The syllabus is an important document, both for you and your students. First, it is a legal document. It is your contract with your students for the semester. It is important that expectations are clear so that students can make informed decisions about staying in the course with the likelihood that they can succeed. There should be no surprises announced later in the term. In general, it is useful to think of the syllabus as a standalone document that does not rely on verbal instructions and clarifications which only some students may hear. However, if the syllabus tries to clarify every aspect of the course, it can become too long, potentially overwhelming students.

Beyond its legal implications, the syllabus is also a personal statement by and about an instructor. At one extreme, students often interpret syllabi that are very short and vague as a sign that the instructor invests very little in his/her teaching, is lazy, or is unaware of students' needs to know what is expected of them in order to succeed. At the other extreme, there is the syllabus that is very long, with pages of rules and regulations. It is so complete that it may appear to lack flexibility and openness to student input. Students are grateful that everything is specified, but they often get lost in the amount of information and conclude that the instructor is rigid, authoritarian, and/or compulsive. Consider carefully how you want your students to view you, because the syllabus is one of the critical ways in which you make your first impression. And the truism stands: You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

It is a balancing act in which instructors should clarify all important elements of the course, spark students' interest in the subject, identify the key tasks and expectations, and convey the instructor's accessibility and desire to help them succeed. It is a tall order.

What to do?
1) Provide all the elements required of all syllabi at EMU.
2) Be selective about additional components that play a major role in your course.
3) Try to personalize the syllabus, adding your own voice or style.

Below you will find Student Expectations and Course Syllabi Required for All EMU Courses (p. 2) and a Syllabus Worksheet (pp. 6-9) with a range of options to include. Even if you have your syllabus completed, you may find the worksheet useful because it includes information about EMU instructional policies, e.g., the EMU code on academic honesty and plagiarism, requests for ADA accommodations, and posting of grades, among others.
Student Expectations and Course Syllabi Required for All EMU Courses
Prepared by the Provost's Office, Division of Academic Affairs (1997)

The Division of Academic Affairs by policy and practice affirms certain rights students have with regard to course information and other classroom-related matters, specifically:

A student has the right to expect the following from instructors:

- Impartial, fair and dignified treatment.
- Reasonable opportunities to ask questions and to express ideas.
- Respect for his or her right of privacy to personal views.
- Clear statements of standards for acceptable work in advance of grading and other assignments.
- Knowledge of the grading system early in the semester and the absence of unfair, capricious or discriminatory grading categories.
- Prompt return of examinations and other assignments with verbal and/or written explanation of deficiencies.
- Regular scheduled office hours, with additional time at hours which are mutually convenient for the instructor and the student.
- Explicit and early description of the instructor's policy for penalties regarding failure to participate in class. (Attendance may be used as a criterion for evaluation.)
- Advance knowledge, when possible, of cancellation of class or office hours.
- Guaranteed anonymity during course evaluation.

One of the ways to meet most of these expectations is to provide the students with a written syllabus, ideally at the first meeting of the class. Such a syllabus should contain at least the following:

1. A list of required and recommended course materials;
2. A general outline of the course content and an approximate time table;
3. The type, number, dates, and value of papers, assignments, quizzes, examinations, and some explanation of the way they are determined;
4. The policy of the instructor on class attendance, late or missed assignments and make-up examinations;
5. Office hours and other methods of contacting the instructor if such alternate methods are provided;
6. Notice that academic dishonesty will be penalized.
Flexibility counts. Instructors may wish to make modifications during the semester. If you label your syllabus, Tentative Syllabus, you have given yourself some latitude to make needed changes as the course progresses. If you make changes, be sure all students know about the changes in a timely way and provide a revised syllabus either in hard copy or on-line. It is advisable to ask for student feedback on proposed changes and to provide alternatives to those who do not wish to make the changes.

Specificity. A review of books on teaching in higher education over the past few decades reveals a decided shift in their approaches to syllabi. Earlier books encouraged faculty to provide a minimum of specifics and to give themselves flexibility to modify their plans as needed. More recent books encourage much greater specificity for three compelling reasons: 1) Many more students in higher education today are working adults who must plan their lives well in advance, arranging baby sitters, work hours and non-academic commitments. Many of them must know well in advance which weeks will require more hours of study to prepare papers and exams or when they will need to meet out of class with groups. Instructor flexibility is often problematic for them in the context of their ongoing struggle to balance school, family, community responsibilities and work, and to plan ahead. 2) Many more students today need specificity of expectations because they do not have the academic preparation or mental models of academic work to understand our shorthand. Some students will understand what it means to do an abstract, a lab report, a case study analysis or a group presentation. Others will not. They need explicit instructions. The syllabus and assignment protocols need to spell out all requirements and expectations. 3) We live in a society that has become increasingly consumer-oriented and litigious. Students often see themselves as customers and when they don't get what they want, need or expect, they seek redress. The syllabus protects both students and instructors by clarifying the nature of their mutual responsibilities. The more explicit the syllabus is, the less there is room for misunderstanding about expectations. There is a cost to providing greater clarity in terms of flexibility; but one can build in some space for change. In balance, most students prefer specificity, affirming again and again that they want and need greater clarity to succeed.

