the text and readings address them.
- Explain expectations to have completed readings before class sessions and the degree of understanding that you expect (e.g., successfully complete pop quizzes, can discuss concepts, or apply reading information to problem-solving scenarios).
- Describe other course components such as teaching approach, group assignments, individualized consultation, etc.
- Share information from ISU's Library Instructor webpage (<http://bit.ly/isulibinstruct>) if readings are on course reserves.
- Identify where students can obtain additional equipment, resources, or materials.

Assignments (Papers, quizzes, exams, projects, etc.)

- Connect multiple means of assessment (exams, quizzes, exercises, projects, papers, etc.) directly to learning outcomes.
- Consider using the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) framework by providing the following for each assignment:
 - Purpose: practice skills, expand content knowledge, and benefits for life-long learning.
 - Tasks: clarify steps on what to do and how to do it.
 - Criteria: how to be successful (e.g., checklist, rubric); as well as, examples and strategies for students to improve their work.

How will Students Be Evaluated?

- Explain clearly how students will be evaluated, and grades assigned. Include components of final grade, weights assigned to each component, grading on a curve or scale, etc.
- Use both summative and formative evaluations (e.g., oral presentations, group work, self-evaluation, peer evaluation).
- Employ periodic feedback mechanisms to monitor learning (e.g., graded and non-graded quizzes, tests, lecture-response systems, tests, reflection papers).
- Provide ways that students can easily calculate or find their grades at any point in the course.

Course Policies

State your policies clearly in the syllabus and discuss them throughout the semester regarding:

- Expectations for attendance, assignments, late assignments, make-up options, extra credit, and examinations.
- Steps to report illness via ISU's Thielen Student Health Center's Class Excuse webpage (<http://bit.ly/isu-class-excuse>).
- Cheating and plagiarism, learn more from ISU's Office of Student Conduct's webpage (<http://bit.ly/isu-academic-misconduct>).
- List grading policies regarding incomplete marks, visit the ISU Catalog website (<http://catalog.iastate.edu/>).
- Make clear a student's course obligations and your obligations to teaching the course.
- Share expected classroom behaviors (examples available on the last page of this checklist).

Course Calendar

- Use the Interfaith Calendar website (<http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>) when scheduling projects, presentations, and exams to consider any potential conflicts.
- Provide a course calendar that outlines topics to be covered, reading requirements, assignment due dates, etc. If necessary, revise it and be sure students get an updated version.

- List important dates (or include a link to the ISU Academic Calendar) such as last drop date, registration dates for the next semester, etc. Visit the ISU Academic Calendar website (<http://www.registrar.iastate.edu/calendar>) for detailed information.
- Note dates and times of any exams scheduled outside of class time. If needed, visit ISU's Online Testing Center website (<http://www.testcenter.iastate.edu/>).
- Include the date and time of the final exam. Locate the information on the Office of the Registrar's webpage (<https://www.registrar.iastate.edu/students/exams>)

Additional Learner-Centered Information

- Inform students about sensitive or potentially disturbing information or activities covered in the course.
- Consider adding a link in your Canvas course to ISU's Online Learner Support webpage (<http://bit.ly/isuonlinesupport>) found in the MyCanvas Students at ISU course site (<http://bit.ly/mycanvasstudent>).
- Estimate student workload. Give students a sense of how much preparation and work the course requires. But be realistic; they don't believe either scare tactics or soft-pedaling. (Remember that yours isn't the only class they're taking.) One way to determine the workload is to use the [Rice University Course Workload Estimator](http://cte.rice.edu/workload/) web tool (<http://cte.rice.edu/workload/>).
- Share expectations in your syllabus and discuss them throughout the semester. Include information on how to succeed:
 - Check your Iowa State email regularly
 - Log into Canvas, the campus learning management system, daily
 - Communicate with your instructor and visit during student hours
 - Create a study schedule so that you don't fall behind
 - Successful students will connect with tutors, academic coaches, communication consultants, resources, supplemental instructors, and more via ISU's Academic Success Center website (<http://www.asc.dso.iastate.edu/>), ISU's Writing and Media Center website (<https://www.wmc.dso.iastate.edu/>), and ISU's Student Accessibility Services (<http://www.sas.dso.iastate.edu>).