Style and Tone. Sometimes short-and-to-the-point is useful. Sometimes it obscures more than it clarifies and establishes an officious or harsh tone that discourages students who may need more information or assistance. Several examples developed by Terrence Collins (1997) follow:

1. Office Hours: 8:00-9:30 T, TH 510 Main
   vs.
   Office Hours: 8:00-9:30 AM, Tuesdays and Thursdays, in my office, 510 Main, in the hallway closest to the English Department Office. My office is wheelchair accessible.
   If you cannot make these hours, please see me before or after class or e-mail me (see e-mail address above) so we can make an appointment to meet at another time.
   Please do not think of office hours as a time to address only problems with the course. You can use them to clarify ideas, to get additional readings or materials, to go over work in progress or even to discuss careers in this field. You don't have to be having a problem to use office hours, and it is best not to wait until you are having serious difficulties.

   vs.
   Feb. 22: Read pp. 112-167. (Note: This is a particularly difficult section on American historiography and theory. You may find it useful to review your notes from the Jan. 20 lecture and pp. 77-91 in the textbook before doing this reading.)
3. NO FOOD and NO DRINKS in the LAB.

Eating and drinking are not allowed in the lab because we will be working with hazardous substances. Eating and drinking in the lab puts you and your classmates at risk of injury, illness and accident from these toxins. Compliance is important for your own safety.

4. Many syllabi do not discuss what students should do if they are having difficulties. New syllabi have sections devoted to this topic.

There are several options for what to do if you are having difficulty. 1) Ask questions in class. 2) E-mail me or come to my office hours. 3) Go to the Study Tables that have been arranged for this class in Main 410. I have reviewed the assignments with the Graduate Students who supervise the Study Tables and they should be able to help you. 4) Go to the Department Tutoring Lab. No appointment is needed, but hours vary from day to day. The schedule is posted on Main 450 and the Department Webpage. 5) Go to the Learning Center in Pierce Hall.

Alternative approaches to the syllabus. An increasing number of faculty use constructivist approaches to instruction, that is, they believe that students must be actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge and therefore engage students in building the syllabus as part of that process. The syllabus for a course based on this approach may appear to be minimalist but within weeks will take shape. Instructors who use problem-based learning may also need more latitude in defining their preliminary plan for the course, basing much of the course structure on the problems and approaches to addressing those problems identified by the students. Courses in problem-based learning, for example, often include lists of questions that may be addressed in the course rather than lists of topics. Nonetheless, even in these contexts, it is important to provide students entering the course with a clear sense of what will be expected of them and how the class will proceed so that they can make informed decisions about whether to stay in the class.

New/unique approaches to instruction and assessment, such as service learning, instructional technology, group work, group presentations, case studies, simulations, group exams, mastery learning and contract grading, among others. As more faculty are integrating new approaches to teaching and learning, instructors are describing these approaches to students on their syllabi by defining them, providing a rationale, and discussing criteria for evaluation of these new techniques. The rationale is important, particularly for students who cannot envision the utility of these new strategies. If you wish to assign group work in which students meet out of class, it is helpful to identify the time commitment on the syllabus so that students know from the get-go that they will need to allocate time to these tasks. Whenever possible, consider adding these approaches to course descriptions in the catalog to provide clear expectations to students who register. It is better for both students and instructors to know about these expectations as early as possible.

Introduce the syllabus to your students. You can talk students through the syllabus, commenting and clarifying as you go. You can ask students to read the syllabus and discuss it for a few minutes in groups of two to three; then ask for questions. If the syllabus is long, you can give an assignment based on reading and responding to it. You may want to construct one or more parts of the syllabus with your students. Don't assume that students have read the syllabus and know what is in it unless you direct them to do so and provide some oversight, structure or follow-up. Many problems can be traced to lack of student understanding of information contained in the syllabus. If students register late for your class for whatever reason, it is useful to give them a chance to review the syllabus and ask questions, either in office hours or by e-mail.
Prepare several additional copies of the syllabus. Students will add and drop the course in the first week of class. You may also have several additional students attend the first class who are not registered but who are "checking out" your class or who hope to get into it once others drop.