Recommended Iowa State University Syllabus Statements from Faculty Senate

- Statement on Academic Integrity:** To promote integrity and deter dishonest academic work, it may be useful to consider including a statement of expectations and consequences related to academic misconduct in your course syllabus. For statement examples visit the Student Conduct's Academic Misconduct webpage (<http://bit.ly/isu-academic-misconduct>)
- Accessibility Statement:** Iowa State University is committed to assuring that all educational activities are free from discrimination and harassment based on disability status. Students requesting accommodations for a documented disability are required to work directly with staff in Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to establish eligibility and learn about related processes before accommodations will be identified. After eligibility is established, SAS staff will create and issue a Notification Letter for each course listing approved reasonable accommodations. This document will be made available to the student and instructor either electronically or in hard-copy every semester. Students and instructors are encouraged to review contents of the Notification Letters as early in the semester as possible to identify a specific, timely plan to deliver/receive the indicated accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are not retroactive in nature and are not intended to be an unfair advantage. Additional information or assistance is available online at www.sas.dso.iastate.edu, by contacting SAS staff by email at accessibility@iastate.edu, or by calling 515-294-7220. Student Accessibility Services is a unit in the Dean of Students Office located at 1076 Student Services Building.
- Discrimination and Harassment:** Iowa State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. Veteran. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies may be directed to Office of Equal Opportunity, 3410 Beardshear Hall, 515 Morrill Road, Ames, Iowa 50011, Tel. 515-294-7612, Hotline 515-294-1222, email eooffice@iastate.edu
- Religious Accommodations:** Iowa State University welcomes diversity of religious beliefs and practices, recognizing the contributions differing experiences and viewpoints can bring to the community. There may be times when an academic requirement conflicts with religious observances and practices. If that happens, students may request reasonable accommodation for religious practices. In all cases, you must put your request in writing. The instructor will review the situation in an effort to provide a reasonable accommodation when possible to do so without fundamentally altering a course. For students, you should first discuss the conflict and your requested accommodation with your professor at the earliest possible time. You or your instructor may also seek assistance from the Dean of Students Office, website (<http://dso.iastate.edu>) or via phone 515-294-1020 or the Office of Equal Opportunity, website (<https://www.eoc.iastate.edu>) or via phone 515-294-7612.

- Statement on Dead Week:** This class follows the Iowa State University Dead Week policy as noted the ISU Policy Library; as well as section 10.6.4 of the Faculty Handbook. Visit the ISU Policy Library website (<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/>) for policy wording.

Consider Including these Examples of Inclusive, Professionalism and Mutual Respect Statements

- Related to ISU's Principles of Community, "Students are responsible for living the tenets established in ISU's Principles of Community: Respect, Purpose, Cooperation, Richness of Diversity, Freedom from discrimination, and the Honest and respectful expression of ideas. Visit ISU's Principles of Community webpage (<http://bit.ly/isuprinciples>)
- Regarding name, gender identity and/or gender expression, "Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records."
- Promoting student health and wellness, "Iowa State University is committed to proactively facilitating the well-being of all students. We welcome and encourage students to contact the following on-campus services for assistance regarding their physical, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, environmental, financial, social, and/or emotional needs:
- Student Wellness call 515-294-1099 or via website (<http://studentwellness.iastate.edu>);
 - Thielen Student Health Center call 515-294-5801 (24/7 Medical Advice) or via website (<http://www.cyclonehealth.org>);
 - Student Counseling Services call 515-294-5056 or via website (<https://counseling.iastate.edu>);
 - Recreation Services call 515-294-4980 or via website (<http://recservices.iastate.edu>).
 - Students dealing with heightened feelings of sadness or hopelessness, thoughts of harm or suicide, or increased anxiety may contact the ISU Crisis Text Line (Text ISU to 741-741) or contact the ISU Police Department 515-294-4428."
- Fostering a safe community, "Green Dot Project: A green dot is any choice, behavior, word or attitude that promotes safety for everyone and communicates utter intolerance for power-based personal violence in our Iowa State University community. A green dot is anything you do to make our community safer. What is your Green Dot? Visit the Green Dot - Student Wellness website (<http://www.studentwellness.iastate.edu/greendot/>)."
- About mutual respect and professionalism, "You are expected to treat your instructor and all other participants in the course with courtesy and respect. Your comments to others should be factual, constructive, and free from harassing statements. You are encouraged to disagree with other students, but such disagreements need to be based upon facts and documentation (rather than prejudices and personalities). It is the instructor's goal to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. Please contact the instructor if you have suggestions for improving the classroom environment. It is preferable if students discuss issues directly with the instructor, however, students may also leave a note in the instructor's mailbox."
- Relevant to the ISU Inclusive Language policy stating, "All university publications and communication, whether oral or written, shall use inclusive language and illustrations. Inclusive language refers to language that makes every attempt to include comprehensively all groups in the community. Whenever possible, selection of academic materials will also reflect efforts to uphold this university policy." Visit the Policy Library's Inclusive Language website (<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/policy/language>).
- Related to usability, disability and design, "I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact the Student Accessibility Services via phone 515-294-7220 to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students."
- Related to University policies, "Students in this course are responsible for being familiar with the University's student rules and policies. Visit the ISU Policy Library website (<http://www.policy.iastate.edu/>)."