Post your syllabus on-line. If you post your syllabus on-line before classes begin, you are more likely to get students who have a clearer understanding of what the course is about and what they are committing themselves to do. If you post your syllabus on-line during the course, you can easily make changes and updates of even minor modifications. But, you will have to notify students in class that changes have been made and that they are responsible for those changes. To browse on-line syllabi at EMU and nationally, go to the FCIE Homepage: http://www.emich.edu/public/fcie/fcie.html, and use the links to On-line Syllabi and the World Lecture Hall.

Ask a colleague in your department to review your syllabus. There may be specific department policies or resources you should consider. The department may also have sample syllabi that are discipline-specific.

If you have any questions, would like to see sample syllabi or have your syllabus reviewed, please call the FCIE (7-1386). We'd be happy to assist you.

References

FCIE Grants to Improve Introductory Courses

Congratulations to all FCIE Grant Participants!

1997-1998 Awardees
- Art: Art Appreciation (CAS)
- Business and Technology Education: Technology Education for Children (COT)
- Economics: Introduction to Macroeconomics (CAS)
- Sociology: Introduction to Sociology (CAS)

1998-1999 Awardees
- Political Science: American Government (CAS)
- HPERD: Lifetime Wellness and Fitness (COE)
- Finance and CIS: End-User Computing (COB)
- Special Education: Language Development in Special Populations (COE)

Whys and Ways of Teaching April 1998
A Syllabus Worksheet


This worksheet can be used as you develop or modify your syllabi. We are not suggesting that all of these items should be included. We are suggesting that you be selective, addressing the topics that EMU specifies must be included and any additional items that reflect your priorities and your wisdom of practice about what students need to know from the first day of class about your expectations and what they must do to succeed. (See page 2 for elements required at EMU.)

Elements with selected examples and commentary.

Course Title and Number

Hours of Course and Location
Other logistics: Labs, clinical settings, electronic classroom, library, etc.

Professor Information
Name, title
Office address
Office hours
Phone (office/home-when to call)
E-mail address
Information about instructor: degrees, fields of expertise, research projects

Course Description/# of credits
Catalog description
Elaboration or clarification of the catalog description

Course Prerequisites/Corequisites

Where Course Fits into Program Goals:
Ex. "This is the first course required in the major."
Ex. "This is the last course before your field work."

Course Objectives/Course Outcomes
Traditionally, course objectives were framed in terms of the content that would be covered by the instructor in a course. Today, course objectives are most often defined in terms of what students will be able to do at the end of the course.
Ex. from a course in Management Policy: “apply concepts of strategic management to real business situations and evaluate how well the concepts aid in formulating recommendations for the issues presented in cases.”
Ex. from a course in Educational Measurement and Evaluation: “At the end of this course, students will be better able to:
Evaluate standardized tests for their technical adequacy.
Apply the theories of tests, measurement and evaluation to the solution of classroom problems in those areas.”

Required Texts/Resources: Title, Author, Date/Edition, Where Sold, Cost
Texts/Coursepacks
Style Guides (To save costs, use electronic style guides available on the www.)
Internet Sites/CD Roms
Subscriptions/Newspapers

Whys and Ways of Teaching
April 1998
Required Materials
  Lab materials, notebooks, art supplies, calculators
  On-line course may require access to specific software, hardware, and computer memory.

Recommended Texts/Resources
  On reserve/on-line/dept. or office libraries

Class Format/Instructional Methods: Description, Rationale, Criteria for Evaluation
  e.g., seminar, lecture, simulations, case studies, required group work, service learning, student presentations, instructional technology: computer conferencing, problem-based learning, etc.
  Many instructors now include a section entitled: Why am I using this method?

Course Policies
  Absences (Note: EMU Policy -- Attendance may be used as a criterion for evaluation.)
  Make-ups/Late papers
  Approaches to Modifying the Syllabus
  Surprise Quizzes

Course Requirements Beyond Assignments and Assessments
  Ex. “Visit to Instructor Office Hours At least Once During the Semester.”
  Ex. “All students who obtain a C or less on the first hourly exam must come to office hours during the month following the first exam.”
  Ex. “Assigned readings are due on the date listed in the calendar. You are expected to come to class prepared. Read, and review the material, take notes on it and be ready to discuss it.”
  Ex. “You must activate your student e-mail address and check your email weekly.”

Guidelines for Class Behavior/Ground-Rules
  Ex. “Please be courteous and respectful to others.”

Expectations for Class Participation
  Ex. “Contributions to class discussion (25%) is an extremely important part of this course. The case method does not work without it. Contribution requires attendance. Quality contribution requires strong and thoughtful preparation and a willingness to take and defend a position.
  Every student should prepare every case and be prepared to be called on in class to discuss the case. Adequate case preparation generally involves reading the case at least twice, taking notes on key issues, analyzing financial figures and other data provided, and developing a point of view on actions the company should take....
  I evaluate class contribution based on the quantity, and more importantly, the quality of contributions to case discussions. To do this, I take notes after every class, and request students to complete self-reports on their contributions....”

Expected Hours of Preparation/Work Outside Class Per Week
  Estimate the total based on the following: reading/studying, assigned papers/projects, group work, study groups, attendance at events, seeing movies/tapes, service, e-mail and computer conferences, labs, field trips

Academic Integrity
  Cheating/Plagiarism
  Ex. “Academic dishonesty will be penalized.” (Some variation of this is required.)
  EMU code: "Academic Dishonesty: Students are not to engage in any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, plagiarism, alteration of records, (continued on p. 8)
substitution of another's work representing it as the student's own, and knowingly assisting another student in engaging in any such activity."

"... plagiarism is defined as the knowing use, without appropriate approval, of published materials, expressions, or works of another with intent to represent the material(s) as one's own."

Course Schedule (Calendar) (The visual display is important.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic/Class Activity</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptions of Specific Assignments (in brief for the syllabus; in detail later in term)

- Description of assignment
- Rationale for assignment: “Why am I assigning this?”
- Due dates/benchmark dates for drafts (# of copies if using peer feedback)
- Criteria for evaluation
- Samples (provided later)

Assessment/Grading

- Types of grades
- Percentage or weighting of each grade
- How to compute your grade
- Policies/practices, e.g., “I will drop your lowest test grade.”
- Mastery learning models, e.g., “Because the Unit Plan is critical to this course and to professional competence, you will receive an RE (Resubmit) until you have achieved a grade of B or better. You may submit up to three revisions.”
- Revisions/resubmits
- Office hours designated at end of term to discuss class participation and course grades

Posting of Grades

(Note: Instructors may post grades but only by student number, not by student name.

Students should not leave papers for students to pick up if they will see the graded papers of other students, e.g., in a box outside your office door. If the dept. secretary, TA or GA is willing, he/she may distribute papers for you as long as students do not have access to the graded papers of other students.)

Testing Guidelines

- Ex. “Students may bring in a 4” x 6” card with notes.”
- Ex. “Students should take every other seat.”

Extra-Credit Options/Bonus Points

End-of-Course Information

- How to find out your course grade
- Where to pick up final papers/exams/journals
- Record-Keeping

Writing Requirements: Uses of writing in the course, rationale, criteria for evaluation

Citation/Style Requirements

- Preferred Style Format
- Internet URL for citing Internet and other resources
Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodations
(Note: Students requesting special accommodations under the ADA must register with the Dean of Students. If you have any questions, speak with the Dean of Students or the ADA supervisor, Robert Teehan, in the same office.)

Ex. "If you have special learning needs, please let me know."

Where to get additional help/Help-Seeking
Tutors
Labs
Study Groups
Learning Assistance Opportunities
Learning Center/Writing Center/Math Lab

Suggestions for Successful Completion of this Course

Modifications:
Use the title: "Tentative" Syllabus
Disclaimer about modifications:
Ex. "The above schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change."
Ex. "Changes may be made in the schedule, but they will be announced ahead of time."
Ex. "Students will be held responsible for all changes in the syllabus which have been announced in class."

Required Diagnostic Tools:
Background Questionnaires/Placement Tests
Myers-Briggs (MBTI)
Program, Department or Institutional Tests/Assessments

Other:
Student Information Sheet to obtain background information
Cover Page for Assignments/Protocols for Word-Processed Papers
Most FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs section)
Opportunities for students to give instructors feedback about the course:
Mid-semester course evaluation
End-of-term evaluations
Student management teams
Start/stop/continue instructional feedback forms
Classroom Assessment Techniques: Muddiest Point, One Minute Essay

Requests for Permission to use student papers (without names) as examples in the future or for research or publication purposes.

Personal Statement to Your Students.

Ex. "I hope you'll enjoy this course. I look forward to working with you!"

My Expectations
Ex. "I expect that students are prepared to devote considerable time to this course. Developing skill in case analysis and strategic thinking takes time, and is cumulative throughout the course. Students therefore should be prepared to stay on top of the work. Students who cannot make this type of time commitment should consider taking the course another semester.

I expect every student to be prepared for every class. I expect students to participate actively, thoughtfully, and with consideration for other students. I expect students to provide me with feedback on the course that will improve their ability to learn. Finally, I expect this course to be fun, stimulating, and an appropriate capstone to your business education. I am looking forward to sharing the experience with all of you!"