Making Your Syllabus Matter

1. Where will students access your syllabus? How do students know where to locate it within Canvas?

2. What do students see first on your syllabus? How do they know what to do next? Can they follow your instructions?

3. How can students obtain the resources they need to be successful in your course?
4. How do you project an inclusive learning environment?
5. How can your syllabus be used by students with visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and/or neurological disabilities?
6. How will you know if students have reviewed the syllabus? A low-stakes quiz or assignment? Or, did you hide “hidden gems” in the syllabi as a way to gauge how many students have read your syllabus?
7. How will you make your syllabus matter throughout the course? If you dump the document on students and rarely (or never) refer to it again, you’re telling them it doesn’t contain any information vital to their success. If you don’t treat your syllabus as important, why should they?

References

- Cullen, R., & Harris, M. (2009). Assessing learner-centeredness through course syllabi. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(1), 115–125. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/10.1080/02602930801956018>
- Cullen, R., Harris, M., & Hill, R. (2012). *The learner-centered curriculum: Design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses (Rev. ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu>. Accessed April 23, 2019.
- Gannon, C. (2018). How to create a syllabus: Advice guide. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus> Accessed on May 22, 2019.
- Harnish, R. J. & Bridges, K. R. (2011). Effect of syllabus tone: students’ perceptions of instructor and course. *Social Psychology of Education*, 14(3), 319– 330.
- Harnish, R. J., McElwee, R. O., Slattery, J. M., Frantz, S., Haney, M. R., Shore, C. M., & Penley, J. (2011, January). Creating the foundation for a warm classroom climate: Best practices in syllabus tone. *Observer*, 24(1). Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/33aQlwm>
- Nilson, L. B. (2016). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors (4th ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, M. S., Bach, D. J., & Streifer, A. C. (2014). Measuring the promise: A learning-focused syllabus rubric. *To improve the academy: A journal of educational development*, 33(1), 14 -36. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/tia2.20004>
- Richlin L. (2006). *Blueprint for Learning: Constructing College Courses to Facilitate, Assess, and Document Learning*. Vol 1st ed. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. Retrieved <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=192982&site=ehost-live>. Accessed April 23, 2019.
- Richmond, A. S. (2016, September). Constructing a learner-centered syllabus: One professor’s journey. *IDEA Paper #60*. Retrieved from <https://www.ideaedu.org/>.
- Richmond, A. S., Boysen, G. A., & Gurung, R. A. R. (2016). *An evidence-based guide to college and university teaching: Developing the model teacher*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu>
- Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) Higher Ed website (<https://tilthighered.com/>).
- Vai, M., & Sosulski, K. (2011). *Essentials of online course design: A standards-based guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Winkelmess, M.A., Boye, A., & Tapp, S. (2019). *Transparent design in higher education teaching and leadership: A guide to implementing the transparency framework institution-wide to improve learning and retention*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Revised 8/12/19 2:55 PM

 Mindful and Learner-Centered Syllabus Checklist by [Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching \(CELT\)](#), [Iowa State University](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).